WAR AND SUFFERING
R. Alan Sykes

One reason why the First World War took such a bloody turn and lasted so long was the machine gun. And what an immensely ingenious and effective invention the machine gun was – able to slaughter hundreds of human beings in a matter of seconds. Military strategists had no answer to it.

They say that necessity is the mother of invention and necessity in war may be the mother of all necessities. But technological innovation can increase suffering as well as alleviate it and in the First World War, by means of technology, human beings increased the suffering of other human beings to undreamt of levels.

When war was declared in August 1914, few people foresaw the mayhem that would ensue. Many thought the thing would be over by Christmas. But why start a war at all? Even small, short wars are hardly pleasurable affairs.

Extreme nationalism played its part. For centuries the nation states of Europe (some of them at least) had been building up empires - in order simply to get rich, no doubt, but also as a form of communal self-aggrandisement.

So the games that the ego plays on a personal and individual level were transposed to the international level. Empires had been born and the recently unified state of Germany wanted a slice of the action. Some kind of conflict was inevitable. When inflated egos come into contact with each other, conflict of some sort always follows.

The First World War meted out suffering to huge numbers of people. This was suffering inflicted by human agency – aided by technological innovation. God has given us the supreme gift of free will. If we choose to use that gift for evil, that is our choice. It might well be argued that God cannot be blamed, at least directly, for the suffering that we ourselves devise and inflict – and wars are always our fault.

But not all suffering is man-made. The discoveries of science over the last few hundred years have told us

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As the ferry enters the port at Calais, one sees at the end of the pier on the starboard side, a lone stone cross.

Each May a party from the Royal Green Jackets attend a service there to remember their brother riflemen in the Queen Victoria’s Rifles, The King’s Royal Rifle Corps and the Rifle Brigade who fought and died there to defend Calais and prevent the German panzer divisions disrupting the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk in 1940. Penny and I are regular attenders and meet up with about eight French Colour bearers, the Mayor of Calais, the British Consul, buglers, this year 7 Rifles’ Padre and the Vicar of Bow, with two of her churchwardens and her riflemen parishioners, some loyal French and about sixty mostly retired members from the three former regiments. It is a moving and memorable occasion.

Also this year Penny and I repeated a commemoration trip to Ypres where my father was badly wounded 99 years ago, shot through the neck by a German sniper. He was a regular subaltern in the King’s Dragoon Guards, which had come from India in the Lucknow Brigade of the First Indian Cavalry Division. He recovered, though was always paralysed in his right hand, but this did not hinder him from serving in the Third Afghan War in 1919 and being involved with the Jedburgh agents of SOE (Special Operations Executive) in the Second World War, for which he was awarded the Croix de Guerre, the Legion d’Honneur and the American Medal of Merit. Penny also had two twenty-year-old uncles killed at Arras, one of whom had already served in Gallipoli where one of my great uncles had been killed. None of these young uncles have known graves.

We arrived in Ypres in time to attend Evensong in St George’s Memorial Church with the walls packed with regimental, formation, individual and even school memorials. A plaque outside the entrance reads:

Ye who would enter here to worship God
Think of your brothers who before you trod
This hallowed ground and did not grudge to give
Their lives in war that you might live.
Ask for a heart to follow their way
Of sacrifice and duty - Rest and pray.

We twice attended the historic Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate, sounded every night at 8.00pm since 1928. We were in the company of about a thousand people on each deeply moving occasion. We visited cemeteries and memorials immaculately maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, whose regional offices we visited in Ypres to discuss the only exception we found. I had spent two years on exchange with The Rifle Brigade’s famous allied regiment the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry and we found their memorial at Frezenberg, which they will visit on the centenary of the battle next year, to be in need of attention. We were reassured that ‘it’s all in hand’.

Many of the identical white unnamed gravestones have ‘A soldier of the Great War’ and beneath a cross, is engraved – ‘Known unto God’. Rudyard Kipling chose this phrase for the headstones after his only son John (Jack), aged 18, had gone missing during the Battle of Loos in the early days of the war and thus had no known...
There are many moving inscriptions below the regimental badge on the named gravestones. Rifleman J. Taylor’s gravestone, died 31st July, 1915, has the wording:

*Roses may wither, leaves fade and die.
Friends may forget you but never shall I.*

The big memorials list those who have no known grave; 54,900 on the Menin Gate and a further 34,888 at Tyne Cot, near Passchendaele, all from the dreaded Ypres Salient.

