

Cuddesdon at War: A Tale of
Everyday Folk in a Small
Oxfordshire Village 1914-1918

Written by Kathy Hawley and Esme
Hawley (aged 11 years)

August 2015©

Scene1: Cuddesdon School July 1914

Photo of School Children projected onto screen

Narrator

The population of Cuddesdon village has hardly changed at all in the last 100 years. There were around 500 men, women and children living in Cuddesdon and the hamlets of Denton and Chippinghurst. Of these 110 children attended the village school. The headmaster Mr. Martin had been head for many years and was assisted by Miss Kate Bricknell a former pupil. The main occupation in the village was of course farming including sheep farming. As with many villages the children were needed to help on the farms and school attendance normally dropped during harvest time and other significant seasonal activities. The school leaving age however was 12 years but if you could show that you had reached a certain level of education you could leave at 10 and a half years.

Enter a very old lady wrapped in a dark cloak around her head and body and walking very slowly with the help of a walking stick appears on the stage.

Ethel May Bestley

In a very quivery voice

Hello my name is Ethel May Bestley I was born in 1905 in a small house in Cuddesdon and I am now a very old lady but I can remember lots of things about my childhood. It was a very happy childhood. I went to Cuddesdon School with all my friends from the village. I was 9 years old when the Great War began. I can still remember the stomach turning feeling when it changed my life forever.....

She pauses and a school bell begins to ring loudly. She throws off her cloak and drops her walking stick to reveal the 9 year old Ethel in a dress, boots and white pinafore. She begins to go up the steps.

I must hurry; I don't want to be late for school

Enter the headmaster Mr. Martin ringing the school bell.

Enter the other children wearing the traditional school uniform.

Ethel joins the other children and they all line up in front of Mr. Martin

Enter Miss Bricknell who joins Mr. Martin and the scene transfers to inside the classroom

Mr. Martin

Good Morning boys and girls. This is our last assembly before the summer holidays begin on July 14th

Cheers from the children

We shall begin our assembly with the hymn "All things bright and beautiful"

Mr Randall plays a few lines of the music on the piano and then the children begin to sing accompanied by Mr. Randall. The cast may have to join in off stage if the children cannot manage the hymn alone.

**All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all**

**The purple-headed mountain,
The river running by,
The sunset and the morning,
That brightens up the sky;**

**All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.**

Mr. Martin

First of all I have a few announcements to make. When you come back next term, school will be closed as usual for the race meetings and for the hunt but more on these nearer the time.

Since it is the end of term I have great pleasure in announcing the names of the school prize winners for the year and Miss Bricknell will distribute the prizes.

Mr. Martin reads out the names and Miss Bricknell distributes the prizes (books). Each child comes forward when their name is read out to receive their prize.

Mr. Martin

The Bishop's prize goes to Elsie Cole

Everyone claps as Elsie takes her prize.

The study prizes go to Elsie Rowe, Emily Morris and Gladys Burt.

Everyone claps as the girls take their prizes.

The infant's prize goes to Mabel Wing (*Gala Hawley*)

Mabel is unsure what to do and the other children around her say go on Mabel you have won the prize and one of the older girls takes her hand and walks her to Miss Bricknell and there are loud cheers when she receives her prize.

The first boy to win a prize is Fred Stavely and this is the Woodwork prize. (*Alex Brown*)

Fred swaggers up to receive his prize the other children clap

And finally the Cookery Prize goes Elsie Cole, her second prize today. Well done Elsie.

There is polite applause from the other children.

Now please line up and file back to your classrooms quietly and remember to work hard on this last day of school before you break up for the holidays. I know that many of you will be helping your families with the harvest so good luck to all of you and I pray for fine weather.

The children all line up and quietly walk off the stage into the Lady Chapel. Mr Martin stands alone on the stage.

