

# STREET SHRINE A REMINDER OF FIRST WORLD WAR

*Jill Waterson, a member of North Watford History Group, has been doing some research*

There are two First World War memorials at Christ Church, North Watford - one outside the Church and one inside. The one inside the Church consists of a glass-fronted frame containing two wooden plaques, on which are inscribed 190 names. It is explained that: "In a nearby street this shrine was used during the Great War to keep in prayerful remembrance those away 'on Active Service' ... The wooden cross above marked for many years the last resting place of an Unknown British Soldier ... The Cross and Shrine are here preserved that future generations may never forget the sacrifice of those who died - that they may live."

Street shrines were common throughout the country during the First World War. The shrines were used not simply as a focal point for remembering the dead, but also to pray for the living who were away on active service. Many shrines contained a list of those on active service as well as of those who had died.

The Church of England actively promoted street shrines during the war. They provided a means of expressing and mobilising collective emotions and values, and helped to recruit support for the Church as well as the war effort. The Vicar of Christ Church at this time was Frank George Hunt, and the Churchwardens were E Ashby and Ralph Alfred Thorpe. Ralph Thorpe was also a Councillor for Callow Land ward, and involved in many local activities, including chairing at least one Army recruitment meeting in Callow Land.

On March 24th 1917, the Vicar of Christ Church led a dedication ceremony of four 'War Shrines'. The West Herts and Watford Observer reported that:

"After a brief service in Christ Church at 3.30, a procession, headed by the Christ Church Scout Band and Troop ... and the choirs of the two churches, preceded by the 'National Mission' banner, was formed, and marched to the shrines, which had been erected in Leavesden Road, in front of St. George's Church (facing Sandringham Road), the Vicarage (facing St Alban's Road), and Christ Church (facing St Alban's Road) respectively ... the Vicar giving a short address after the unveiling and dedication of each shrine, and reminding those present that the shrines stood

there as one of the results of the work of the National Mission in the parish, and that they were to be looked upon as a special call to prayer.

The Shrines were described as being made of oak, with a raised gilded cross, and of dormer pattern, designed by Mr G.W.Chilton. There were said to be 1,100 names, but that many more would be added "as the existing 'Rolls' represent the outcome of a house-to-house canvass of the parish, carried out under the auspices of the 'National Mission' Committee some time since."

The decision to place one of the shrines inside the Church was initiated on October 12th 1931, when the following resolution was passed:

"The Church Council of Christ Church Watford approve the proposal of the Vicar and Churchwardens (1) to place on the west end wall of the church, just inside the doorway, one of the old street shrines used during the war, containing a list of the fallen and to be used as a suitable place where flowers may be placed in their memory. (2) to place over the shrine a wooden cross from an unknown soldier's grave [given by the Imperial War Graves Commission]."

The Vicar and Churchwardens immediately applied for permission to the Bishop of St Albans to place the shrine and cross inside the Church, expressing the hope that this could be done in time for Armistice Day on 11th November. This was achieved.



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The Vicar at this time was Edmund Dixon Parkin Kelsey, and the Churchwardens were James William Beach, of 44, Bruce Grove and Frederick Ford Pulman, of 137, Gammons Lane. Both James Beach (born c1869) and Frederick Pulman (born 1865) had lived in North Watford since at least 1901. In 1901, James Beach was already living in Bruce Grove, employed as a commercial clerk, and Frederick Pulman was a carpenter with three young sons, who would have reached service age by the time of the First World War. So they would both have been familiar with the street shrine during the war.

The two plaques inside the shrine which is now inside Christ Church contain 190 names of people from the whole parish. These names have clearly been rewritten in (almost) alphabetical order. It seems then that the original shrines contained the names of people from their locality and included those away on active service, whereas the shrine now inside Christ Church has incorporated names from the whole parish, but only the names of those who died.

The names as written on the plaques have now been displayed near the shrine in the church, together with additional information where it has been possible to determine this with a reasonable degree of certainty. It is hoped that others may be able to add further information and correct any inaccuracies. So if you can shed any further light please tell the Parish Office.