

South Gloucestershire remembers WW1



# Those who lived to tell the tale

*Into my heart an air that kills,  
From yon far country blows:  
What are those blue remembered hills,  
What spires what farms are those?  
I see it shining plain,  
The happy highways,  
Where I went,  
and cannot come again.*

A. E. Housman

**One hundred years ago**, South Gloucestershire was a rural backwater of beautiful rolling countryside, market towns and villages, with some small scale industry in the south.

The First World War changed South Gloucestershire and our society. By looking into the well documented lives of the few, we can gain an insight into the many.

The school master and the shopkeepers, valiantly did their bit for the war effort at home. One girl went to great lengths to bring back her injured man. Another girl found love that took her to the other side of the world.

Some people suffered huge loss but went on to realise their dreams. After the war, many took advantage of opportunities that were available because of their war time experiences.

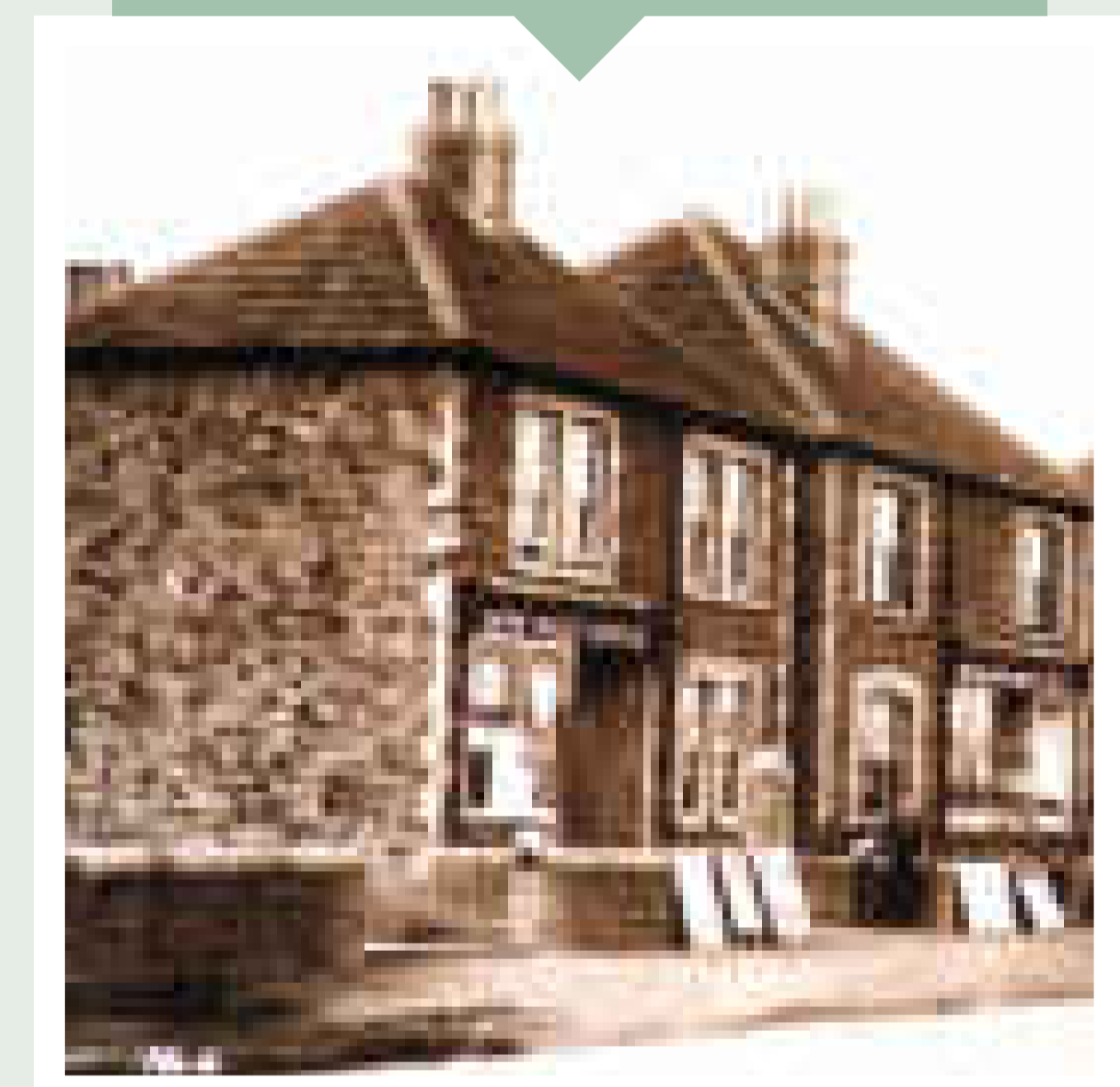
Everyone had ghosts to live with. Some were so damaged they were unable to live a normal life again. But life does go on. These stories represent the local people who lived to tell the tale. They are the survivors.

