



Wheathampstead History Society

Bulletin no. 2, 19 July 2017

Latest news

- Five of our members joined Welwyn Archaeological Society's outing on 8 July to the Bronze and Iron Age Archaeology Park at Flag Fen, Longthorpe Tower with its 14th century wall paintings, and Peterborough's magnificent Norman cathedral and museum.
- Next meeting: Wednesday 20 September. Kris Lockyear will tell us about 'The History of Lamer', including the estate, the houses that have stood there, and the Garrard family. For details, please see the website.



REMINDER: Mavis Soane will retire as the Society's Treasurer in April 2018, though she will continue as Membership Secretary. Please contact us if you could 'shadow' Mavis and then take on this important role.

Notes and Queries

**'WHERE THEY BURNT
the TOWN HALL DOWN'**
Luton, the First World War and
the Peace Day riots of July 1919
Dave Craddock



Ninety-eight years ago today, Frank Wing, twice wounded on active service in the Great War and father of Wheathampstead resident Michael Wing, was involved in momentous events in Luton. The armistice that ended the war was signed on 11

November 1918 but the demobilisation of servicemen was a slow and clumsy process, unemployment was high, and many ex-servicemen became deeply resentful.

A nationwide 'Peace Day' was announced for 19 July 1919 and, in February, Luton Council began to make plans for a procession, banquet and firework display. There were problems from the start as the Council disputed about the celebrations with the two ex-servicemen's organisations, the Discharged Sailors and Soldiers Association (DSS) and Comrades of the Great War (CGW), with arguments about content, venues and numbers of ex-servicemen involved. By 15 July, both the DSS and the CGW had withdrawn from the Council's celebrations, though the Comrades later reversed their decision.

On the morning of the 19th, there was an "undercurrent of high tension and bad feeling" in

the town. The procession started from Luton Hoo Park in heavy rain at 2.00 pm, accompanied by some booing from the crowd. The civic party were booed again as they arrived at the Town Hall and the mayor's speech was shouted down. At about 3.15 a mob of some 80 men and women broke into the Town Hall and ransacked the Assembly Room, overturning tables and chairs and smashing crockery. Mounted police were used to control the crowd which was eight to ten thousand strong. There was a lull when the pubs opened at 6.00 pm but, as the pubs emptied at 10.00 pm and the crowd grew again, police were re-deployed. Missiles were thrown and windows broken. A small group broke into the side of the Town Hall and started a fire.

The fire brigade were called at 10.25 and the police baton-charged the crowd at 10.30. Firemen and police were injured and more fires were started. By midnight, a full-scale riot was in progress with petrol thrown on the fires, shops looted and fire-hoses being turned on the crowd. The rioting ended only when troops were called in at 3.30 in the morning. By this time, the Town Hall had been completely gutted by fire. Nineteen people were convicted of various riot-related offences at Bedford Assizes in October 1919. Frank Wing was not one of them.

(To read the whole story in detail, see the book shown in the image above.)

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