Mr. Martin

I have talked to the children about the races and the hunt that always take place in Cuddesdon later in the year but who knows where we will all be and what we will be doing. There is talk that War will be declared against Germany in the next 2 weeks and what that will mean for all of us in this village only God knows.

He walks off slowly into the Lady Chapel.

Revised.

Scene 2: Down by the river August 5th 1914

Photo of young boys of Cuddesdon sitting by the river is projected onto the screen.

Narrator

1 War was declared against Germany two weeks later on August 4th 1914. There was a rush of men to serve, confident that the war would be over by December. Ex regular soldiers, reservists and raw recruits all enlisted. In Cuddesdon the first group of men to enlist were volunteers and there were a few already serving as regular soldiers. Men had the option of which company and service they joined. The 2nd Battalion of the Oxon and Bucks light Infantry based at the Cowley Barracks was often the first choice but others joined regiments where they may have had previous family connections like Warwickshire. The navy and rarely the Royal Flying Corps were the other options. Officer status was often given to men who joined the Royal Flying Corps or as army padres as in the case of men who had studied at Cuddesdon College.

2 Farming during the war years was crucial for keeping food supplies going and as in all farming communities the children and young men had to help their families on the farms. It was often long hours and hard work so walking down to Cuddesdon Mill and across the fields to a bend in the river to enjoy a swim was a tradition which has lasted for well over a hundred years.

Enter 3 young men who sit down on a piece of baize made to look like grass, dressed somewhat like the boys in the photo but without swimming trunks.

Archie

Well it's finally happened, yesterday we declared war on Germany and the volunteers have already started to enlist. We're all too young to join up and since people reckon it will all be over by Christmas we'll be stuck in Cuddesdon working on the farm or looking after the sheep! Only single men aged from 18-41 can enlist.

Fred

I'd love to be able to join the army and go to France; it would be a bit of an adventure. I went into Oxford last year to St Giles Fair which was great but France really would be different and exciting.

Percy

And don't forget what they say about all the ladies love a man in Uniform!

Archie

Trust you Percy to think of that. One day I'm going to join the Oxon and Bucks battalion. Does anyone know what the uniform looks like?

They all shake their heads

Archie continues

May be we can walk down to Cowley Barracks on Sunday afternoon and take a look at what goes on?

Percy

Be careful you don't get compulsorily enlisted!

Fred

My mam wouldn't let me near the barracks; she would think they would kidnap you like they did to the sailors in the old days.

Percy

I don't know about joining up to fight for your country, if I don't get back soon to help me dad feed the cattle I won't live long enough to be old enough to join up. Does anyone know the time?

Fred

I heard the Church clock strike 4 o'clock not so long ago

Archie

You shouldn't take any notice of the clock... if never chimes the right time. Who knows one day maybe someone will give the village a new clock!

They all stand up and line up like a row of soldiers marching around the stage totally out of step and arms swinging totally at random. They leave the stage down the steps then turn right singing as they go off to turn to into the Lady Chapel. If the lads cannot or don't want to sing then perhaps Jonathan and some of the adults off stage can sing the verse?

Mr. Randall plays the accompaniment on the piano

**It's the soldiers of the King, my lads
Who've been, my lads, who've seen, my lads
In the fight for England's glory lads
Of her worldwide glory let us sing:
And when we say we've always won
And when they ask us how it's done
We'll proudly point to every one
Of England's soldiers of the King.**

Narrator

2 Nearly 2 years later, in March 1916, conscription came in and all single, fit men between the ages of 18-41 were liable for call up and in May 1916 this was changed to include married men. By 1917 some of the young men in this group would have been conscripted and gone to war.

Archie's wish that someone might give the village a new clock sadly was fulfilled. The nephew of Sir Edward O' Malley (of Denton House) Alfred James Osborne was killed at Arras in France on April 29th 1917 and a new clock and chimes was donated by his eldest sister Miss Osborne. This was erected on St. James Day April 29th 1919 and still sits here today on the clock tower. A brass plaque in the church commemorates the gift.

