

The Great War 1914-18

‘War Horses’

The adaptation of **Michael Morpurgo’s** novel ‘**War Horse**’ for stage and film audiences is well documented. Set at the time of the Great War, the story focuses on the young Albert Narracott’s beloved horse ‘Joey’ which was sold to the Cavalry and shipped to France.

With this in mind, and in commemoration of the centenary of the Great War, the village of Tattenhall has created a lasting legacy in tribute to the significant role of horses in this conflict. In the first year of the war, the countryside was emptied of many of its horses. Local farming communities saw their finest and most beloved horses requisitioned by the government.

Funded by CWaC and designed by local Blacksmith, Andrew Smith, the Tattenhall ‘War Horse’ sculpture is located at Millfield (adjacent to the War Memorial).

Context ...

At the outbreak of war on 4 August 1914 the British Army owned only 25,000 horses, a number which was wholly inadequate. Horses were vital to the war effort in the movement of heavy guns, transporting weapons and supplies, carrying the wounded and the dying to Field Hospitals and, in the early days of the conflict, to mount cavalry charges.



Horses burdened with shells

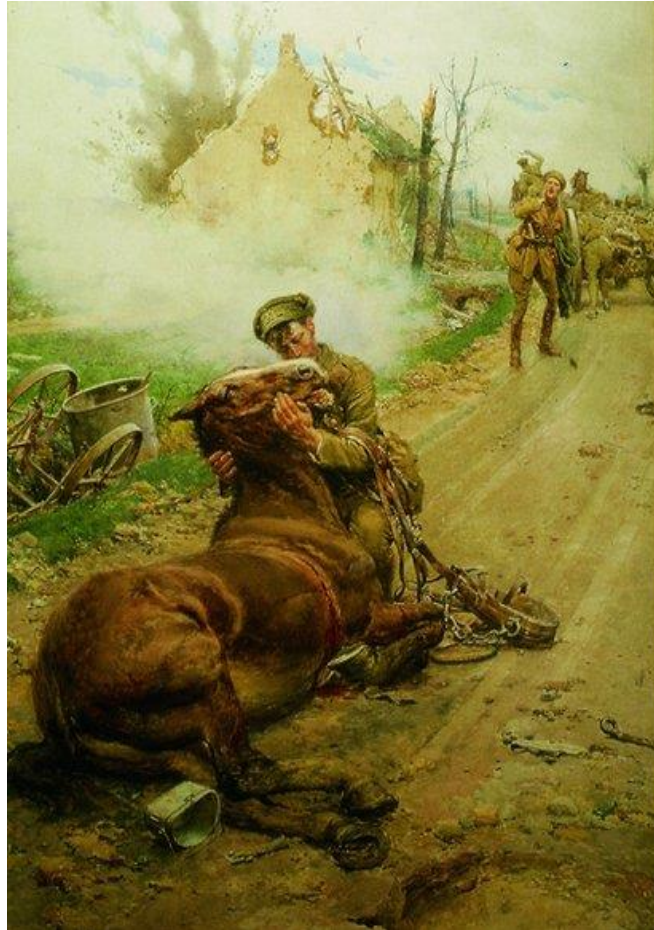
The supply of horses (and mules for their stamina and endurance) needed to be constantly replenished. The War Office was tasked with sourcing some 500,000 horses to be transported across the Atlantic from the United States. Transportation was difficult and dangerous with significant losses at sea when vessels came under attack from enemy fire and were sunk. In 1915 alone, some 200,000 horses were shipped to Britain from the United States.



Conditions were severe for horses at the front. They fell prey to wounds from artillery fire and died from gas attacks. Their presence may have increased the morale of the troops, but horses suffered from mange (a skin disorder), ill-fitting shoes, lack of clean food and water and from a lack of dry sleeping conditions.



The fate that befell most of the horses was not lost on the British public who petitioned the government to improve animal welfare during the conflict. The **RSPCA** and the **Royal Army Veterinary Corps** were both active in treating injured horses and in trying to prevent unnecessary suffering. **The Blue Cross** supplied horse hospitals, ambulances and vital veterinary supplies to the front lines.



*'Goodbye Old Man' – a British soldier saying farewell to his dying horse.
This painting was commissioned in 1916 to raise money for 'The Blue Cross Fund'*

At local level, Chester enthusiastically supported a '**Flag Day for Wounded Horses**'. So successful was the event that several ladies from the Army Remount Depot in Chester actually sold out of one set of flags before noon.

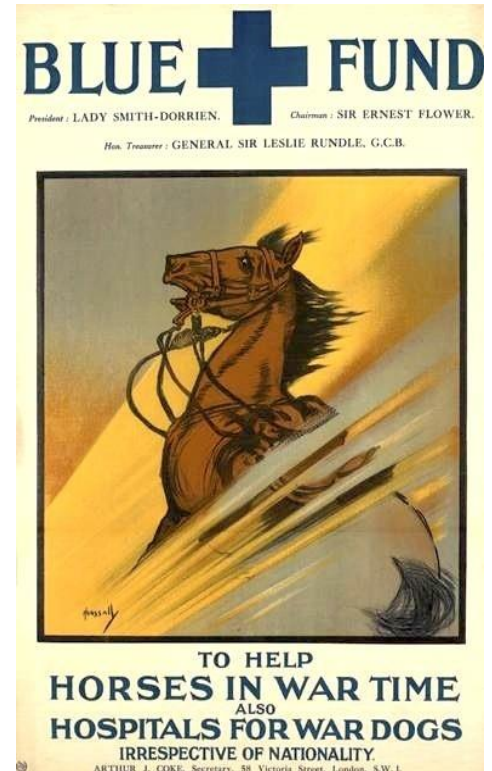
It was reported in '**The Chester Chronicle, Saturday, 20 October 1917**' that the proceeds of '**Flag Day**' for the **RSPCA's** good work in alleviating the sufferings of sick and wounded horses at the Front, amounted to approximately £300 (*with historical conversions this would amount to approximately £11,250 today*).

'The Blue Cross' was instrumental in creating posters such as that shown to the right. The emotional imagery used in the posters highlighted the plight of the horse (and other animals) in warfare.

Badges, postcards, bookmarks, stamps and other items were also created not only to heighten public awareness but to raise much needed financial support. It is estimated that the poster campaign alone was successful in generating donations in excess of £170,000 (*with historical conversions this would amount to approximately £6.3m today*).

Estimates suggest that some 225,856 horses drafted into the British Army lost their lives and that by 1917 alone, there were 869,931 horses in active service.

At the end of the war, surviving horses were often sold as meat to Belgian butchers (unfit for any other purpose).



'Saving the Guns'

Particular thanks to Lynn Holmes, a former Tattenhall resident, who has been instrumental in providing many of her original postcards for use in the 'Tattenhall Remembers' Exhibition.

This flyer was produced by Terri Hull & Yvonne Keeping for the Tattenhall Local History Website.