The town, with its beautiful 13th Century Cloth Hall, was almost totally destroyed in four years of shelling and was memorably restored after the war and is today a charming little Belgian town with a completely rebuilt Cloth Hall containing ‘The Flanders Fields Museum’. We also visited ‘Toc H’ (Talbot House), the well preserved little town house behind the lines in Poperinge (‘Pops’), where the Reverend Tubby Clayton set up his Rest Centre, with a simple chapel in the attic, redolent with heartrending memories. There was the inscription,

‘There are many kinds of sorrow in this world of love and hate. But there is no sterner sorrow than a soldier’s for his mate.’

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**WAR AND SUFFERING - continued**

Rved Alan Sykes

that ageing, sickness and death have been with us since the very inception of life. They are built into the very structure of the universe. Mosquitoes didn’t suddenly begin to carry the parasite that causes malaria when Adam and Eve took a disobedient bite of forbidden fruit.

In previous centuries it was possible to read the Bible in ways that put the blame on Adam and Eve for the existence of suffering. Their disobedience brought suffering into the world and that was that. In one bound God was absolved from any charge of inflicting pain and untold distress on his creatures. God didn’t intend suffering – it was all our fault.

That view is no longer tenable. God in some way has to bear responsibility for at least some of the suffering in the world. If God is all-loving, omnipotent and the creator of all things visible and invisible, there is no way around this dilemma. The philosopher David Hume asked these questions and provided these answers: ‘Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?’ For evil, read suffering.

And so, inevitably, the problem of suffering is perplexing for the believer, a stumbling block for the agnostic and conclusive proof that God cannot possibly exist for those who take their stand under the banner of atheism.

Oceans of ink have been applied to mountains of paper on this subject – mainly by Christians keen to justify the ways of God to us human beings. If we still wish to affirm that God is omnipotent, all-loving and the creator of all things, the Christian has to show that the evil of suffering is outweighed by some greater good, and that God has some means of dealing with the evil definitively.

There’s no space here to present a theological case. Fundamentally, it comes down to a question of trust. Can we and do we trust in God despite what appearances may seem to be telling us? Trust is a kind of bridge to a place where we can see things from another and, we hope, deeper perspective. As we come to know God through prayer, acts of loving-kindness and whatever other means we have to hand, that bridge can, I believe, begin to form in our hearts. But it’s not easy or quick. My goodness, no-one could ever say that it was easy or quick.

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**QI Theology Group – an autumn series on Suffering and God based on the thought of three theologians:**

12th October – Austin Farrer
Canon Robert Titley

16th November – Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy
The Revd David Gardiner

14th December – Alvin Plantinga
The Revd Alan Sykes

A sermon at Evensong at St Mary’s followed by discussion at the vicarage
Until August 1914 the main concern was the roof at St Matthias, whose plaster was in a dangerous condition and had to be replaced at a cost of the substantial sum of £500. However, in the September edition of the Richmond Parish Magazine (covering St Mary’s and St Matthias), the war makes its first appearance. The Vicar, the Revd Max Binney wrote,

Within a few days the whole aspect of life was changed. Europe became engulfed in a war. I hardly think that the great mass of people yet realise what a terrific struggle we are called upon to make. It will test to our utmost our courage and our power of endurance and our power of making sacrifices.’

Very soon news of the Richmond casualties began to come through. An early death occurred not in the opening engagements in France or Belgium, but at the now little known naval battle the First Battle of Heligoland Bight which took place on 28 August and at which the German fleet suffered heavy losses. 35 British sailors were also killed including Lieutenant Eric Westmacott, aged 20, who died on board HMS Arethusa. As the months passed, more and more bad news arrived. Writing a report for the Mothers’ Union in mid 1915 Mrs B E Chapman said:

Names inscribed on the Richmond War Memorial.
We grieve to say that one of our members has lost her only son and only child. We especially commend her to all your prayers.

and similar messages appeared all too often. In October 1916 it was announced that

Mr and Mrs Umney are fitting the four windows in the S wall of the chapel at St Matthias with painted glass in memory of their son Lieutenant Basil Umney.