Scene 3: The Eggs: March 1916

Photo of Dove House Farm projected onto the screen.

Narrator

Casualties were very heavy in this war and some of the wounded were brought back to England to recover or receive treatment. There were many of these ~~hospitals and convalescent homes~~ ^{in hospitals and convalescent homes} around Oxfordshire. They ranged from Somerville College for Officers to the Cowley Road Workhouse for the ordinary servicemen. Cuddesdon had already suffered its first fatal casualty when Charles Shirley was killed earlier in 1916

The scene takes place outside the front door of Dove House Farm. The maid servant is brushing the steps. Enter Sophie and her 2 small sons carrying a basket...

Emma Morris the maid

(Cheryl Hicks) In a strong Oxfordshire accent

Good morning Sophie and boys. You're up early.

Sophie's son

In a really excited voice

We've come to bring Mrs. Gale some eggs and the chickens have laid 4 this morning. They are towards the eggs that Mrs. Gale and Mrs Ryman are collecting to take to the wounded soldiers in hospital

Emma

That's very good because the men need some good fresh food to build up their strength. I'll go and find Mrs. Gale for you.

She disappears off stage and re-enters with Mrs. Gale.

Mrs Gale

Good morning Sophie, Gabriel and Sampson. I hear you have some eggs for me. Mrs. Ryman and I are taking them all into Cowley later this afternoon. So this is really good timing. You must look after your chickens very well boys to get this number of eggs.

The boys nod their heads and smile.

And what about you Sophie how are you coping looking after small children and keeping everything else going during these difficult days?

Sophie

It's what we women have to do and always had to do. I get very tired sometimes but it is nothing in comparison to what husbands brothers and other men have to put up with in the trenches in France.

Emma

Some women, I think they call them suffragettes, say it will all change for women after the war. Well that's what I have heard from my friend who lives in Garsington. But then again there are some funny folks in Garsington..... like that women called Lady Ottoline Morrell. They have very strange ideas. She dresses in odd clothes and dyes her hair purple! I hear Lady O'Malley from Denton House will not receive her ~~in her~~ into her home because of her reputation. I'm not sure what her reputation is though!

Mrs. Gale

I think that's enough of gossip for this morning Emma. Back to work

Emma

I still think those Garsington folks have got it wrong. Women have as much chance of getting the vote as we have of having a woman prime minister ~~or~~ putting a man on the moon! ~~!~~

Emma exits muttering to herself

Mrs. Gale

These are hard times Sophie. My heart is breaking because John has joined the Royal Flying Corps. I worry about him every day and wonder if I will ever see him again.

Sophie

Sophie puts her hand on Mrs. Gales arm tentatively

Only a mother can understand another mother's grief and worries for their children. We will all pray for John's safe return.

They both walk off stage very slowly in opposite directions

A Hymn for Mothers in War-time

This hymn was found in an autograph book belonging to a Denton Resident. The book started in 1913 and the last pages written in January 1918.

Susannah McGuinness reads the Poem

Countless boys who fight and fall

Oh, believe he knows them all

Oh, believe his hand can reach

With a special gift to each

Countless stars in heavens blue frame

Everyone he calls by name

Every sparrow's fall he sees

Are our heroes less than these?

Wounded falls your darling? Balm

He sends down and strength and calm
Killed? He takes him from the strife
To the everlasting life

Missing? He knows where and heeds,
Gives him just the help he needs,
Can he stray beyond His Bound?
In whose love the lost is found.
Prisoner? He can break the bond
Mother, will you get despond?
Love, 'mid millions keeps your son
As he were the only one;

Keeps him still alive or dead;
Counts the hairs upon his head
This message sent to you
This in life or death is true

Narrator

① Sadly 6 months later on September 14th 1916 Mr and Mrs Gale's beloved son John Hugh Gale was shot down and killed while on a reconnaissance flight in France by the famous German pilot Oswald Boelcke; the man who trained the German pilot known as the Red Baron. Her worst fears of never seeing him again became a reality.

