

THE MIDDLEWICH GREAT WAR TRAIL

Follow the trail to uncover the story of Middlewich during The Great War. This information reveals the history of Middlewich during the Great War and the impact made upon the town and its people. The trail is just over one mile (1.8km) long and will take about an hour and a quarter. There are toilet & refreshment facilities on the main shopping area at Wheelock Street. Please consider local residents by parking in designated car parks and not residential areas.

The Middlewich Great War Project is a partnership between Middlewich Heritage Trust, Middlewich Town Council and the Royal British Legion. The project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund with the assistance of Tesco, Jack's and the Middlewich Round Table.

MIDDLEWICH AND THE GREAT WAR - TIMELINE

1914– The Middlewich detachment of the Territorials met in the new council schools for drill every Tuesday evening at 7.30pm. Nine days after War was declared, on August 6th the Middlewich Detachment of the Territorials under the leadership of Lt Haddon assembled in Victoria Square at 7.30pm to march to Winsford to collect their kit.

1914 - The Middlewich ladies at the Red Cross HQ in Hightown made 443 pairs of socks, 81 shirts, 125 comforts, 61 pairs of cuffs and 79 cholera belts in between September and November in response to lack of supplies.

1915– By the summer Middlewich was divided into 11 districts and enumerators were sent into each household to ascertain the age, occupation etc. of the males in the house. This was to make sure and to obtain the maximum number of men possible for the armed forces.

1915 - In December 384 Middlewich men were in uniform. The relief committee had to raise £100 in order to send each man a **Christmas Gift** wherever he was stationed. Each parcel contained a writing pad, pencils, a Christmas card, a radium pocket stove, tinder lighter, pair of mittens, packet of candles, packet of chocolates, 6 packets of cigarettes, one tin of Oxo cubes, one yard of muslin, one tablet of soap.

1916– Germans had begun to drop bombs, 300 bombs in one week resulting in 59 deaths and 101 injured as well as property damage. Middlewich police started to enforce lighting rules, the church clock could not be lit, gas lamps dimmed, windows and skylights had to be blacked out or extinguished all together.

1916 - Women were expected to fill the men's previous roles. To assist this, one of the first **nurseries was opened** at No.16 Hightown so women could leave their small children while they trained and worked in farming and munitions.

1917– Any Middlewich man who had been decorated for bravery and home on leave was asked to attend a small ceremony in the council chamber with his family, this is where details of his bravery were read out and he was awarded a medal, certificates, some cigarettes and a few other small gifts that symbolised the town's appreciation.

1917 - " Our Boys Day " 450 Middlewich troops were now in the army or navy so the town decided to honour this by having a fete. 600 people attended raising £400 through singing, dancing and selling triangular shaped half-coloured badges which had the motto " best of Luck to our boys" on it.

1918– Men from Middlewich who died during March-April 1918. Frank Moss was killed in action on 24th March 1918 aged 20; he lived at " Limes" on Chester Road.

1918 - The government launched a new nationwide initiative " Week'. Towns and villages whose population was under 10,000, which included Middlewich, raised enough to buy 4,500 aeroplanes at £2,500 each! This nationwide achievement was tremendous by any standards and certainly raised the country's morale.



The 1919 CELEBRATIONS

The Armistice of 11th November 1918, had held. Peace was declared nationwide in 1919 with many local councils holding peace celebrations on **Saturday 19th July**. Bunting and flags were put up everywhere as the church bells rang. A procession of ex service men, Red Cross nurses, scouts and school girls who were led by the Centenary band, filled Sutton Lane. The nurses wore their red uniform adding colour to the procession but they also wore black scarves to represent the members of the community who wouldn't be returning home. They made their way from Sutton Lane to St. Anns Road, across the Canal Bridge, Newton Bank, Chester Road, Wheelock Street and then halted in Victoria Square where there was a speech from the Chairman, Mr George Dean, and the national anthem was sung. At this point the whole procession dispersed to go to their various schools and halls for tea. In the Victoria Building 300 soldiers and sailors sat down for their meal, a knife and fork tea, there was no shortage of food and beverages now. After tea a second procession was formed, behind the Centenary band, to arrive at Ravenscroft Hall to be welcomed by Mrs Kay OBE.