**Village shopkeepers**  
Gazette Series - Murray Dowding,  
Yate Heritage Centre

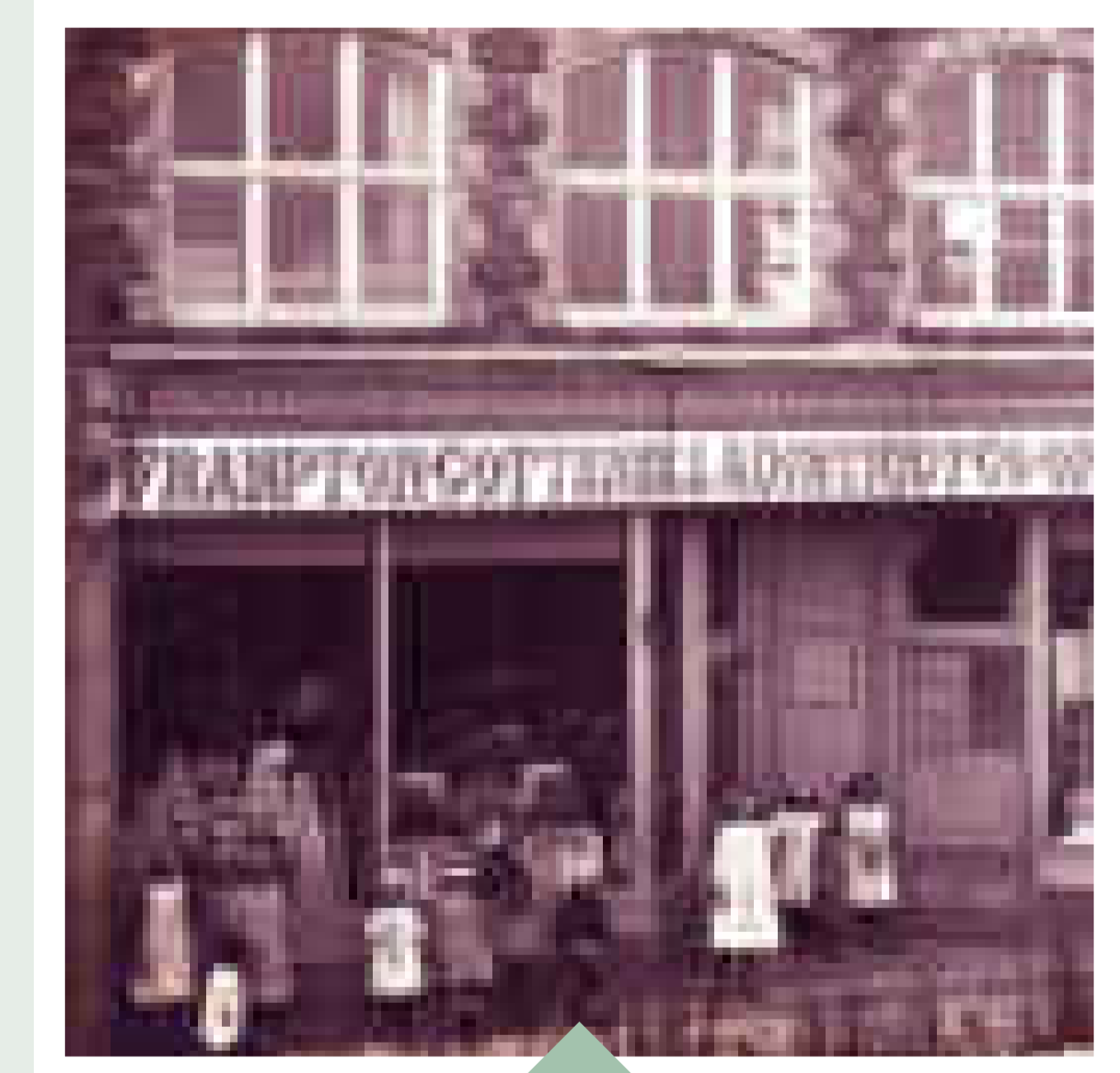
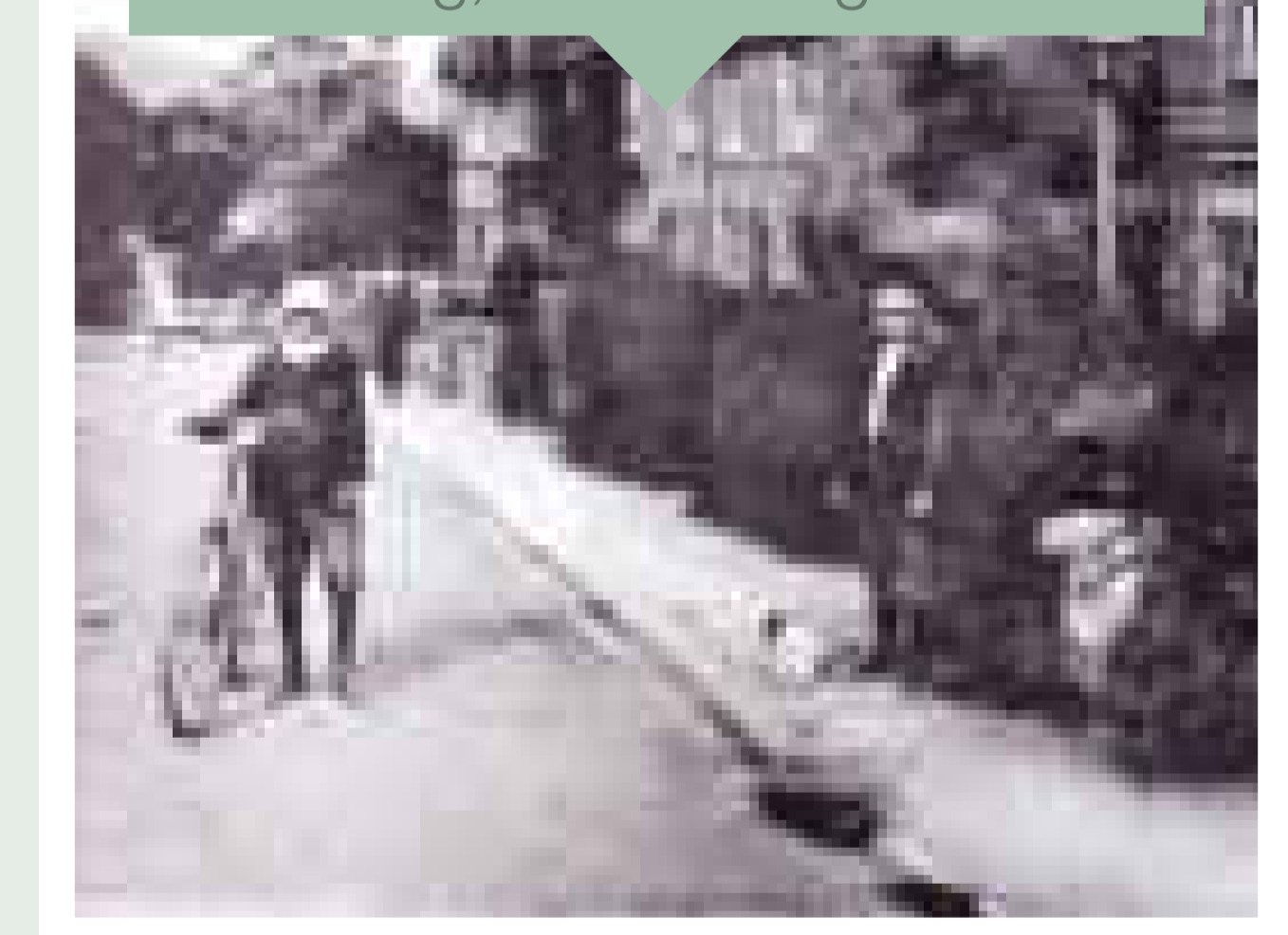