Mrs Gale's

John.

He is commemorated here in this
plaque in 5000

WALKER
talk

Scene 4: The Wedding July 15th 1916

Photo of the Wedding of Harry Lockett and Ada Godfrey is projected onto the screen

Narrator

1 Many things changed during the war years which made daily living
2 harder for those trying to keep some sense of normality. One
particular area was that of weddings. The war placed a certain
urgency on young couples and wedding preparations often had to be
made very quickly. The weddings sometimes took place before the
groom went away to War or when he was home on leave. Many
brides had no option but to borrow a wedding gown. Others saved
every single penny they could ensuring they were still able to wear
the dress of their dreams. Bouquets of flowers were more restrained
than in the pre-war years since land had to be used for growing food
rather than flowers.

1 One such wedding which was a source of great happiness and took
place in this very church on July 15th 1916 was that of Harry Lockett
and Ada Godfrey. They stood on these very steps and exchanged
their vows in front of their friends and families.

*The bride and groom are already standing on the higher altar steps with their
backs to the audience facing the vicar Rev James Seaton. The rest of the
wedding party stand behind them.*

Rev Seaton

We all wish you every happiness in your new married life and pray
you will not be parted too long Harry from your wife Ada and Ada
from your husband Harry who will be fighting for King and Country.
May God bless you both.

*All walk off stage in front of the pulpit and enter the Lady Chapel. Stage hands
bring on a table and chairs. On the table is a cake, flowers and some tankards.*

The Wedding party return from the Lady Chapel laughing and chatting. they fall quiet to listen to Harry

Harry

I'm not going to make any long speeches (*Cheers from the wedding party*) I just want to say that Ada by agreeing to be my wife has made me the happiest man on earth. I have never seen her look so beautiful and radiant as she does today. I will do my very best to make her the happiest woman in all the world and look after her well. I want us all to enjoy ourselves today, so a toast to my lovely bride!

All raise their drinking glasses and say "to the bride"

I would like to have the first dance with Ada. There is a new song that was published a few months ago which says a lot of what I feel for my new wife

Ada and he dance a slow waltz to the tune of "If you were the only girl in the world" The music is played on the accordion and the words sung by Johnathan.

**Sometimes when I feel bad
and things look blue
I wish a pal I had... say one like you.
Someone within my heart to build a throne
Someone who'd never part, to call my own**

(Audience joins in)

**If you were the only girl in the world
and I were the only boy
Nothing else would matter in the world today
We could go on loving in the same old way**

**A garden of Eden just made for two
With nothing to mar our joy
I would say such wonderful things to you
There would be such wonderful things to do**

**If you were the only girl in the world
and I were the only boy.**

Loud cheers from all the guests

Groom's father

Photo of the Cuddesdon hand bell ringers is projected on to the screen.

And now by special request the Cuddesdon Hand bell ringers will play for us accompanied by our young fiddler (Ben McGuinness)

Hand bell ringers play with "fiddle" accompaniment, Ode to Joy

Harry

Project Photo of Harry with his regiment onto the screen

Harry walks to the side of the stage and speaks his thoughts out loud.

Yes to-day is the happiest day of my life but I am scared of what lies ahead. So many men who have gone to the front have never come back. I want to share my life with Ada and one day with our children. My name is Lockett and I hope that means I will be lucky and return safe.

He goes back to the Centre of the stage.

Come on everyone let have some more music.

The accordion player strikes up the music for "Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag". All the guests join in.

Chorus Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag,

And smile, smile, smile,

While you've a Lucifer to light your fag,

Smile, boys, that's the style.

What's the use of worrying?