There was a slow bicycle race and tug of war plus the 100 yards dash, an egg and spoon race, the needle threading and the chance of a piggy-back in the 50 yards dash for everyone to enjoy. The Centenary band played a selection of music during the evening sports. The prizes were distributed by Mrs Kay and Major General Broadbent. The very successful day was rounded off by a dance in the Town Hall



THE GREAT WAR TRAIL - see map overleaf

1) Victoria Building, Lewin Street

The first Middlewich men reporting for duty assembled in Victoria Square and marched to Winsford to collect their kit. Victoria Building had a part to play throughout the war as workshops for the comforts committee and at the end of the Great War as it hosted celebrations for the soldiers and sailors tea in the country wide Peace Celebrations of 19th July 1919.

Standing with your back against Victoria Building, turn right following Lewin Street. Cross the road carefully when you see a canal bridge, Brooks Lane. Go over the bridge and stay on the left hand side; you'll come to a memorial and garden.

2) Brunner Mond Memorial, Brooks Lane

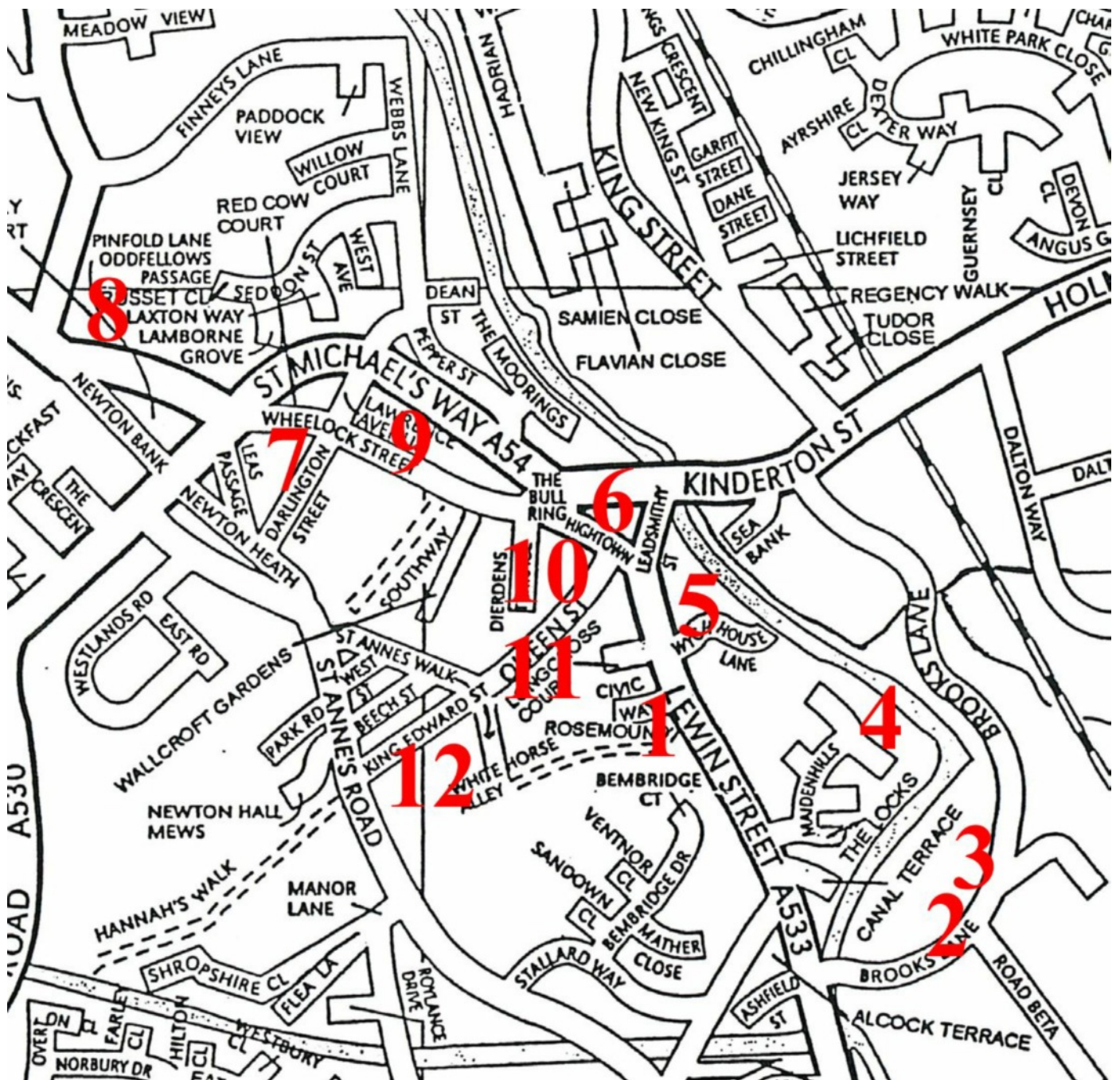
There is an interpretation panel here.