**A village church**  
Gazette Series - Murray Dowding,  
Yate Heritage Centre

**A local post office**  
Gazette Series - Murray  
Dowding, Yate Heritage Centre



**Rural businesses**  
Gazette Series - Murray  
Dowding, Yate Heritage Centre



**Shops that sold just about everything they could**  
Gazette Series - Murray  
Dowding, Yate Heritage Centre

**Rural South Gloucestershire**  
Gazette Series - Murray Dowding,  
Yate Heritage Centre



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# Other lives

**One here will constant be,  
Come wind come weather.**

John Bunyan

**May Huggins** fell in love with an American serviceman Ned Steel, stationed in Yate in 1915. They exchanged post cards when he was posted to France. At the end of the war, May's aging parents refused consent for May to marry Ned and go to America. Ned continued to send her postcards right up until he died in 1952 though he married another. Dutiful May died in 1997 aged 96 having never married.



Postcard of Yate  
Gazette Series:  
Murray Dowding: Yate Heritage



American Soldiers in Yate  
Gazette Series:  
Murray Dowding: Yate Heritage

Advertisement T EXELL  
Grocer & provision merchant  
Thornbury Museum



Gunner **Ernest Exell**, son of grocer Thomas Exell enlisted in 1915. In 1916 Thomas applied for Ernest to be exempted from military service. By 1917 he was discharged *"no longer physically fit for service"*.

The 1916 *Bristol Mercury* report, gives us an idea of Ernest's state of mind. He was fined 10s for not having lights on his cart. Thomas spoke, apologising for Ernest: *"he had highly strung nerves and he had had work to get him to attend Court at all."*

Thomas's will in 1930 left £2000 in trust for Ernest who was in the Gloucester Mental Hospital. Ernest died there in 1958.

45 High Street Thornbury, home of the Exell family  
Thornbury Museum

High Street east side  
Thornbury Museum



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# Little Sodbury

## A Thankful Village

*No Foes shall stay his might,  
Though he with Giants fight:  
He will make good his right,  
To be a pilgrim.*

John Bunyan



Discharge Certificate  
Margaret Faithfull of Horton  
(Granddaughter)



Corsham Convalescence Hospital with Bill in the  
front row second one along with a stiff right leg  
Margaret Faithfull of Horton (Granddaughter)



Wedding of Mary and Bill Leach in 1915  
Margaret Faithfull of Horton (Granddaughter)



Mary and Bill  
Leach in the 1940's  
when living at  
Stephens Cottage  
in Horton with  
their family  
Margaret Faithfull  
of Horton  
(Granddaughter)