Scene 5: The School and the Memorial Plaque

November 1916

Project photo of Cecil, Annie and baby Ivy onto the screen

Narrator

Harry Lockett was lucky and returned home from the war to his wife. But one other family in particular in the village were not so lucky. The Godfrey family had lived in Denton from at least 1862 and one of the Godfreys', Annie married in 1910 her beloved Cecil Herbert Morris whose family originated from Northampton. Cecil joined the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry. While her husband was away fighting Annie lived at 17 the High Street Cuddesdon (opposite the school).

This scene takes place in the school and the children; headmaster and Miss Bricknell are lined up for the morning Assembly.

Mr. Martin

Good morning boys and girls. This morning I start our Assembly with some very sad news. You all know of Mrs. Morris and her 2 year old daughter Ivy, who live across the road. Very sadly she has received news that her husband has been killed in action. He was killed during heavy shelling, during the night time, on his unit and died on 19th November. So we start this morning's assembly with the hymn *Abide with me*. We will sing 2 verses.

Mr. Randall plays the piano; again the rest of the cast may have to sing off stage in support of the school children

**Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.**

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Mr. Martin

None of us can do anything to bring back Mr. Morris but sometimes just doing something small to show we care, can help the family. Has anyone any ideas what we can do to show our sympathy to Mrs. Morris?

Children can spontaneously shout out their ideas. Then one of the boys makes a suggestion.

Fred who had won the school prize for woodwork (Alex Brown)

We do not have any Memorial in the village where we can honour those who have already lost their lives. So could we make a miniature war shrine in wood to give to Mrs. Morris?

Mr. Martin

I think that is a very good idea Fred. What does everyone else think?

The children all nod their heads.

Elsie Cole who won the cookery prize

I think it is a very good idea but it will be the boys who make it. Could the girls contribute some ingredients for us to also make a cake to give to Mrs. Morris and little Ivy?

Miss Bricknell

I think that is a really good idea Elsie. So over the next 2 weeks we can work on making the shrine and bake the cake the day before we present them to Mrs. Morris.

Everyone stays on the stage but remains in silence and does not move. Stage hand brings on the wooden shrine and the Cake and hands them to Fred and

Elsie. A black muslin curtain is spread across the division of the classroom and the back of the altar.

Enter Mrs. Morris wearing black. She stands in front of the class. No words are spoken by anyone. As Fred walks towards Mrs. Morris, Mr. Randall quietly begins to play "The Ashokan Farewell". A few seconds later a figure in his soldier's uniform (Mr. Morris), slowly walks onto the stage behind the black muslin curtain on the left. He stands to attention with a salute as Fred presents the wooden shrine to Mrs. Morris. No words are spoken and Mr. Randall continues to play. Then a piper appears to the right of Mr. Morris and joins in the Ashokan farewell with Mr. Randall. As the music ends Mr. Morris and the piper disappear off the stage. Then all the children, Mr. Martin and Miss Bricknell all file out into the Lady Chapel. If possible I would like to get Michael Simmonds to play the violin as well.

Project the picture of the wooden shrine on to the screen

Mrs Morris remains standing alone on the altar turning in the direction of where her husband stood then she too walks off quietly.....

Paddy

Scene 6: The Parochial Church Council Meetings

26th May 1917-24th January 1919

Project the photo of James Buchanan Seaton onto the screen with a list of council members. Mrs. Gale, Mrs Ryman, Mrs Buswell, Miss Gale, Mrs. Fletcher and Lady O'Malley, Mr. Wheeler, Mr. Hyde, Mr. Ryman and Mr. Sellar

Narrator

1 The daily running of small villages was delegated to Church Vestry Committees who carried out the combined duties of community police, looking after the needy and responsibility for the local church. They dated back to medieval times but the in 1894 the civil part of their work was transferred to the New Parish Councils and in 1919 as a result of another new act, vestry committees became Parochial Church Councils. Cuddesdon as ever was ahead of the pack and set up a provisional Parochial Church Council in May 1917, prior to the legislation.

