

# **A solemn commemoration of the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War in Lisbon**

*By Patricia Lamb*

On the evening of 4<sup>th</sup> August 2014 three Council Members of The British Historical Society of Portugal joined a small group of mainly British people at St. George's Church Lisbon for a Vigil Service to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, known to the generation who lived through it as "The Great War" or "The War to end all Wars". The service of hymns, scripture readings, war poetry and personal memories was led by the Chaplain, the Reverend Nigel Stimpson. Edward Godfrey, a long-time parishioner at St. George's, read a brief account of the situation of the British Community in Lisbon on the outbreak of the First World War and this is given here.

"The British community in Lisbon in 1914 comprised various groups of people who were closely linked by economic and family ties. The merchants, as men of business were referred to in those days, and their families were the leading members of the community. They would have been involved in the shipping and forwarding businesses, in the import of goods from Britain such as machinery and manufactures, and in the export of Portuguese raw materials and manufactures to Northern Europe. British engineers would have been prominent in the tramways, the telephone company, mines and factories. Further down the social scale would have been office managers and clerks, teachers, governesses and domestic staff.

The community was informed of events in Europe through their reading of the Portuguese daily newspapers and the London newspapers which would arrive by train two or three days after the publication date. Perhaps one can imagine the hot summer of 1914 and men, wearing the then fashionable boater hats, lace-up boots, not shoes, rushing after work to buy the latest English paper at the news-stands in down town Lisbon or Rossio railway station, then Lisbon's principal station.

No doubt their feelings were as mixed as were the feelings of their compatriots back home in Britain. Some would have been enthusiastic about the prospect of Britain going to war, whereas others would have been more circumspect as they considered the likelihood of huge loss of life if the war was not over quickly, and also the war's impact on trade; trade and its resulting benefits being their life blood.

However, once the decision to go to war was made on 4<sup>th</sup> August, the community would have rallied around to support what was perceived as a just

cause. Support was very often carefully considered, well-informed, reasoned, and only made once all other options were exhausted. In the end, people supported the war, but only because they felt it was the right thing to do in light of the circumstances.

No records are now available of the names of the Lisbon men who volunteered and joined the armed forces but the chaplain of St George's, Rev. Edward Pilcher Lewis, writes in the church's annual report for 1914 that "nearly 30 of the eligible young men, including some married ones, have offered their services to King and Country and gone out to do their best".

Of these thirty, ten gave their lives and are recorded in the bronze tablet in St. George's War Memorial Chapel. Their names are read out on every Remembrance Sunday."

The eleventh name on the bronze tablet in the War Memorial Chapel is that of Captain William Raymond Croft Murray, Grenadier Guards, who was not a local man. Details of his career and death, and those of the other men buried or commemorated at St. George's, are given in an article which Edward Godfrey has written for this Report.

For the Vigil Service on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2014 the usual lighting of the church was supplemented in the chancel by many candles but towards the end of the vigil most of the lighting was put out, leaving only the paschal candle standing alone at the back of the church as Father Nigel concluded the ceremony with a final blessing, following which all present left the church in silence and drove home through unlit streets, since Lisbon had adhered to the Europe-wide appeal for an hour of darkness leading up to 11.00 pm, the hour at which Great Britain entered the war.

During the day reports had been shown on TV of commemorations in other parts of Europe, with the presence of the Prince of Wales in Glasgow, the Duchess of Cornwall at Westminster Abbey, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in Belgium with the King and Queen of the Belgians, Prince Harry at Folkestone and later in France. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II attended a private memorial service at the church on the Balmoral estate.

#### **NOTES:**

Edward Godfrey acknowledges his indebtedness to "A Kingdom United" by Dr. Catriona Pennell for background information on which he based this account given at the commemoration service, and he would like to add to the present publication the following notes taken from her book:

"Traditional views of public opinion towards the First World War are over simplified and inadequate. A series of retrospective myths have built up that

suggest ordinary British and Irish people backed the war because they were deluded, brainwashed and naïvely duped into supporting the conflict. My research shows that this was simply not the case.”

Whilst enthusiastic crowds certainly existed in August 1914, the new research suggests that this didn't reflect the whole picture. “Other gatherings around late July and early August opposed the war,” Dr Pennell explains, “and many more people were shocked and disbelieving that such an event could happen.”

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