3) Brunner Mond Hospital, Brooks Lane

There is an interpretation panel here.

Directly opposite the memorial and Clubhouse is an industrial estate, this was the site of Brunner Mond (ICI). The entrance to the works was Road Beta. Adjoined to this was Murgatroyd's Salt Works. Walk further along Brooks Lane past the Community Church, the un-named junction on your right leads to Murgatroyd's Brine Pumps, but today we are walking back towards the canal so continue down Brooks Lane until you come to some steps on your left which leads over a lock bridge. Walk across and stop.





4) Transport and Industry – Three Locks Area

Farm and plough: the canal indicates the boundary between Middlewich and Kinderton, the latter was largely farming communities beyond the industrial site you've just walked through. Further up the canal past Town Bridge was the Milk Factory (beside the Big Lock) and just over the bridge on the right were fields around King Street and beyond which were ploughed up for food.

1915 brought grave concern over two things nationally: industry and workforce. As spring approached, the farming industry made it known to the government that local labour exchanges were not working and suggested that children should be employed. The education committee said that boys in school could be employed on local farms but that they should still have some schooling and it was agreed that during the agricultural crisis, boys and girls aged 13 to 14 years should work from 1st March to 31st October on farms if available. During this period they must have respectable hours and a fair wage. Employment would last for two months at a time to ensure that the children were not overworked and that they had some schooling. Gangs of women were now employed on farms, usually as dairy maids or milkmaids, looking after pigs, calves and poultry.

From the Lock Bridge, follow the path down the three locks towards an open field with a sandstone sculpture in the middle of it. This is the Salinae Field, in fact this area belonged to Seddon's Salt Works Wych House Lane.

5) Transport and Industry – Salinae Field

Salt orders could not be fulfilled because the coal industry did not have enough miners to supply the demands of any industry or the naval fleet. In addition, the war office diverted railway wagons carrying coal and munitions to southern England en route to France.

By 1915, 45 men had enlisted from Henry Seddon's and sons. From this year "starred men" had the opportunity to appear before a tribunal to explain their roles, as the jobs "are not readily understood by those who have no experience of actual salt making". This is illustrated by complaints from Seddon's that work such as food preservation, cheese production, chemical weaponry, textile dyes etc. required salt but tribunals did not properly understand the industry and failed to protect the workers who produced the salt. This left a number of problems for salt and chemical manufacturing as a whole.

Electro Bleach Works were located further along the canal to the south. James Hargreaves (1834-1915) was one of the most prolific inventors in matters relating to Chemical Industries. The successful cell developed by James Hargreaves and Thomas Bird operated reliably at the new factory in Middlewich. The nature of the electrolysis process produces chlorine, hydrogen, and caustic soda. At the time chlorine was used only for products such as bleaching agents, however this changed from 1914 onwards as the government required an increasing amount of Liquid Chlorine, firstly as a war gas then for chlorinated organic chemicals.



"I do hope they don't touch lump men or we shall be entirely closed" - Roland Seddon

The era of the Great War in terms of the salt industry is significant in that the process of multi effect vacuum brine evaporators began. This process was destined to end the open pan operations. Walk up the field onto Wych House lane and turn right, use the crossing and cross the road. Walk by the church and you will arrive at the Bull Ring.

6) The Bull Ring – location of the Town Hall and Memorial

Lord Kitchener sent a 'call to arms' to every authority throughout the country. In Middlewich it prompted an immediate response. Within 14 days two main meetings had been arranged and another committee was formed with the congregational minister the Rev J W Fortnum as its chairman. These meetings attracted large crowds of people. The speeches were rousing and patriotic, hymns like 'Onward Christian Soldiers' and the National Anthem were sung. As each man stepped forward to give his name to the recruiting sergeant a cheer went up. Cars were organised for the next day lent by Mrs Roylance Court, Mrs Kay and Mrs Haddon to take recruits to Chester. The Comforts committee, based at the Town Hall, were anxious about the plight of the prisoners of war in Germany after they received postcards from some of them, saying that they had "black bread" to eat. Mrs Roylance Court arranged for food parcels to be despatched. Each prisoner was to receive food parcels at regular intervals consisting of biscuits, cheese, cooked veal, "Maggi Soup" and chocolate. At the end of November 1918, the Parish Church together with the UDC decided to erect a memorial in the church vestry (Lady Chapel), in memory of the heroic dead. Mrs Roylance Court gave £1,000 to commemorate her late husband, her son (killed in action) and the late Sir Andrew Walker her father. The war relief committee in May 1919 resolved that a memorial to the fallen be erected in the parish churchyard at a cost of £400.

