

WAR IN FRANCE - NO END IN SIGHT

THERE WAS STILL NO SIGN IN JANUARY 1917

that the war in France was anything like coming to an end, at home the hardship of the ordinary families was getting worse, prices in the shops began to rise, the local markets experienced rises considerably more than in Pre-war times, the army and navy were still short of men and in spite of the addition of a number of women, the labour shortage in agriculture was desperate. The availability of timber was becoming very difficult and therefore the price increased so much that the army council took control of all stocks of timber throughout the country, this included sleepers to safeguard supplies for military purposes, all dealings in timber were prohibited from February 1917 except for existing contracts.

CASH PRIZES FOR AGRICULTURE

Following on from government instructions of a few months ago the cultivation of allotments and ploughing up of pasture land was now in full swing throughout the country and should provide approx. 3 million acres ploughed by autumn. In Middlewich the council offered cash prizes to stimulate the idea of growing food for everyday consumption. The first prize was £1.00, 2nd place 10/- and 3rd prize 5/- Cheshire was to plough up 60,000 acres over 10 districts on top of the land already taken over. In the Manor Fields and New King Street areas the MUDC established the local food production committee. This took over the land recently purchased by the burial board committee for cemetery extensions and also private gardens not previously used for Cultivation of crops.

The board of agriculture introduced a system to cope with the expected boost in the quantity of crops, both from the increased ploughing and cultivation of allotments. The idea was around a "gang system" of work that involved part time women workers working in their own neighbourhood. The "Gang" leader or forewoman was experienced in Agriculture and travelled from farm to farm organising the work gangs as they went. The travelling forewoman would train someone in the team before moving on and earned 25/- per week from the agriculture board plus whatever they earned on the farm, it turned out that the forewomen earned more per week than the wage of the former agriculture workers now fighting at the front. This system doubled the output in all aspects of agriculture and the Prime Minister Lloyd George announced that from autumn 1917 and through 1918 the nation's food supply was assured.

LOCAL SCOUTS LEND A HAND

Mrs Kay of Ravenscroft Hall organised the scouting movement in the town to help with the collection of waste food, which was to be fed to pigs and poultry, paper, bottles and jars. Weekly collections of these items were vital to help with the war effort as the countryside ploughing operations got under way.

DARDANELLES FORTS BOMBED

On the 1st of February the German U Boats were ordered to attack all British shipping irrespective of status, on the 3rd of February, the United States liner Housatonic was sunk in the Mediterranean. Two days later the British steamer California was sunk off the coast of Ireland. March saw the U boat activity increase, 4 US merchant ships the Algonquin, City of Memphis, Vigilante and Illinois were all sunk during the 2nd week in March.

CEREMONY FOR BRAVERY

Any Middlewich man who had been decorated for bravery and home on leave would be asked to attend a small ceremony in the council chamber together with his wife or parents, during this meeting, at which the full council attended, the details of his bravery would be read out by the clerk, Mr C F Lawrence together with the type of medal the man had received, the Chairman Mr O B Whitehead would then present the man with a number of savings certificates, together with a wallet, cigarettes and other small gifts to show the town's appreciation and good wishes.

'Gotha' Attacks on Britain

The spring and early summer brought about a new type of attack by the German high command, they had developed a bomber called the "Gotha" these had a ceiling of 15,000 feet and carried a payload of approx. 1,000lbs divided into several different sizes of bombs and incendiaries. They attacked the coastal resorts of Southern England and London. They were intended for daylight raids as opposed to the night raids of the zeppelins, which because of their losses in daylight now turned to night attacks. The Daylight raids of the Gotha's where the navigators could virtually see where they were by the landmarks below them, did not require wireless direction finding and therefore the British could not intercept any signals to have warning of them coming. The problem that this German aircraft had was the difficulty in landing, due to the aircraft returning lighter after dropping their bombs and the use of petrol to return to base. Crash landings in the sea, in France and Belgium destroyed more Gotha's than anywhere else including hostile action.