Gloucesters in camp. Bill is the first  
Soldier in the back row  
Margaret Faithfull of Horton (Granddaughter)

*Six men went to war:  
Six men came back alive.*

**Charles Grivell**

*the youngest to go to war at  
14 years old in 1914. Son  
of a farm labourer at Ball's  
Cottage.*

**William (Bill) Leach**

*went to war at 23. Married  
to Mary Ethel. Lived in  
Winchcombe Cottage.*

**Ernest Warren**

*went to war at 29.  
Ambulance driver for Little  
Sodbury Manor Hospital.  
Ernest lived at The Lodge  
with his wife and 2 children.*

**William Gowen**

*went to war at 31. Railway  
labourer. Lived with his  
wife and young twins.*

**John Weare**

*went to war at 31. Groom at  
The Great House. Went with  
his employer to war.*

**Leonard Taylor**

*went to war at 38. Farmer  
and Secretary to the Beaufort  
Hunt. Lived at The Great  
House with his wife, young  
son and 5 servants.*

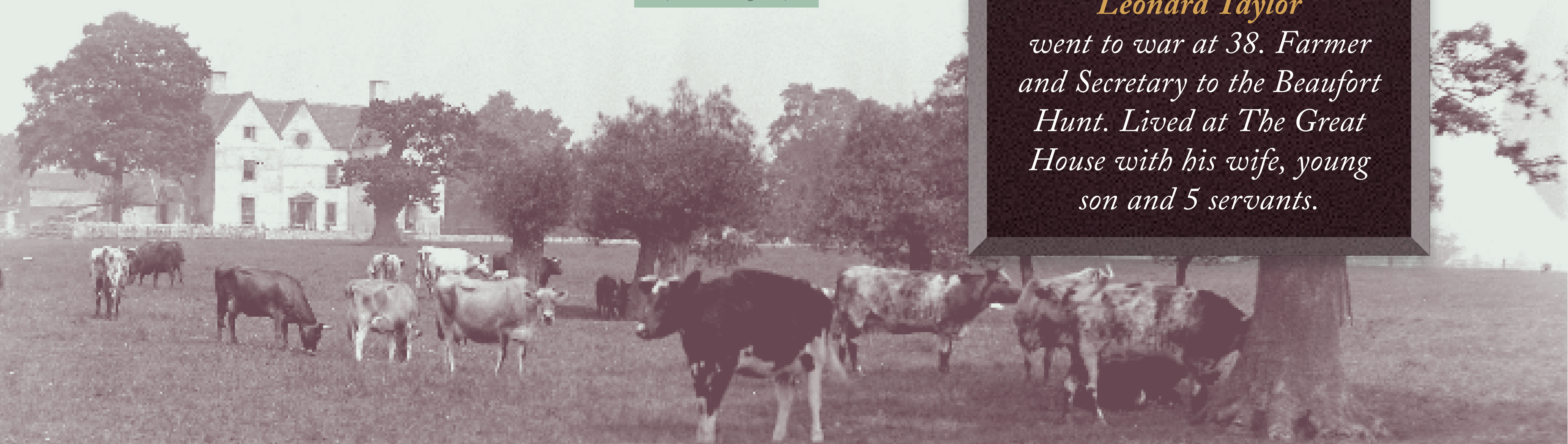
### Have you news of my man Bill?

Mary Leach of Winchcombe Cottage in Little Sodbury received a telegram. Her husband, Bill, a soldier, was lying in a field hospital in France having had five operations. Mistrustful of his recovery over there, Mary decided to 'fetch him back'. Somehow she went to Calais and brought Bill home to Corsham Hospital. The surgeons advised that Bill should lose his leg but Mary and Bill would not hear of this. Remarkably Bill survived, his leg was always stiff. Bill died in 1971. Mary died in 1978.