In conjunction with the Great War Project, Philip Andrews has researched and produced a series of books about the fallen. Geoff and Salli Page have researched and documented the Middlewich fallen, and travelled in the UK, France, Belgium and Italy to visit each grave and place a cross on behalf of Middlewich Residents. As a result of their individual projects it was found that fourteen

names were missing from the Town memorial. For the centenary of the end of the Great War these names were finally added.

If you stand with your back to the memorial, you will see the town centre, Wheelock Street, walk down here, many buildings still remain from the early 20th Century. Look up at the building facades and alley ways which lead to squares, factories, stables and outbuildings.

7) Wheelock Street – on the left hand side, just after the first house past Darlington Street.

Many organisations in the town followed the advice of the war relief committee and commenced fundraising in their own way. One of the first persons to add to the fund was Mr A F Sutcliffe of the Picture Palace 'star cinema' in Wheelock Street, who held a Saturday afternoon matinee and raised £6.00. A film showing the battle of the Somme was released to picture houses on 21st August. Throughout the autumn of 1916 20 million people (nearly half of the population of Britain at the time) flocked to see the silent film. The film remains one of the most watched in British cinema history, even bigger than Star Wars.

At the end of Wheelock Street you are now in Newton. You will see a crossing point over St. Michael's Way, go across the road pass Lidl on your right and some original Newton cottages with their little alley-ways on the left. Keep walking and you will come across the Cemetery Railings.

8) Cemetery

There are 17 WW1 fallen in this cemetery. Follow the centre pathway and just after the second path on the left you will find

Russell Thomas Hatton, 17658 Pte 19 Bn Lancashire Fusiliers C521

and James Henry Kirk, 11336 Pte 8 Bn Cheshire Regiment C530.

From the cemetery, re-trace your steps back to Wheelock Street and walk down the left-hand side.

9) Wheelock Street – on the right hand side

The unemployment exchange was near to Red Cow Court, recorded in 1909 and believed to be there through the war. Walk down Wheelock Street, on the left there is a vacated electrical double fronted shop, this used to be Powell's shop with an alley way beside it that was the staff route into the workshops behind, now housing. Powell's of Middlewich, sewing works since around 1868: this company carried out ministry of defence work in WWI making regiment, policeman's and fireman's uniforms. It was a gentleman's outfitters.



At the end of Wheelock Street by the Vaults, there was Pepper Street that went down to Webbs Lane and the Milk Factory. Wheelock Street was often busy with horse and carts making their deliveries, sometimes causing a traffic jam on busy days!

All the local firms both large and small held weekly collections at their premises for the relief fund and at the end of September 1914 the fund stood at £600. In 1917 the hardship for ordinary families at home was getting worse; prices in shops began to rise, the local markets experienced price rises considerably higher than in pre war times. Follow the road to the right of the church, this is Hightown.

10) Hightown

The Red Cross had set up a shop devoted to raising funds in Hightown, one of the first in Cheshire to do so. In April 1916 it was realised that the military service act was causing a tremendous shortage on manpower in all sectors of industry. Women were asked to take on some of the farm labouring jobs, despite some opposition clearly displayed in newspaper articles of the time. In Middlewich a number of women could not take up farm work because they had small children to look after. In response to this, Mrs Roylance Court opened a day nursery at No 16 Hightown at the end of May to try to resolve the situation. Now, for the first time, mothers could leave their children to be cared for, as they went to the farms in the morning to do the milking.

Turn into Queen Street keep to the left and stop when you see a modern police station set back from the road.

11) Queen Street – Police Station

In 1917 all men over the age on enlistment but not of retiring age put their names forward for duties as special constables.

- 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
- 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 in the vicinity to keep civilians away from a potential hazard
- A look-out should be kept for opportunist thieves and looters Further up Queen Street becomes King Edward Street, on the left you can see the council school built in 1906.

12) “Our Boys Day” Was held at the council school in 1917 with over 600 people attending the fete. The main hall and some of the classrooms were decorated in the Christmas tradition. Several patients from the two hospitals helped with the Festival decorations. The evening commenced at 8pm with a whist drive in the 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 was 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 local men serving with the forces.