2 You may be forgiven for thinking that parts of the following scene are taken from the minutes of **2015** meetings but rest assured nothing really changes and the scene represents some items from the records of the agendas for 1917 -19. The meetings were held every 3 months.

The scene opens with the Rev Seaton sitting at a small table. The parish councillors walk onto the stage carrying their chairs and sit in a semi-circle around Seaton.

Rev Seaton

Good evening councillors. I know parochial finances are tight but there was no need of you to bring your own chairs.

Mr. Wheeler

In a strong Oxfordshire accent

It's always best to be prepared Vicar, as that man Baden Powell tells his scouts.

Rev Seaton With a look of disbelief on his face

We have a lot to get through this evening and homes to go to after the meeting is over. So let's do our best to stay with the agenda and make life easier for the secretary. I see that Mrs. Gale, Mrs Ryman, Mrs Buswell, Miss Gale, Mrs. Fletcher and Lady O'Malley are all present as is Mr. Wheeler, Mr. Hyde, Mr. Ryman and Mr. Sellar. The others have all sent their apologies. Mr. Wheeler (who has his arm in a sling) I didn't realise that being a member of the council was such a dangerous occupation!

The first item this evening is to discuss is finances; namely our £8 contribution to the Diocesan funds, new tools for Mr. Mortimore, repairs to the heating system and the repair of the church wall which has collapsed due to heavy rain. Suggestions please?

Mr. Sellar

We could pray for fine weather!

Rev Seaton

Your trust in the Lord is highly commendable Mr. Sellar!

Lady O Malley

Church Fetes are always a good fund raiser

Mr. Hyde

Especially the ducking stool which raise 3/6d at Garsington when the vicar was on the ducking stool.

Rev Seaton

I think we should all go away and give some thought to how we increase our finances. What else do we need to discuss?

Margaret Gale

Vicar I will continue to be responsible for the collection of books that we send to our soldiers in France every 6 months.

Rev Seaton

Thank you Margaret; you and your mother with the egg collections do a sterling job in providing some of the comforts for our men at the front and in the convalescent hospitals.

Mr. Ryman

I understand Vicar, that a friend of yours, Mr. Stuart Johnson has offered to pay for a War Shrine to be installed in the Church to recognise the sacrifice made by the men of the village and the members of the College who have lost their lives.

Rev Seaton

That is correct Mr. Ryman. What does everyone think?

Mrs. Buswell

I propose that the offer be gratefully accepted.

Rev Seaton

Thank you Mrs. Buswell; do we have someone to second the proposal?

Mrs. Gale nods her head.

Rev Seaton

Thank you Mrs. Gale and we also need to decide a rule about whose names can go on the shrine. In the years to come people may

question why some names are inscribed on the shrine and others not. Again go away and think about this.

Rev Seaton

(He coughs) This may not seem the time to raise another matter but I will anyway. Many of the other villages are preparing to build memorials to commemorate the men who lost their lives. We in the College have already started to fund raise for one for all the men who were at one time or another at the College. I have already had a quote and it is not going to be cheap and so far we have raised £2000 which is only half of the cost.

Gasps from everyone and comments made to each other!

However the village has a fine medieval preaching cross which needs repairs. I would like to suggest we restore the cross as a village War Memorial. Since it will involve a considerable amount of fund raising we should think about it and also discuss at a future meeting.

I suggest we now address the final item that of the Serbian Students Fund.

As you know in March this year the College received a number of Serbian students and teachers from the Seminary of St. Sawa in Belgrade. Some of us would like to have a small collection to help them and are we all agreed about this?

All raise their hands

The meeting is now closed and there is still time for those gentlemen who have thirst to satisfy it at the *Bat and Ball* or the *Three Compasses*.

