

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO WITH REFUGEES!

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The Willatt family of 'Dordrecht' in Aviary Road gave shelter to two families in 1914-15. Sadly their own son, Norris, was killed in action on the 4th May 1918 aged 35.



There is a war taking place and refugees are in desperate need of assistance. Do you a). Liken them to a 'swarm' and do the bear minimum that is politically acceptable to help them, or B) offer them your home and raise money for their support?

In 1914, in Pyrford at least, there was no doubt what should be done for the refugees of Belgium, and in true British style a 'committee' was formed under the chairmanship of the Vicar, the Rev Cuthbert Hamilton, to co-ordinate the village's efforts. But unlike most committees this one actually made a difference, and over the coming months they would help at least two dozen people, providing them with a roof over their heads and eventually employment.

Twenty-four people may not sound all that much (remind me again how many from Syria the whole of Woking is offering to house!), but for a still largely rural community in Edwardian England I think it was a tremendous effort, and one that should be more widely known.

With the Rev Hamilton in charge, and Mr Charles Echlin Gerahty as the secretary and treasurer, money was raised in the village to look after the first set of refugees for at least a few months. By February 1915 £195.5s.0d had been raised with a further £35.19s.0d promised up to the middle of March. Some pledged money for six months, whilst others committed themselves to do whatever was necessary 'for the duration of the war'.

Initially eight refugees were housed at Winton, in Engliff Road with a second property, the Vicarage cottage, put at the committee's disposal early in November 1914 for another

family of four. But the committee were not content with just a temporary fix, they wanted a longer term solution and on the 3rd March 1915 a General Meeting was held at Pyrford Council School.

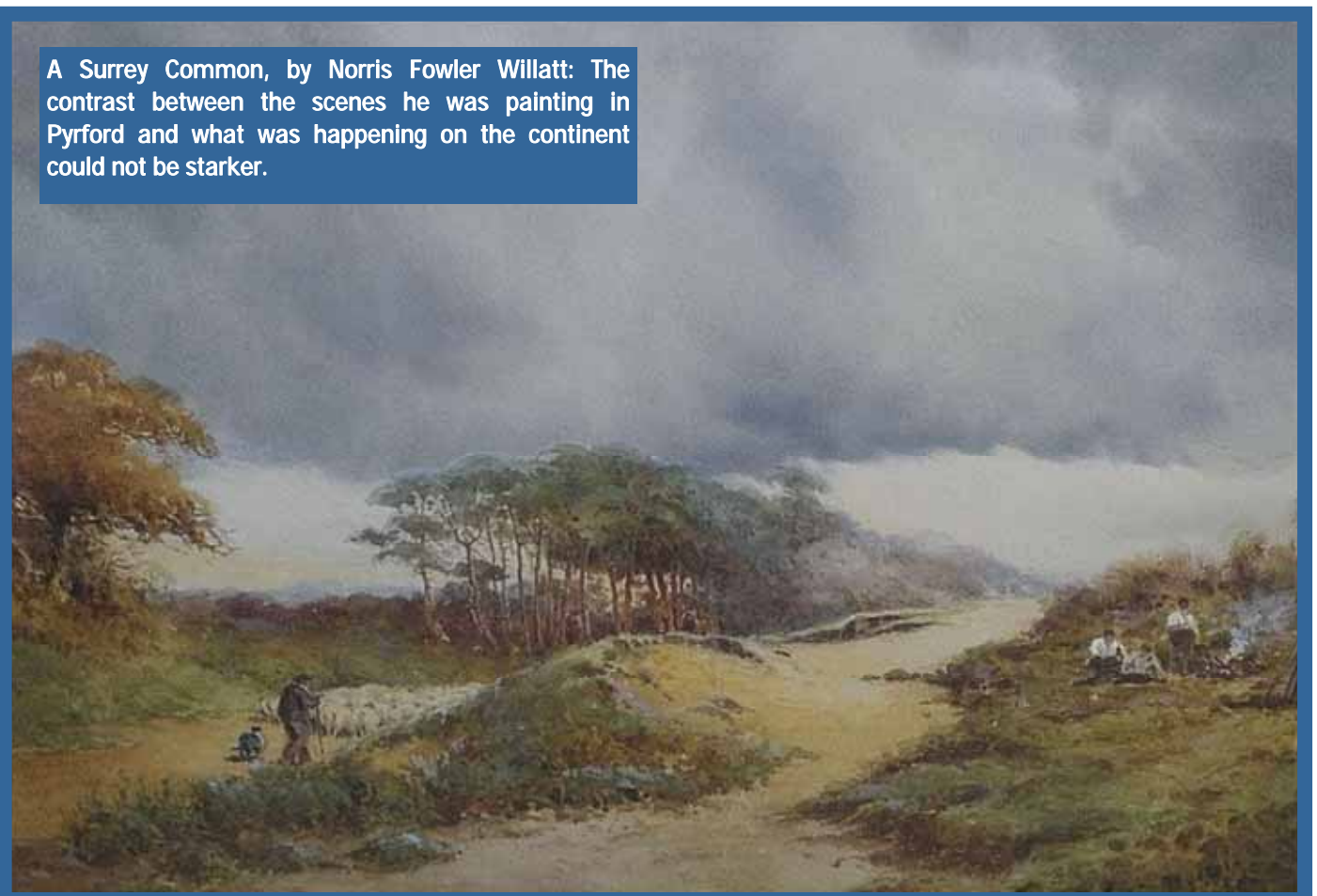
The problem was that at first the homes and money had only been promised on a short term basis - until mid March – but as it became clear that the crisis in Europe was not going to end soon, the committee skilfully appealed to the 'generosity of the Parish not to turn these unfortunate people adrift after having once offered them hospitality'.