Padded silk  
handkerchief case  
brought back from  
France by Mary  
when she went to  
fetch Bill back  
Margaret Faithfull  
of Horton  
(Granddaughter)

The Great House, Little Sodbury, shows how rural  
the local landscape was one hundred years ago  
Gazette Series: Murray Dowling: Yate Heritage



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# Nation of shop keepers

*I love to rise on a summer morn,  
when the birds sing in every tree:  
when the distant huntsman winds his horn,  
and the skylarks sings with me.*

William Blake



Frank Symes in  
Volunteer Battalion  
Uniform  
Thornbury Museum

**Frank Symes** was a saddler and harness maker who ran a thriving shop. At 52, Frank was too old to enlist so he joined the local Volunteer Battalion. Records show that his business serviced 100 farmers and 300 horses.

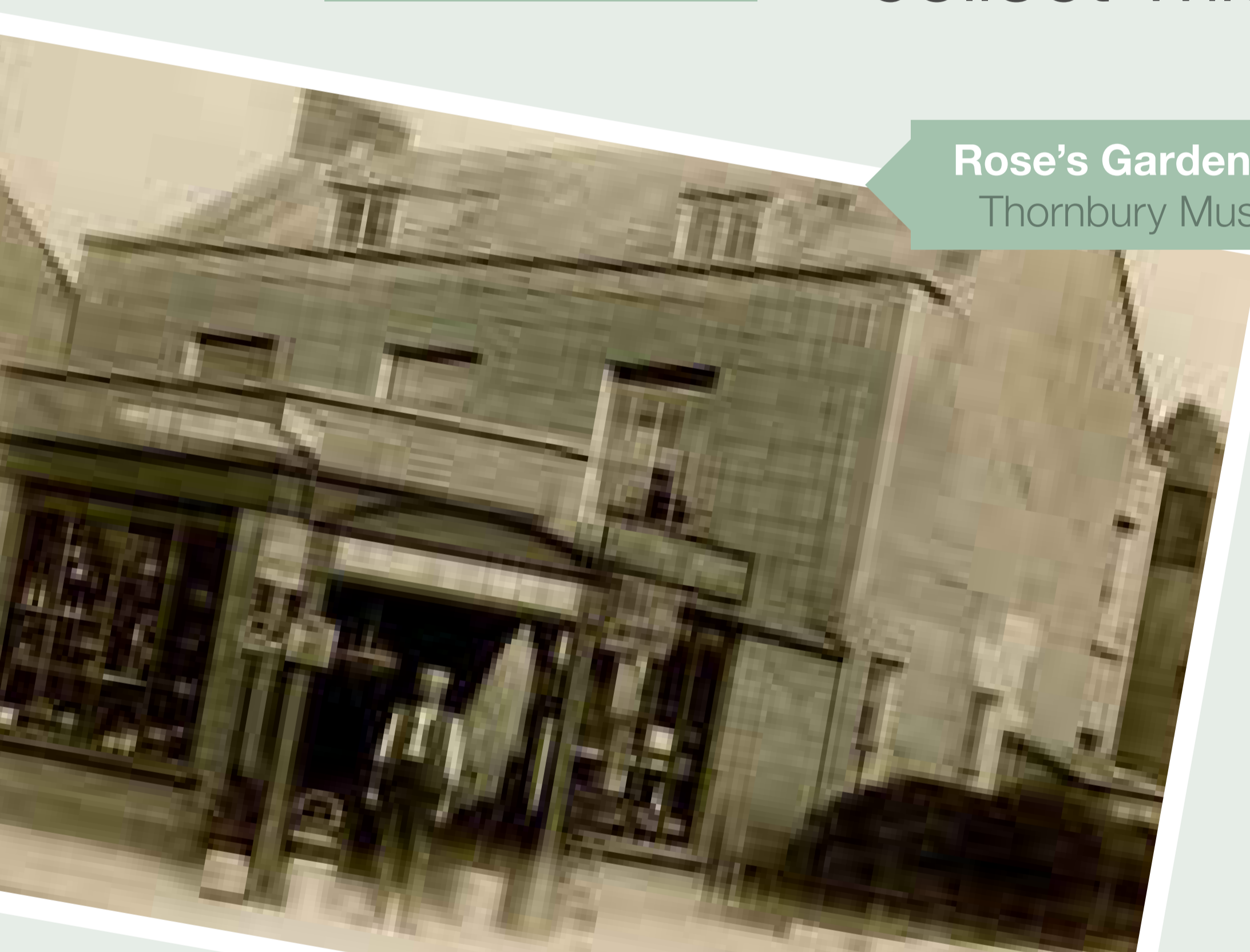
An advertisement in 1916 in the local paper says that 'top prices would be paid for apples, blackberries, mushrooms and walnuts' to go on sale in his shop. Part of the war effort was to encourage civilians to collect wild produce to help feed the nation.