Basil had been killed on the Somme aged 19 on 22 July 1916.

All the churches kept what was termed 'The War List' which listed all those who were serving and for whom the congregations would pray.

The list was headed by a Roll of Honour containing the names of those who had died, those wounded in action, prisoners of war and anyone mentioned in despatches. The rest of the list was broken down into sections - With the Navy, With the Army at the Front, Garrisons Abroad, Serving at Home and finally the Watermen of Richmond who were also heavily involved in the war effort.

The War List would commonly have about 500 - 600 names for St John's, which was a very populous parish and there were about the same number on the combined St Mary's and St Matthias List. There is a reminder of the role that women played in the war in the St John's magazine where three sisters called Webb -Johns were mentioned as serving as Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurses, the first at No 3 General Hospital, British Expeditionary Force (BEF), the second with No 4 Casualty Clearing Station, British Expeditionary Force, and the third in No 64 General Hospital, Salonika.

The War List was placed on the altar at each and every eucharist service and the names read out. The sheer scale of the war and the number of names, however, meant that Max Binney was obliged to write

The lists of Sailors and Soldiers at the front are getting so long that I think we shall be obliged to divide them up amongst the different services. I propose that we remember all by name at the Intercessions, the Sailors at the celebration on Tuesday at St Matthias and Wednesdays at the Parish Church, the Soldiers at the celebration on Thursdays at St Matthias and Fridays at the Parish Church and both Sailors and Soldiers connected with the congregation at the Sunday 8 am services.

A little later because of pressing demands on himself and other clergy in the town to provide chaplaincy services to the various military hospitals in Richmond he decided 'to suspend for the present some of the less used services such as the 4 o'clock Evensong.'

Life on the home front went on. The Bishop of Southwark was very concerned about the moral welfare of the (largely female) munitions workers who had come from all over the country to work at the Woolwich Arsenal, and so launched the 'Woolwich Crusade'. This consisted of all parishes in the Diocese regularly praying for the workers:-

Guard in danger and strengthen in temptation all who are serving their country in the making of munitions, that in weariness, strange conditions and new perils they may be kept ever pure.

The plight of the Belgian refugees also concerned the congregations with whole collections being given over to Belgian relief funds and appeals by the Mothers' Union such as

One of our members has most kindly offered to adopt or provide for a small Belgian child if another member could clothe it'

- an appeal that was subsequently and readily answered.

The clergy themselves were not immune from tragedy. In early 1917 Max Binney retired from the parish of St Mary and St Matthias and was replaced by the Revd J F Kendall in May 1917. Only six months later he lost his son Lieutenant Locke Kendall, attached to 21st Machine Gun Company who died of wounds on 22 November in Palestine. Kendall did not refer to his personal loss in the magazine, but he wrote movingly in his January 1918 editorial:

We long for the war to be brought to an end lest other lives equally precious as those that have already been sacrificed, should be added to the number. We long to save what remains lest we be bereft of all our children.

There was, however, to be nearly another year before the war ended.

Names inscribed on the War Memorial inside St Mary’s.

We hope to include further items from the parish magazines in future editions of Team Talk, mirroring the progress of the War.
Like most towns and cities, Richmond has its share of war memorials and wartime associations, but its story also has particular aspects ranging from its important part in the building of aircraft both in Ham (Sopwith Aviation) and Richmond itself (Townshend Road) through the Poppy Factory to the Star & Garter. The old hotel was briefly used for disabled soldiers, demolished in 1919 and completely rebuilt as the Star and Garter Home, dedicated in 1924 as the ‘Women of Empire’s Memorial to the Great War’ for disabled and wounded servicemen.

Richmond Park was home to a military hospital for South African servicemen, and there were at least two other military hospitals elsewhere in the town, one at Grove Road, the other the Red Cross Hospital at Old Friars on the Green; the park was also used for military training activities.

