

From the Parish Archive

100 years ago this month, December 1919: a death, a memorial, and a most unusual gift!

Setting the national scene: If you're anything like me it'll be helpful to have a bit of a refresher about what was happening 100 years ago in 1919. So, ever the 'girly swot', I did a bit of research and found that there were some really interesting events, and not just in Northlew.

Just to give you a flavour of what was happening on the national scene a century ago this month.... on **3rd February 1919** Éamon de Valera, the leader of Sinn Féin, and two other prisoners escaped from Lincoln Prison in England in a break personally arranged by Michael Collins and Harry Boland. On **31st July** the Housing, Town Planning, &c. Act 1919 provided government subsidy for the provision of council houses, with the target of completing 500,000 houses by 1922. On **15th August** the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act provided for returning servicemen to get their old jobs back, and on **11th November** the first Remembrance Day was observed with a two minutes silence at 11:00 hrs.

On **1st December** Nancy Astor (Viscountess Astor) became the first woman to take her seat in the House of Commons having stood at the Plymouth Sutton by-election to succeed her husband as a Unionist member. On **15th December** meat rationing ended. On **22nd December** a bill '*...to provide for the better government of Ireland*' was introduced into the House of Commons, proposing two parliaments: one for the six counties of north-east Ulster and one for the other twenty-six.

And for women there was a particularly important event; on **23rd December** the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act removed legal impediments on women entering the secular professions stating that...

'A person shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function, or from being appointed to or holding any civil or judicial office or post, or from entering or assuming or carrying on any civil profession or vocation, or for admission to any incorporated society (whether incorporated by Royal Charter or otherwise) ...'

It's hard to know what real difference this made to the women of Northlew and how it impacted upon the Council in the short term. I could have missed something, but it seems from my review of the Parish Minutes that the first woman Councillor (Mrs. Lacey) wasn't appointed until 45 years later in 1964. (Can anyone in the Village tell me if this is correct, or give me any information about Councillor Mrs. Lacey? If you can please send me an email on jjones@northlewparrishcouncil.org.uk - I'd love to find out more about what is potentially a land-mark event.)

From the Parish Archive: So, having set the scene a bit let's find out more about what was happening right here in the village during 1919.

The first meeting of the year was held on **4th February 1919**. It was attended by Councillors John Brooking, William Brooking, Henry Pellew, Albert Pascoe, Henry James Adams, John Adams, Roger Jackman and Henry James Friend. Chairman Reverend John Worthington was unable to attend due to illness so the meeting was Chaired by Henry Pellew. This wasn't a particularly exciting meeting; discussions focussed on footpath repairs (a regular topic), the 'Housing of the Working Classes Act' and the need for Workmen's Cottages. It was resolved

to ask Okehampton Rural District Council for 6 cottages to be built, land being ‘no doubt available’ if Government assistance could be obtained.

By the time of the next meeting on **March 17th 1919** Reverend John Worthington, a long-standing servant to the Parish (first became Chair in 1897), had died and Henry Pellew was in the Chair. Discussions focussed on a letter to Okehampton Rural District Council about the proposed construction of the railway between Torrington, Okehampton and Moretonhampstead...

‘We the members of the Northlew Parish Council do hereby heartily support the proposal for the construction of the Railway from Torrington to Okehampton and thence to Moretonhampstead. And would urge on all parties concerned the necessity of the scheme being carried out at an early date.’

The question of a War Memorial was also raised, and it was agreed to discuss this further at the Annual Parish Meeting (where it was agreed to hold a joint meeting for the United Parishes of Northlew and Ashbury on 23rd April 1919.)

Also on this day, the Election of Councillors for the coming year resulted in the following candidates being elected:

Names of Candidates		
Forenames	Other names	Place of Abode
Adams	John	Middle & Overlake
Adams	Henry James	Kesterfield
Brooking	Willian	Crowden
Bickle	Alfred Edward	West Kimber
Friend	John	Church Gate
Friend	Henry James	Rutleigh
Jackman	Roger	Higher Whiddon
Pascoe	Albert	Village
Pellew	Henry	Harpers Hill

At the next meeting, on **April 15th 1919**, Henry Pellew was elected Chairman of the newly elected Council.

For some reason that’s not at all obvious from the records the next meeting didn’t take place until **December 17th 1919**. This was a very interesting meeting! The Council had been offered a ‘German Machine Gun’ as a War Trophy, and instructed the Clerk to accept it. It was also agreed that, should a Village Hall be built (and we know how that turned out) the Trophy should be deposited there for safe keeping.

(I’ve looked for more detail about this machine gun and I haven’t found very much at all. And so, dear reader, do you know anything about it? Was it ever deposited in the Victory Hall, or elsewhere in the Village for safe-keeping? If you know anything about it please send me an email on jjones@northlewparrishcouncil.org.uk – I’m really curious to find out.)

Of course, the usual more mundane matters were also discussed. Councillors were unhappy at the standard of work previously carried out to clean the gullies in the Village, so the Clerk was instructed to write to the Sanitary Inspector requesting that any new appointee should be *'fully advised as to his duties'* and that the Parish Council should be approached before the appointment is settled. There was discussion about the visit of the Inspector of Weights and Measures (be still my beating heart) and there was an apparently lengthy discussion about a recurring theme, the state of the roads in and around the Village. On this occasion the focus of attention was the roads leading to Okehampton between Gorhuish Down Cross and Hilltown and Councillors agreed to send a resolution to the Okehampton Rural District Council..

'That this Council begs to call the attention of your Council to the disgraceful state of the Road from Gorhuish Down Cross to Hilltown, the said Road being practically impassable for motor traffic and very dangerous for horses. The rate payers of Northlew are seriously aware of the ever-increasing demands made upon them for the upkeep of the Roads etc and now feel the time has arrived when they are entitled to some consideration and therefore hope your Council will give the matter attention.'

So there you have it; 100 years ago this month the Parish Council's focus was on a Trophy from World War 1, sanitation, weights & measures and the state of the roads around Northlew.

Next time: the early years, from the Council's inaugural meeting in 1895 to December 1905. Find out what was decided about rating and valuation, the commissioning of a 'parish chest', elections, appointments of overseers, local education, the diamond jubilee, telegraph to the village, restoration of the old village cross and (you guessed it) the state of roads and paths around the village.