Frank Symes outside shop  
with cart  
Thornbury Museum



Frank Symes  
Thornbury Museum



Rose's Garden shop  
Thornbury Museum

**Rose Symes** ran the garden shop. Her father, Charles Symes, brother of Frank, was a nursery and seedsman. The shop also sold flowers. Rose apparently lost her fiancé in the war and, like so many of her generation, never married. Rose inherited the family business and ran it for much of her life. She died in 1970 aged 82.



Frank Symes –  
Saddler and harness maker  
Thornbury Museum



Rose taking part in  
agricultural shows  
Thornbury Museum

The Plain, Thornbury where Rose's garden shop  
was located  
Thornbury Museum



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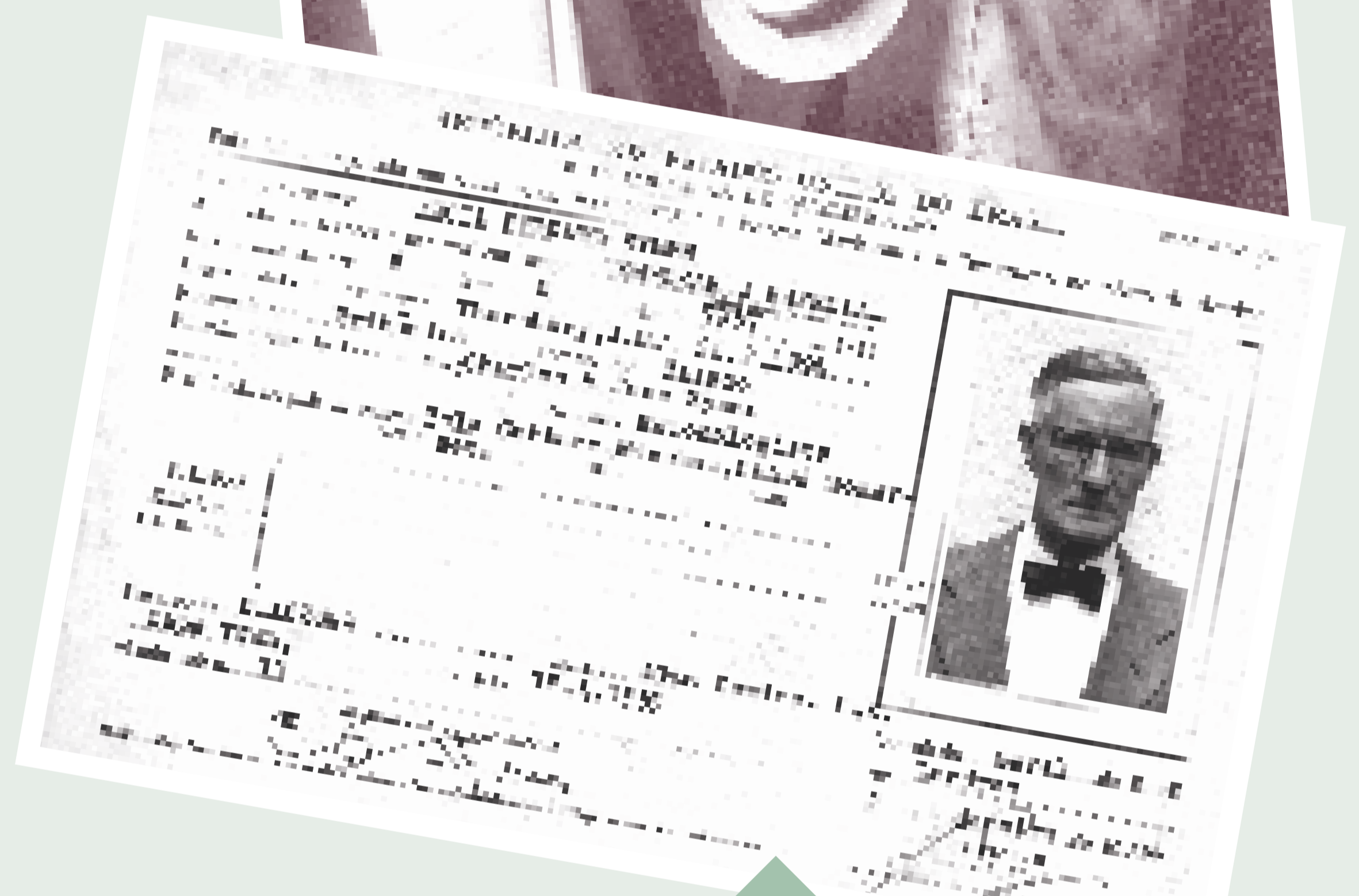
# Extraordinary Destinies