The churches of Richmond have some very specific reminders of the conflict. At St Matthias there are four fine stained glass windows by Burlison & Grylls in the south chapel portraying SS Alban, Martin, Michael and George; these were dedicated to the memory of Basil Charles Lovell Umney, 2nd Lt, Royal Fusiliers, killed in action in the first month of the Battle of the Somme in 1916: the head of St George is taken from a photograph of the dead soldier.

According to the census of 1901 and 1911, Basil Umney lived in George Street, then Kings Road and lastly in Marchmont Road; his father was a member of the Wright’s Coal Tar Soap dynasty.

The Christus Rex which hangs in the chancel at St John the Divine was carved at the request of families of those lost in the war and given in their memory in 1921.

The church is particularly fortunate in possessing a rare wooden cross grave marker dedicated to Private Norman Woodgate Blows, 1st Kensington Battalion, killed in action on the first day of the Somme. He and his family lived in Twickenham and he appears in the roll of honour on the very fine memorial at St John’s; he is not mentioned on the public memorial.
in Richmond as he is recorded on the memorial in Westgate-on-Sea in Kent where the family had moved. He is buried in Hebuterne Military Cemetery, Hebuterne, Pas-de-Calais in Plot IV M 1.

These wooden crosses were normally sent back to England to the families of the deceased following the erection of permanent headstones in the war cemeteries of France and Belgium. There are fewer than 300 such crosses known to survive here, including only nine in the London area; St Peter and St Paul, Deddington, Oxfordshire has nine and Salisbury Cathedral seven, otherwise churches across the country most often have just one.

The production of these crosses at the battlefields appears to have been the responsibility of the battalion carpenters under the direction of the quartermaster. Therefore crosses differ considerably, albeit with frequent standard features: most are simple crosses or celtic-type. The cross at St John’s is typical of many in having a metal plate at the top on which the soldier’s details are written in addition to those on the body of the cross. The description of death is significant: ‘killed in action’ or ‘died of wounds’ are the norm - tragically and movingly, the simple designation ‘died’ refers to those deemed guilty of cowardice. At St Mary the Virgin, Childrey, in Oxfordshire is a very rare example, a cross dedicated to Major Stuart Rickman, killed in 1914, buried by the enemy, and inscribed in German with the words ‘Engl. Kapitaine’ (sic).

The Imperial War Graves Commission under the vigorous direction of Fabian Ware made it its business to hunt down every grave they could find. A huge collaborative effort was undertaken by the British and the French to set up the cemeteries and provide a permanent memorial for as many of the fallen as possible. The process was not smooth - there were many obstacles, political and personal; touchingly, many families who felt the cross had been a true comfort were thwarted in their desire to have a permanent stone cross in place of the wooden rather than a headstone.

Richmond has one more significant, but not well-known, part in the story. In early 1916 Arthur Hill, assistant director at Kew, toured the western front at Fabian Ware’s request to advise on a systematic programme of planting for the cemeteries. This was duly implemented with careful attention even to the use of plants indigenous to the countries of the Allied Forces’ soldiers, with maple seeds, Tasmanian eucalyptus and New Zealand shrubs being delivered to Kew and from there to France.

_These men bestowed ever-blazing glory upon their fatherland, and folded around themselves the dark cloud of death. But, though they have died, they are not dead, since their valour which sheds glory on them from above lifts them from the house of Hades._
_Simonides 556-467BC_

**Additional sources/acknowledgements**

Western Front Association
King’s Own Royal Regiment Museum, Lancaster
David Crane: Empires of the Dead
Peter Moore
For further information on aircraft building in the Richmond/Kingston area: _Richmond History_ no.26 (2005), Journal of the Richmond Local History Society
Richmond Local History Society Newsletter, nos.84 (September 2013) and 85 (January 2014)

The Museum of Richmond is leading a local history project, funded by a Heritage Lottery grant, to commemorate the First World War.
As you know the Parish Weekend is taking place on 3-5 October at the beautiful Aylesford Priory in Kent, and the theme for the weekend is Encountering the Bible being led by our very own Team Vicar at St Matthias, David Gardiner.

