

William Wallace pays tribute to his maternal grandfather, recounts stories told to him over the years and tells of the Fellowship of Reconciliation founded in 1915



My maternal grandfather, Private George Davidson, was mortally wounded during the week prior to the Armistice in November 1918. Examination of the archives suggest his date of death occurred later in November. My mother, like very many of her generation, grew up in a household with no father present. I suspect my mother was too young ever to have known her father and I never heard her speak of him. I had many chats with my granny in her last years [she died in 1965] and, while she told tales about her sister and brothers, she never mentioned, to me at least, her husband, who had been killed nearly 50 years earlier.

When I first started as a GP here in 1974, there were many old men who had fought in the Great War. In the course of my work, I cared for quite a few first war veterans and most of them had little to say about their time in the armed services. It must have been awful to fight in the trenches and see so many of their friends being killed or injured and it is not surprising that they did not want to share such memories.

One first war veteran that I visited regularly was Bob. He was a “glass half empty” old chap and he claimed that none of the pain killers that I prescribed for his sore knee were of any use to him whatsoever. One morning, he was in a particularly low mood. I asked him what was wrong. He answered mournfully: - “I wish I had died with my friends on the Somme because my football team [Celtic] were beaten last night”

Tommy was 19 when he went to fight in the Far East during the Second World War. He was captured and spent the rest of the war in a Japanese prison camp. I first got to know him as a patient over 40 years later, when he and his wife were living in Juniper Green. He consulted me on many occasions with various health issues. One of these was an alcohol problem, which he said was the result of too many drams offered to him as a piper by his fellow soldiers in the mess. He was at heart a very decent, caring man who was devoted to his wife. At nearly every consultation I had with him, he mentioned, directly or obliquely, his experience as a Japanese POW. This terrible experience had been simultaneously the high point and the low point in his life.

In the late 1970s, more than 30 years after the 2nd World War, I was called to visit a patient in Juniper Green. On entering the house, I was met by a middle-aged man who stated that his wife was distraught and inconsolable because their daughter was going to marry “a German”

At a special service in the Church of Scotland in St. Helier, to commemorate Liberation Day in Jersey [9 May 1945], the lesson was read by Sheila, a long-time resident of the island. After the service, Sheila, a sprightly 93 year-old, described vividly her evacuation from Jersey in 1940, not long before the Germans occupied the island. She recounted how she, along with many others, hurried down to the quayside, wearing the clothes she “stood up in” and carrying only a few belongings. She boarded the boat which took her to Southampton, after which she travelled to Scotland where she settled in Glasgow. She returned to Jersey after the war.

In Cambridge in 1915, Christians of all denominations agreed to found the Fellowship of Reconciliation, pledged and committed to non-violence and linking people throughout the world who took a similar stance. Their principles are set out as follows in a statement known as “The Basis”

That love as revealed and interpreted in the life and death of Jesus Christ, involves more than we have yet seen, that is the only power by which evil can be overcome and the only sufficient basis for human society.

That, in order to establish a world-order based on Love, it is incumbent upon those who believe in this principle to accept it fully, both for themselves and in relation to others and to take the risks involved in doing so in a world which does not yet accept it.

That therefore, as Christians, we are forbidden to wage war, and that our loyalty to our country, to humanity, to the Church Universal, and to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master, calls us instead to a life-service for the enthronement of Love in personal, commercial and national life.

The Power, Wisdom and Love of God stretch far beyond the limits of our present experience, and that He is ever waiting to break forth into human life in new and larger ways.

That since God manifests Himself in the world through men and women, we offer ourselves to His redemptive purpose to be used by Him in whatever way He may reveal to us,

September 2018