All get up taking their chairs with them and some chat together others leave quickly

from the book, as much

Narrator

The question of restoring the Medieval Preaching Cross as a War memorial never came up again during the last few years of the Rev. Seaton's time in Cuddesdon. The onus of raising what would have been considered a vast amount of money in 1918/19 to build a College Memorial, ~~would~~ ^{must have} have an arduous task alone for James Seaton but he did succeed in that task before he left Cuddesdon to become Bishop of Wakefield. The Cross can still be seen today by all as they walk past the college.

2

It ~~also~~ ^{is nearly 100 years since then} must have seemed strange to people in Cuddesdon, many of whom had never travelled further than Oxford, to see the 18 Serbian ~~men~~ walking around the village sometimes in their traditional robes but no comment seems to survive in records about the villagers' reactions. ~~We do know that they celebrated their liturgy in the College on Sundays and Feast days. What a beautiful sound their music would have made, as any one walking past the college, would have heard~~

known
choir
music

1

The narrator quietly moves to the side by the Lady altar and enter 2 Serbian students to sing one of their parts of their liturgy. When they finish they leave the altar by the left hand side by the organ.

Narrator

It is nearly 100 years since that Parochial Church Council Meeting when James Buchanan Seaton made his suggestion that the Medieval Preaching Cross should be restored and become the village War Memorial. Tomorrow Sunday 8th November, Armistice Day, will see that suggestion become a reality. Sometimes Cuddesdon needs time to think about important issues but Seaton would be well pleased with this decision.

2

Mark Collins

Scene 7: Siegfried Sassoon

Project a photo of Siegfried Sassoon in his military uniform onto the screen

The scene opens with Siegfried Sassoon (Robert Wilson) sitting on the green hump which was used in scene 2 "The Boys". He is dressed casually in an open neck shirt. He is sitting as though looking out onto the fields. Two children walk onto the scene chatting with each other Mabel (Gala Hawley) and Fred (Alex Brown)

Mabel

She suddenly sees Siegfried and she and Fred stop talking. She turns to Siegfried.

Who are you? I have never seen you in the village before.

Siegfried Sassoon

My name is Siegfried Sassoon. I am a poet and writer and my work is famous all over the world.

Fred

So what are you doing in our play which is about Cuddesdon Villagers who lived here during the First World War?

Siegfried

I used to stay a lot during the War with a friend, Lady Ottoline Morrell, who lived in Garsington. I spent a lot of time walking in the fields around Cuddesdon village and got to know Cuddesdon very well. I was really happy here

Emma Mrs. Gales Housemaid walks onto the stage

Emma

Did I hear you mention Lady Ottoline Morrell? Were you one of those Conscientious Objectors who stayed at home and refused to fight? I know there were a few of them at Garsington Manor.

Mrs. Gale

Mrs. Gale walks onto the stage looking quite angry and turns to Siegfried.

I lost my only son in the War. He was in the Royal Flying Corps, his plane shot down by a German pilot. I mourn him every day of my life and cannot bear the idea that his sacrifice was meaningless.

Harry Lockett

Harry enters; he looks at Siegfried and says

You wandered in the fields around Cuddesdon while I slept in the cold dark wet trenches. I was one who did survive the war and returned to home to my wife but many of my friends died on Flanders Fields in those cold wet trenches. Those of us who did return home could never forget the horror of those years.

Annie Morris

Annie wanders onto the stage and joins the group?

Are you married?

Siegfried

Yes I am with a young son.

Annie Morris

I was married but we only had a few years together before my husband was killed on the battlefield, leaving our 2 year old daughter and I alone. He is buried in Flanders Fields and we have no grave here to mourn him at.

Siegfried

Let me tell you my story and you will all understand why I am here to-day.