On the weekend we will be invited to say goodbye to the book we think we know and greet the book we’ve never really met, encountering the Bible in a variety of different ways that will spark a more intimate relationship with God.

In addition to the themed sessions led by David, there are plenty of other opportunities to share spiritual and social activities or if you want time and space alone for meditation and reflection. You can join in any of the wide-ranging activities (including Taizé, Lectio Divina, ethical dilemmas and a Labyrinth) or just spend time yourselves exploring the Priory and its surroundings.

Those of you at our 2012 Parish Weekend will know how special and moving all of the services were, and we are so pleased to say that Ruth Martin is once again in charge of this important aspect.

The weekend is also great for families as there’s a dedicated programme for children. We are delighted to announce that Alice Eastaugh and James Titley will be leading the youth programme this year. Those lucky enough to have taken part in the ‘Seven Up’ activities will know how much fun that will be.

The Parish Weekend is an incredibly special time for all three churches to come together for great fellowship, to cement old friendships and create new ones. It is such a rewarding (and fun!) time.

The booking form is now available at all three churches and is also online on the RTM website under the ‘Get Involved’ section, along with some more details about the weekend and its programme.

Do please let us know that you’re going to come before you head off on your hols, so that we can start to plan for numbers and whether we need to return any rooms or request more!

Also, some good news - since we last went to Aylesford Priory in 2012, Wi-Fi has been installed in the conference centre and in all the rooms in the “new” accommodation block.

If you have any questions do please contact Emma Meredith (emeredith@ctpa.org.uk).

Aylesford Priory
home to the Carmelite Order from 1242 until the Reformation
and again since 1949
...and our home from home for the Parish Weekend.
Richmond Team Ministry (RTM) will be taking part in **RIDE+STRIDE on Saturday 20th September** and you are all invited to discover London’s hidden gems, have a wonderful day out and raise money for your church and others in London!

The concept of RIDE+STRIDE is very simple: the idea is to **visit as many places of worship as possible in one day** – by bike, on foot, or by public transport - and to get sponsored for doing it. All faiths, denominations and buildings of all periods are included.

The congregations of **all three RTM churches** and the local community are encouraged to get out and about to visit other places of worship: why not join in or help run a guided walk or biking tour? There will be clusters of buildings in many parts of London taking part: so this is a good opportunity to visit an area that you don’t know well. Suggested itineraries will be available and speak to your clergy or church organiser about getting a group together.

Last year £1.5 million was raised nationally and we would like to see London benefitting even more from this well-established national event. All of the money raised goes towards helping places of worship: half the money raised goes directly to your church and half to the local grant provider, Heritage of London Trust, to enable us to give grants to help with restoration projects. Participants are encouraged to get sponsorship from their friends and family but those who prefer can make a (substantial!) donation instead.

This is also an opportunity to welcome visitors and to show them our wonderful church buildings. Those who are unable or would prefer not to go out visiting are encouraged to volunteer to keep the churches open instead. We hope to have various things which reflect the personality and style of our churches going on to welcome visitors, such as music, a display of vestments, a guided tour or photographs. Please discuss with your clergy if you have any ideas or would like to be involved.

There’s no set programme, so give your imagination free rein – it’s a great way of **raising the profile** of our three wonderful churches!

Ride+Stride takes place on the same weekend as London Open House. This means that many buildings will be open and large numbers of people will be out and about looking for places to visit. Let’s give them good reason to visit Richmond.

Please visit [www.rideandstrideuk.org](http://www.rideandstrideuk.org) the national website for general information about the event; for details on the London event and itineraries, check [www.heritageoflondon.com](http://www.heritageoflondon.com).

Find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/LondonRideStride](http://www.facebook.com/LondonRideStride) where information on the places of worship is being uploaded and follow us on Twitter [@LondonRandS](http://twitter.com/LondonRandS).

We really hope you will be interested in taking part and making London RIDE+STRIDE the success it deserves to be. Please contact the clergy and download a sponsorship form from [www.heritageoflondon.com](http://www.heritageoflondon.com) or pick up a leaflet at the back of church.

