VETERANS

In the 1920s, many houses in Dorney were occupied by men who had served in the armed forces during the First World War. These were those who had survived that brutal conflict, though not necessarily unscathed. Similarly, after the Second World War, in many households there were former servicemen and women. It would have been commonplace, not an exception, for your neighbour to have been involved in some way. In this month of remembrance, let's take a look at some of these.

The first owner of our house in Dorney Reach, in July 1924, was Cecil Notley, a young man working in advertising. As an eighteen-year-old straight from school, he had joined the Royal Flying Corps in September 1917. He became a fighter pilot, flying low level ground attack missions in support of British troops fighting on the Western Front. He appears to have undertaken this dangerous activity unscathed and resumed his previous occupation when he was demobilised in 1919. I am not sure that he ever actually lived in the house, as he worked in London, and a few months before marrying he had sold it on.

Gordon Richard Smith purchased the house in March 1925. He had married the previous year; the young couple did not move in straight away but by 1930 they were in Dorney Reach with their young son.

Gordon came from Whitehaven. In 1916, aged 18, he was an apprentice mining engineer when he joined the army. By May 1917 he was a 2nd lieutenant in the West Riding Regiment and was sent to fight in France, taking part in several battles – Arras, Cambrai, Lys, Playe. He was attached to the 10th Trench Mortar Battery, operating light mortar guns. On 18 July 1918, he was involved in providing artillery cover for a raid to take Pacaut Wood and capture a German garrison there. The mission was successful but a shell in a gun under Gordon's command exploded prematurely, leaving him severely wounded. He subsequently received the Military Cross for maintaining the artillery barrage despite his injuries.

Gordon's injuries were life changing. Invalided home to England, his other wounds healed but he lost the sight in both eyes and suffered from frequent headaches. He was judged to be 100% disabled as a result and was awarded a small army pension. Unable to pursue his previously chosen career, he retrained as a chartered

masseur. Gordon and his family left Dorney Reach around 1936, but he continued to practice as a masseur and was part of the Massage Corps in the Second World War.

The Smiths were followed by Hamish Macdonell, a retired banker, with his wife and teenaged daughter. In September 1939, Hamish was recorded as a lieutenant in the Royal Armoured Corps, which may have been his rank during the First World War. His wife and his daughter – who was unable to return to her school in France – had both volunteered as telephonists for the ARP (Air Raid Precautions) in the current conflict.

"In France many false orders—such as 'Retire' and 'Cease Fire'—were circulated with disastrous effects. Home guards can help to trace such cunning messages and pin them down to the senders."

A few years later, the house was purchased by Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Barry Costin-Nian, although I don't think he ever lived in it. He was Canadian by birth, educated at Sandhurst and then joined the Canadian army. In 1915 he transferred to the West Yorkshire Regiment and was sent to France. As a captain, he was awarded the Military Cross in January 1916 for distinguished service in the field. By 1918, he was attached to the Machine Gun Corps and promoted to acting major. After the war Charles continued his military career, including spells in Australia and Egypt with the Royal Tank Corps, and reached lieutenant-colonel in 1933. He had retired in 1937 but was recalled in June 1939 shortly before war broke out again, being finally released in 1943 having reached the age of 55. Between 1940 and 1944, he wrote regularly as military correspondent for the Daily Express and other newspapers, commenting on the progress of the war and providing tactical guidance for Home Guard volunteers, of which he was one. Advice covered subjects such as how to shoot down a dive bomber with a rifle and how to fortify your village and ambush enemy tanks with trip wires in the event of invasion.

In 1948 the house was sold again, to Herbert Buckmaster. He had been too young to take part in the First World War, and during the second he was engaged in other war work as technical director and works manager of McMichael Radio Ltd in Slough. The company spent the war manufacturing equipment for the armed forces,

producing bomb racks, suppressors, and even secret equipment for resistance movements. They also played a crucial role in the development of radar technology, producing components for early radar systems. Herbert was awarded the MBE in 1945 for his contribution to the war effort. In 1940, when the threat of a German invasion felt all too real, Herbert issued instructions to key personnel in the factory, concerning the disposal or destruction of equipment, parts and machinery if the worst happened. He was also a lieutenant in the Home Guard and led the company's own Home Guard platoon, equipped with rifles expropriated from the shooting section of the company's Sports and Social Club. Post-war the company resumed production of civilian radio and television sets, and Herbert became managing director in 1951.

Wartime service was still a feature of the next family to move into the house, in 1955. Peter Cane joined the RAF as a nineteen-year-old in 1933 and became a pilot officer a year later. Posted to Egypt in 1937, he was promoted to flight lieutenant and then in 1941 to temporary squadron leader. That same year he left the RAF and joined BOAC as a captain. The airline was unable to undertake normal commercial services during the war and instead transported personnel and supplies for the

Government. Peter took part in the operation to maintain supplies in the Western Desert, where BOAC made 270 flights in the first half of 1943, and he received the King's commendation for this in June 1943. After the war, he remained with the commercial airline and was heavily involved in the development and testing of new airliners, the Comet and later the Vickers VC10. He was described as one of BOAC's most experienced pilots in 1959 when he flew the Duke of Edinburgh from Heathrow to Delhi.

These people were all associated with just one house, and many other houses in Dorney would have similar stories to tell. This November, I will remember not only those who made the ultimate sacrifice but also the many ordinary people who came forward to help protect our country in time of war.

Virginia Silvester