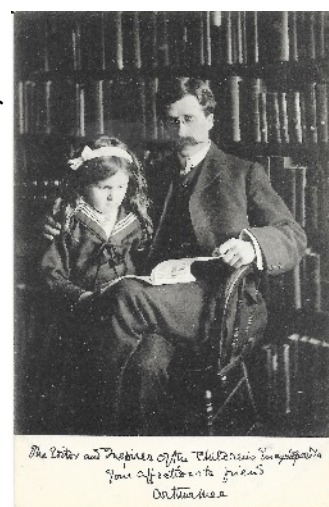


THANKFUL VILLAGES, OR, A NEW DISCOVERY

Grace Davies tracks down a different type of war memorial

It's funny how things happen. In September 2014, I was enjoying a picnic on the Mendip Hills with the Lewes Footpaths Group when someone said, out of the blue, "There's a thankful village near here". He had noticed the sign driving down the day before and it had registered because of an episode of 'Coast' he'd seen some time ago. Puzzled looks. Thankful villages, he thought, were those whose soldiers had returned home after the First World War. The group returned to their sandwiches but my collector's mind thought "This could be an interesting new project" and so that afternoon found myself in Rodney Stoke. I took lots of photos, but then it was some months before I settled at my computer, to Google for information and to Ebay for some illustrative material. I found plenty of information including lists of the villages, and started collecting postcards. The only item I found mentioning the phrase 'Thankful Villages' was a 2014 pamphlet; nothing on the postcards. I would be very interested to hear from anyone who might have taken an interest in this subject.



Arthur Mee

My first surprise was that the term 'Thankful Village' was popularised by the writer and journalist Arthur Mee, best known for his 1908 Children's Encyclopaedia. While researching for *The King's England*, his series of guides to each of England's counties, Mee was struck by the tiny proportion of villages that did not have a war memorial. In his 1936 introductory volume, 'The Enchanted Land', Mee coined the phrase Thankful Village to describe those whose residents left to serve in World War 1 and all came home again, maybe injured but alive.

Mee's initial list included 32 villages. In an October 2013 update researchers identified 53 civil parishes in England and Wales (out of over 16,000) which did not lose a member of their community in World War 1. There are no such settlements in Scotland or Ireland. In Wales, out of 1,000 villages only three have Thankful status.

All of a sudden the subject started to expand. It turned out that of those 53 villages, 13 (one in Wales) are Doubly Thankful in that they lost no service personnel during both World Wars. Remarkably, one of them also survived another miracle. In 1944, 2,000 incendiary bombs were dropped over Upper Slaughter in the Cotswolds, causing devastation, yet no-one was killed or injured. Trebly Thankful?

And then there is Thierville. France suffered far greater losses in both wars than Great Britain and between 1919 and 1925 a war memorial was erected in every village in France with one single exception, which had no dead to mourn. Thierville is a commune in the Eure

department in Haute-Normandie in Northern France. In 2008 its population was 287. This tiny community sent soldiers to World Wars One and Two, and also to the Franco-Prussian War, the first Indo-China War and the Algerian War, and all came home from all five wars. I feel a trip to Normandy coming up . . .

Back to the UK: some of the villages have had plaques, church windows, commemorative stones and the like for some time to celebrate their status and give thanks, but much of this is recent. Then in August 2013 Medwyn Parry and Dougie Bancroft rode Triumph Trophy motorbikes to every one of the 51 Thankful Villages in England, taking commemorative plaques with them, to raise money for the Royal British Legion. This prompted a general surge of interest which coincided with the centenary of the beginning of World War 1. Bradbourne, the only Thankful Village in Derbyshire, set out to find the identity of the 18 soldiers of their community mentioned by Arthur Mee. At the start of their research they knew of four, by the time the pamphlet was produced they had the names and places of birth, regiments etc of all 18. This was using local knowledge; the censuses of 1901 and 1911; birth records; Forces war records; absent voters lists and other websites. The team are still looking for more information. This research has been going on across the country.

The postcards I have are unused and therefore without postmarks. I suppose it is possible that some of the villages have a named handstamp. So if, dear reader, you ever find yourself in a Thankful Village with postcards for sale *and* a Post Office, please bear me in mind. I could tell you which villages they are in any given county.

During his Thankful Villages Run Medwyn Parry is quoted as saying “The fact that this handful of parishes lost no-one focuses your mind on the sheer scale of the carnage elsewhere”. As so often in philately, food for thought . .

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Editor's note: Wikipedia has a complete list of villages.