London Ride+Stride is organised by Fiona Morgan, a member of the St John the Divine congregation, on behalf of Heritage of London Trust and is supported by the National Churches Trust, the Diocese of London, the Diocese of Southwark, London Open House, Bear Grylls and English Heritage.

Above: (left to right) The Ven. Luke Miller, Archdeacon of Hampstead; The Revd Anna Hälli, Chaplain from the Finnish Church; Mgr Vladimir Felzmann, Chief Executive of John Paul Foundation for Sport and Roman Catholic Chaplain for Sport; The Rt Revd Michael Ipgrave, Bishop of Woolwich, Diocese of Southwark; Ride+Stride Organiser Fiona Morgan
June Meeting

The PCC meeting held on 3 June at the Vicarage Basement Room, Ormond Road was the opening one of the 2014-2015 PCC year at which new members were introduced and Tony Demby was re-elected as Treasurer, Elspeth Fearn as PCC Secretary and Margot Gallie as Electoral Roll Officer.

Inclusive Church, an organisation of which Richmond Team Ministry is a member, has recently issued a new Declaration or Statement of Belief and PCC formally adopted the new Statement and reaffirmed its commitment to Inclusive Church. At Christ's School various governors were standing down or retiring. Sarah Percival was prepared to stand as a Foundation Governor and the members of PCC unanimously approved her candidature.

The meeting also discussed the Coffee Bar at St Matthias and how it could best serve the interests of the both the church and the community, the Team Vicar vacancy at St John the Divine, the Youth Strategy, including the 7 Up group, and also admission to First Communion. In a report from the Deanery Synod, PCC heard about a moving visit by clergy including Bishop Richard to the Diocese of Matabeleland, to celebrate its 60th anniversary. Various churches had been visited and services held whatever the state of the building. Life is very difficult for our fellow Christians there. Finally the Mission Action Plan (MAP) was also discussed and a further meeting dedicated solely to the MAP was arranged for 17th July.

July Meeting - MAP

At a special meeting in July, the PCC continued to work on developing the priorities emerging under our Mission Action Plan (MAP) process —

- to make our churches to be centres of community in Richmond
- to embrace people of all ages in our worship and other activities
- to improve our ministries of welcome and pastoral care
- to grow in numbers of worshippers by these and other means

Watch our for more MAP-related things in the coming months.

A Team-wide MAP workshop at St Matthias last November (above) came up with over 80 aspirations for our team—we have refined them to just four.

Elspeth Fearn is Secretary to the Richmond Team Ministry PCC
Matthew Blaiden joined the Team in early August as Director of Music at St Mary’s.

Matthew succeeds Ron Bond, who became Organist Emeritus of St Mary’s in April, and follows Chris Bond’s much-valued time as Acting Director (Chris is now Director of Music in the parish of Waltham St Lawrence).

He is the Richmond Team Ministry’s third musical Matthew, joining Matthew Searles, DoM at St John’s, who himself succeeded Matthew O’Sullivan. (Megan Vaughan-Jones, our St Matthias DoM, is resisting calls to change her name to Mattie.)

Matthew comes to us from Little St Mary’s Church, Cambridge, where he was Assistant Organist, freshly graduated from Gonville and Caius College with a Master of Philosophy degree in Renaissance Literature. He knows our area well, hailing from Wimbledon and having been Organ Scholar at our neighbours at St Peter, Petersham.

Speaking about the appointment, Matthew said,

“I am delighted to have been appointed Director of Music at St Mary Magdalene. It is with tremendous excitement that I look forward to building on the musical foundations existing at the church, working closely with Canon Robert, the choir, church wardens and congregation, as well as with other the other Team churches. There is huge potential to expand and develop all areas of the church’s musical life to provide an engaging, varied and accomplished programme of services and events.”

Windows of Opportunity

As we went to press, the re-glazing of St Mary’s nave was nearing completion.

It has transformed the building, inside and out.

Left: Blacksmiths Shelley and Andy replace corroded ironwork. Above: glazier Tyrone finishes off a new pane of 18th-century style reamed glass.
WHO’S WHO?

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