I led an idyllic life as a young gentleman after leaving Cambridge but I was no coward and I was not a conscientious objector either. I enlisted the day War broke out and I went to France with my

regiment in 1915. I was decorated twice for bravery and was sent home 3 times to recover from my wounds and illnesses, always returning back to the Front. I was known as “Mad Jack” because of my daring actions. But things changed. I saw the needless death, destruction and suffering of men of all ranks. My brother Hammo was killed at Gallipoli. In 1917 I wrote to the *Times* a letter in which I stated that “I believe this which I entered as a war of defence and liberation has now become a war of aggression and conquest.” I was lucky not to be court martialled instead I was sent to a psychiatric hospital in Edinburgh. But after this, I again returned to the front only to be wounded again in 1918 and sent home for the last time since Armistice was declared in November that year.

One by one he turns to each of the members of the cast on stage;

- Emma I hope my story makes it clear I could never be accused of being a coward and willingly enlisted to serve my country.
- Mrs. Gale I watched my mother mourn the loss of her son and my brother as all mothers mourned their loss during the war. Their deaths were not in vain but it is complicated to explain in a few words how we know their sacrifice had meaning. If you were to stand at the foot of Golgotha along with Mary the mother of Christ you would also stand with the mother of a German soldier also killed in battle. The three of you united in grief.
- Harry I too slept in those cold dark wet trenches and suffered the loss of my friends and colleagues. None of us will ever be the same again. The poem I wrote about this is one that many people can understand what war does to men and their families and it had a great impact at the time I wrote it.
- Mrs. Morris as an officer it was my duty sometimes to write the letters to the wives of the men killed in battle. A duty which

'A chap who's served that hasn't found some change.

' And the Bishop said: 'The ways of God are strange!'

Siegfried

I have not told you Mabel and Fred the most important reason why I am here to-day in your play. Something I longed and hoped for happened. Let us go back to 11-00 o'clock on November 11th 1918. I was walking in the water meadows by the river below Cuddesdon that morning... a quiet grey day..... A jolly peal of bells was ringing from the village church and the villagers were hanging little flags out of the windows of their thatched houses. The war is ended. It is impossible to realise. But what will stay with me all of my days is the sound of those church bells ringing in the armistice.

Siegfried remains standing all the others on the stage sit on the steps. The bells begin to ring and at the end all stand up and move off stage quietly talking to each other. The bells will be rung by a team from Horspath.

Scene 8: Conclusion

Project a photo of Cuddesdon Village onto the screen

For this scene the narrator does not introduce the background but stands quietly to the right of the stage. The characters needed are Ethel May Bestley, poet reader Euan Macintosh, soloists Hannah and Cate and all the children who have taken part in the play. At the end all the cast will come onto the stage.

Ethel May Bestley

Ethel walks slowly onto the stage dressed as the old lady with the walking stick as she did at the opening of the play.

My name is Ethel May Bestley. I was 9 years old when the war started and I was 13 years old when the armistice was signed but the war was not over for me or my family. We thought it was because my beloved brother Archie was still alive although lying wounded in a hospital in France. But it wasn't over; he died some 6 weeks after Peace was declared, on December 1st from those wounds and lies buried in Flanders fields.

She hobbles off the stage and quickly becomes the child to join all the other children when they reappear on stage.

Euan Macintosh

Euan walks onto the stage and stands on the top step of the altar. Cate and Hannah join him and stand on the second step. All the children file in and sit on the bottom steps. They carry their large poppies by their sides.

Euan reads the following poem.

For the Fallen

by Laurence Binyon written in Cornwall and published in *The Times* newspaper on 21st September 1914

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
They sleep beyond England's foam.

Euan stays on the top step and Cate and Hannah sing in Flanders Fields

Hannah sings the first verse

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

Cate sings the second verse

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Both sing the final verse

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.

If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Keith Randall plays the last verse on the piano while all of the cast move onto the stage. All sing the final verse together

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

All the children

After about 30 seconds all the children sitting on the steps stand up and hold their poppies to their breast while they say

**When You Go Home, Tell Them of Us and Say, For Their Tomorrow,
We Gave Our Today.**

After a suitable gap all the cast bow to the audience.

The End