Some obviously wanted to do more and the artist Norris Fowler Willatt, who lived with his

wife Alice at a house called 'Dordrecht' in Aviary Road, opened their doors to five more refugees on the 8th December 1914. These were the Bogaerts and Le Plat families, who through the efforts of the 'General War Refugee's Committee' in London, were found work and were thus enabled to move out with their families by the 13th September 1915.

Steps were also taken to find work for M. Robins and his eldest son. By September 1916 they had been residing at 69 Birchwood Road in West Byfleet, but they too moved out to London where both his sons had found work and where 'M. Robin is taking a course of instruction at the London County Council Technical School, to

A Surrey Common, by Norris Fowler Willatt: The contrast between the scenes he was painting in Pyrford and what was happening on the continent could not be starker.





enable him to obtain employment in a Munitions Factory'. In the meantime, however, the Pyrford Committee continued to pay an allowance for six weeks and committed to pay for his daughter's board at the Ryde House School in Ripley until the end of term.

The Robins family were not the only ones to reside in Birchwood Road. At No. 29 was Madame Geniesse, whose eldest son apparently found work at Diepe and was able to contribute towards the support of his mother and younger brother. Another refugee, Madame Vinck, had apparently returned to Belgium but whilst her eldest daughter and son had gone on to be looked after by an Aunt in Birkenhead, Merseyside, the Pyrford Committee continued to pay them a small allowance and to support another daughter who was employed as a needle-woman at the St Nicholas Home in the village.

By the end of 1916 all but Franz Vinck in Birkenhead had been found work (what did he expect in Birkenhead!), and the Pyrford Committee could be wound up. In total almost £600 had been raised locally and letters from 'our late guests' to the committee thanked them 'in the warmest terms for the kindness shown to them at Pyrford during the time they so much needed it'.

After the war practically all of the Belgium refugees that had once been sheltered in this country returned to help rebuild their nation once more, and the people of Pyrford concentrated on raising funds for things closer to home - such as their Memorial Hall - but that is another story.

Incidentally, Pyrford (& West Byfleet) was not the only place where refugees were housed in this area, the 1916 Street Directory covering Horsell records '1 Stratton Cottages, Abbey Road' as being occupied by 'Belgian Refugees'!

At least two houses in Birchwood Road were rented by the Pyrford Belgium Refugee Committee to house the Robin and Geniesse families.

The Accounts of the Pyrford Refugee Committee show how the villagers raised almost £600 .

	£	s.	d.
Mr. Kingzett ..	15	5	0
Mr. S. Dismorr ..	5	10	6
Mr. and Mrs. P. W. Ellis	30	10	0
Mrs. Walters Clark ..	5	0	0
Mr. D. J. de M. Beaumont ..	3	13	0
Miss Cheston and Staff of St. Nicholas's Home	11	0	0
Collections in Chapel of St. Nicholas's Home per Miss Cheston ..	18	6	
Mr. C. Napper ..	1	1	0
Mr. & Mrs. J. E. Gerahty	19	10	9
Mrs. Pears ..	26	10	0
Mr. and Mrs. Gould ..	30	10	0
Mr. and Mrs. Norman Hallett ..	25	15	9
Rev. O. Sharp ..	3	17	6
Mr. & Mrs. Page Phillips	6	0	0
Mr. and Mrs. Sargant ..	4	7	6
Mr. & Mrs. F. O. Stoop	35	10	0
Mr. and Mrs. E. Prichard	4	10	0
Mr. and Mrs. Fisher ..	11	12	6
Mr. and Mrs. Jeudwine	11	10	0
Mr. & Mrs. A. Bevington	30	10	0
The late Mrs. Drake ..	4	15	0
Mr. & Mrs. Chas. Drake	6	12	6
Mr. and Mrs. V. Nisbet	20	0	0
Mr. and Mrs. Hampshire	15	10	0
Rev. W. Tuckwell ..	15	5	0
Mrs. Taylor ..	7	0	0
Mr. and Mrs. Poate ..	8	0	0
Mrs. Norton Taylor ..	2	7	6
Mr. & Mrs. O. Bowring	28	5	0
Miss Wotherspoon ..	5	12	6
Mr. W. Shears ..	9	15	0
Mr. W. Dickenson ..	7	15	0
Mr. Crowdy ..	1	1	0
Mr. and Mrs. Pinnock ..	22	10	0
Mr. and Mrs. Hughes ..	6	6	0
Mrs. Phillips ..	5	12	6
Mr. and Mrs. Kingsford	5	12	6
Mr. and Miss Colchester	15	5	0
Miss Kimber ..	8	6	