WAR NEWS

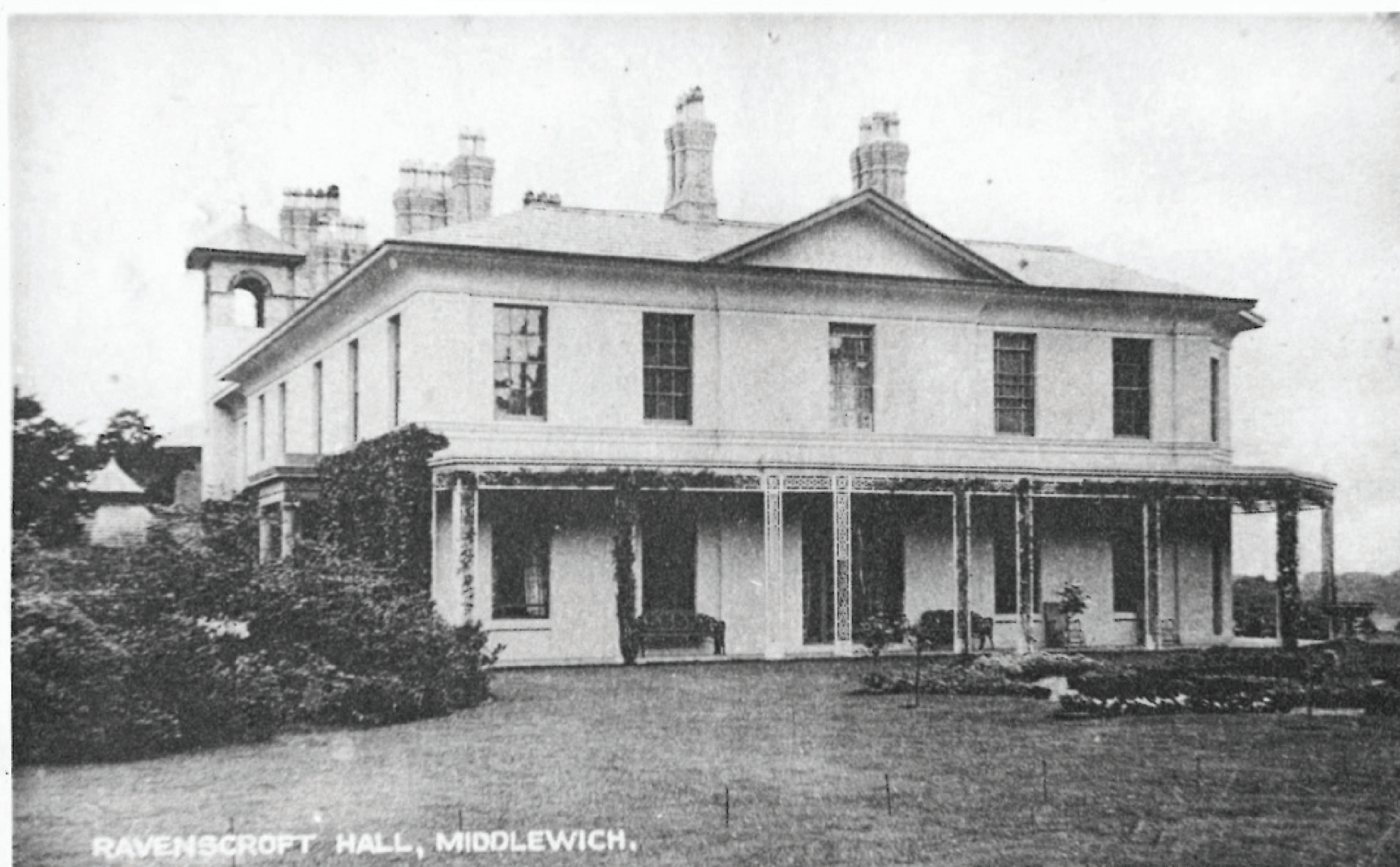
The three Mid-Cheshire Town's war news now occupied complete pages of the local papers, each town having a separate column. Several Middlewich Men were killed or died of wounds in the first weeks of the Battle of the Somme or even on that tragic day the 1st July. No 32525 Pte Harold Cookson serving with the 9th Cheshire Regt was killed in action in France on the 8th July, No 12899 Pte Charles Coppenhall died of wounds as a prisoner of war in Germany on the 28th July 1916 aged 22 and lived at 1 St Anns Rd, Middlewich, he was also in the 9th Cheshire's.