	£	s.	d.
Rev. C. A. and Mrs. Hamilton ..	15	5	0
Mr. J. J. Atkinson ..	2	2	0
Mr. and Mrs. Chassereau	13	5	0
Mr. H. Selater ..	1	1	0
The Misses Way ..	10	15	0
Mr. and Mrs. Milbourne	2	0	0
Mrs. E. K. Jenkins ..	5	12	6
Miss R. M. Sharp ..	19	0	
Mr. and Mrs. Hay ..	11	5	0
Mr. and Mrs. Tisdall ..	7	13	0
Mr. and Mrs. Hope-Simpson ..	15	0	0
Mr. and Mrs. Herron ..	5	1	0
Mr. & Mrs. W. B. Rouse	5	12	6
Belgian Refugees' Fund, Byfleet and Pyrford ..	10	14	11
Mr. and Mrs. Goddard	9	0	
Mr. and Mrs. Jinks ..	1	3	6
Mr. and Mrs. Hill ..	1	16	0
Mrs. Potter ..	5	5	
Mr. and Mrs. Kent ..	3	0	
Mr. Walker ..	12	3	
Mr. and Mrs. Choate ..	1	3	0
Mr. and Miss Bennett ..	2	6	
Mrs. Munns ..	1	11	
Mr. Fred Crowter ..	8	0	
Miss Budden ..	2	0	
Miss Mortlock ..	3	6	
Miss Hollway ..	5	0	
Miss Brockwell ..	5	0	
Mr. Percy Leeds ..	10	0	
Mrs. Freemantle ..	2	2	0
Mr. M. Egan ..	1	1	0
Mr. and Mrs. Leatham	6	10	0
Mr. and Mrs. Dahl ..	2	0	0
Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths	10	0	
Mrs. Fisher for Sale of goods belonging to Committee ..	13	8	
Petty Cash repaid ..	10		
Cheque Forms not used	1	3	
	<u>£595</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>

C. E. GERAHTY, Hon. Sec. and Treas.

WEST BYFLEET STATION

The station at West Byfleet was originally opened in 1887 as 'Byfleet & Woodham' Station. At that stage there was few houses on what had once been Byfleet Common and the railway company looked at three possible sites for the station - where the line crossed Camphill Road, where Sheerwater Road crossed the railway and a point half way between the above (where the footpath from Pyrford to Woodham was crossed by the line) - choosing the latter and so giving birth to the new village of West Byfleet.

It was not until May 1914 that the station was renamed 'West Byfleet', and not until 1927 that Byfleet & New Haw Station was opened as 'West Weybridge Station'.



OUR LADY HOPE OF CHRISTIANS, WEST BYFLEET



If few people know about the Belgian Refugees, how many are aware that they are partially responsible for the establishment of the Catholic Church in West Byfleet?

In 1917 Father Christains van Aspert, himself a Belgian priest who was then staying at St Dunstan's Presbytery in Church Street, Woking, gave a mass to the refugees of the

area in a temporary building in Madeira Road, West Byfleet. The building, on what had once been an orchard and nursery land, was apparently owned by Tarrant's the builders of Byfleet.

Like all the refugees Father van Aspert returned to Belgium in 1919, but the 'hut' (by then attracting local Catholic families) continued to be served by Father Plummer from Woking (or

occasionally by a priest from Salesian's in Chertsey) until 1935, when the site was sold to the church for £100 and West Byfleet was established as a separate Catholic Parish.

So from the small act of Christian kindness shown by the people of Pyrford and West Byfleet during the First World War came the Church of Our Lady Help of Christians – how appropriate!