AIR RAIDS IMMINENT

The air raids carried out by the Gotha's and the casualties on the civilian population as a result, raised a serious issue. There seemed to be no way to prepare people that an air raid was imminent, this prompted the government as a first step to issue a direction to all local authorities and chief constables. This directive was aimed at men who had not been enlisted in the army either by age or minor disability. All chief constables had to inform the divisional super-intendants of the following:-

- All men over the age of enlistment but not of retiring age if able and fit, to put their names forward for duties of a special constable.
- If the circumstances require each man should undertake instruction of First Aid
- Each man to be trained as a stretcher bearer, whilst walking or at the run.
- Each man to carry a haversack containing a first aid kit
- Each man to be prepared to be able to assess the situation during an air attack, to be calm and try to get all civilian personnel to shelter.
- At the end of a hostile attack, each man to submit a report of the attack and subsequent conditions of civilians involved and destruction of property including names and addresses
- If the hostile attack resulted in partial destruction of property, the special constable should remain the vicinity to keep civilians away from a potential hazard.
- A look out should be kept for opportunist thieves and looters

The Red Cross Hospitals at Brooks Lane and Ravenscroft Hall had a regular turnover of convalescing soldiers as their health improved they helped out at the various fundraising events in the Town.



Approval of the Middlewich "Comforts" Committee.

MRS. KAY, President. COUNCILLOR O. B. WHITEHEAD, J.P., Treasurer.
MRS. MORRIS and COUNCILLOR F. A. LIDBURY, Secretaries.

PATRONS: Mrs. Roylance Court, Mrs. Kay, Miss Court, J. A. Kay, Esq., J.P.,
Brigadier-General S. P. Rolt, C.B., Major Douglas H. Talbot, Mrs. Broadbent, Mrs. Macnab.

ALL LOYAL CITIZENS

ARE REQUESTED TO OBSERVE

"OUR MIDDLEWICH BOYS' DAY,"

31st December, 1917.

BADGES to be worn in honour of "OUR BOYS"
One Shilling each if bought early.

GREAT

SOCIAL GATHERING

NEW YEAR'S EVE,
in the Council Schools,

IN AID OF THE "COMFORTS" FUND.

GRUNDY'S BAND WILL PLAY FOR DANCING

FROM 8 TO 3.

(CRACKER CARNIVAL.)

WHIST DRIVE AND OTHER FORMS
OF ENTERTAINMENT

FROM 8 O'CLOCK.

ADMISSION TO WEARERS OF BADGES ... NINE-PENCE EACH.

"OUR BOYS DAY"

By 1917 there were 450 men in the army and navy from Middlewich and as in previous years, each one had been sent a Christmas parcel. The cost was becoming a burden on the comfort committee on its own, over £300 had been raised in the months before Christmas. The various fund-raising committee's met to discuss this situation and decided to hold a fete to raise funds in the Council Schools on New Year's Eve 1917.

Messer's C F Lawrence and T L Drinkwater fell in with the idea and "Our Boys Day" was the outcome. Before the day any member of the public could buy a triangular shaped half-coloured badge on which was the motto "The best of Luck to our boys", the badge gave admission on the day at a reduced price, over 600 people attended the fete, the main hall and some of the classrooms were decorated in the Christmas tradition. Several Patients from the 2 hospitals helped with the Festival decorations. The evening commenced at 8pm with a whist drive in one or two of its classrooms, and then dancing in the main hall. At intervals the Middlewich Male voice choir entertained and the MC's for the dancing were Mr W Bailey and Mr E Stockton. Mr Stockton's dog 'Jack' raised £10 of his own accord and regarded as a regular collector for the comforts fund. One of the features in the main hall was a picture gallery consisting of photographs of all men serving with the forces. This attracted a great deal of attention. Just before midnight the large crowd became silent and waited for the new year, A gong sounded and the band struck up, the national anthem was sung followed by Auld Lang Syne, Balloons were burst and dancing carried on till the early hours, over £400 was raised for the comforts fund.

Corporal Frank Buckley was awarded the Military Medal for devotion to duty in the field. He was in charge of a 30 strong party whilst wiring and entrenching a position for 5 nights during a bombardment in which he was wounded. He later became a councillor and Chairman of Middlewich Urban District Council in 1952-3 and again in 1960-1.