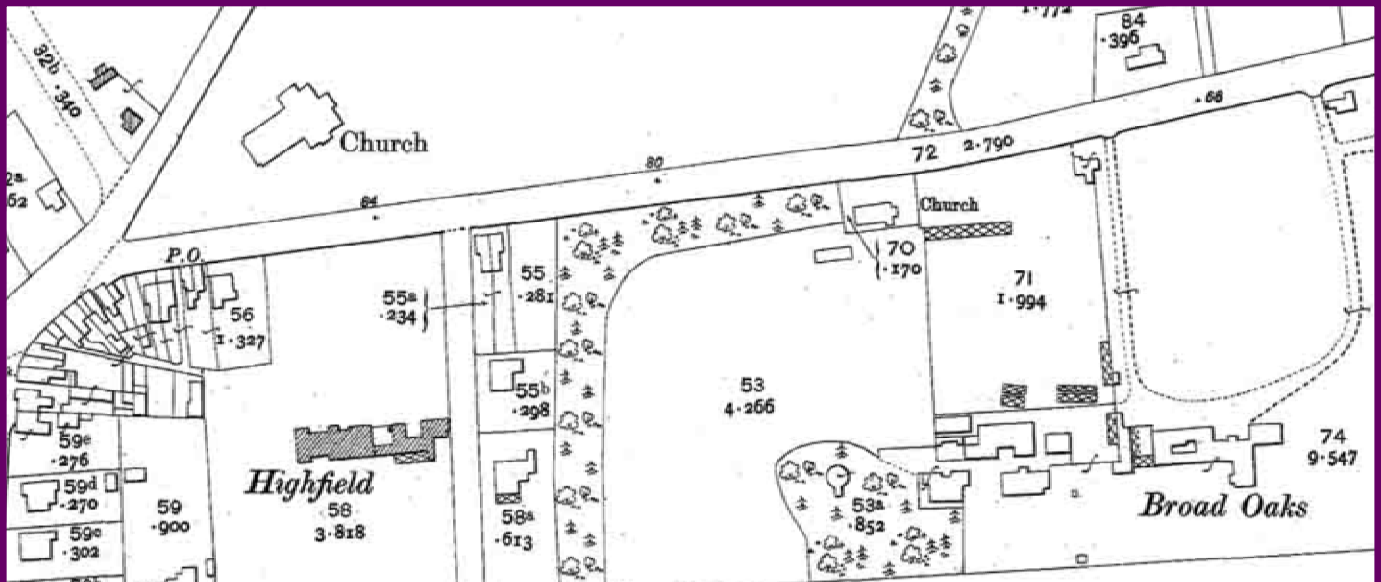
THE PARISH OF ST JOHN, WEST BYFLEET

In the same year that the Belgium refugees were hearing Mass by Father van Aspert, the chapel of ease of St John the Baptist at West Byfleet was being made into a parish church.

The original chapel of ease at West Byfleet was a small iron room in the grounds of Broadoaks, erected in 1872 to serve the 'Byfleet Corner' part of the parish of St Mary's at Byfleet. In 1900 a committee was set up under the chairmanship of the wonderfully named, Rev G E Money, to raise funds for a new chapel on the corner of Parvis Road and Camphill Road. The architect, W D Caroe (a pupil of Sir John Loughborough Pearson) was appointed and plans were agreed for a building seating 350 to 400 people at an estimated cost of £6,057.

By May 1903 £2,600 had been raised, but the Education Act of 1902 meant that the village of Byfleet had to raise about £3,000 to bring its village schools up to standard, so the West Byfleet church scheme was temporarily abandoned until April 1906 - by which time a slightly cheaper scheme had been agreed. The problem was that with an ever growing population in the area, the church commissioners decided in 1908 that a larger church, seating 600, was required, so that by the time Mr W G Tarrant had been appointed to build the church in October 1909 the costs had once more increased, to £9,908.

The foundation stone was laid by Mrs F C Stoop of West Hall on the 15th June 1910 and the church was due to be complete by the 30th April 1911 (Mr Tarrant agreeing to a penalty clause of £5 per week 'unless agreed with the architect'). I don't know whether Mr Tarrant



completed the building on time or not, but by the time the chapel was due to be consecrated on the 24th June 1912 there was still an outstanding debt of £3,000, so the Bishop of Winchester 'dedicated' the building instead (a place of worship not being able to be consecrated until it was debt free).

The stoops arranged a 'Dutch Village and Fair' in the grounds of West Hall for Saturday 13th &

The 1912 Ordnance Survey 25" Map shows the original chapel of ease in the grounds of Broadoaks, and the new church being built on the corner of Parvis Road and Camphill Road.

14th June 1913, with the Duchess of Albany as patron of the event, but sadly the wife of the Rev. Money died the day before and what must then have been a more subdued event raised just £2073.9s.4d., not quite enough to see the debt repaid and the church consecrated.

That finally happened on the 11th October 1913 when the Suffragan Bishop of Guildford, The Right Reverend John H E Randolf performed the ceremony.

By 1917 the population of both Byfleet and West Byfleet had increased so much that it was decided to make St John, West Byfleet, into a parish church, with the Wey Navigation forming the 'natural' boundary between the old and the new. The final cost of the church by then had amounted to £12,392.1s.6d.