*If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch*  
Rudyard Kipling

**Cecil Bernard Symes** was an Assistant Master at an elementary school before the war. He had a distinguished service record with the Royal Medical Corps. Cecil became an expert on malaria carrying mosquitoes before being discharged with wounds in 1919.

Cecil went on to study entomology at the Royal College of Science. He then worked for the Colonial Office worldwide as a specialist creating the Entomological Section of The Medical Research Labs. A new species of mosquito is actually named 'Anopheles Symesi', after him.

Cecil Bernard, known as 'Nard', with Ellen and Annie two of his sisters. They were part of a large family living at The Georgian House, Thornbury  
Thornbury Museum



Nard's' Brazil Visa shows him in later life. On leave he often returned to his beloved Thornbury  
Thornbury Museum



Mabel Hedditch served on the Portland Town Council in 1949-64 and was mayor 1956-60. In 1954 she was made a justice of the peace. Mabel died in 1966 aged 69  
Frenchay Museum Archives



Wedding of Mabel and Norman Hedditch an Australian soldier. They met when he was working on a local farm whilst waiting for a passage home. They were married in Melbourne, Australia in 1921 and had seven children  
Frenchay Museum Archives



**Mabel Emily Flux**, of Walton Farm, Hambrook was a land girl. She lost two brothers and two cousins during the war. Mabel emigrated with her Australian sweetheart to a new life and became a pillar of local government. Awarded the OBE in 1960, she was described as 'one who knows and loves the land, the people who live on it and the things that grow in it'.

The Hedditch Homestead at Cape Bridgewater Australia  
Frenchay Museum Archives



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# 'Gaffer' Dennis and his wife

*And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.*

Wordsworth

**Samuel Dennis** was a much loved and respected schoolmaster. From 1917, Samuel ran the National and Council schools for the duration of the war. Mabel, his wife, was also a teacher.

The school was very busy keeping up with government demands. The War Office wished school children to pick wild blackberries. They were used for making jam for the servicemen. In October 1917 over 41 cwt. was sent. The Ministry of Munitions also wanted horse chestnuts and the children collected 2 tons. Three sacks of waste paper were also sent to E A Chamberlain Ltd. Nailsworth, weighing 2 cwt.

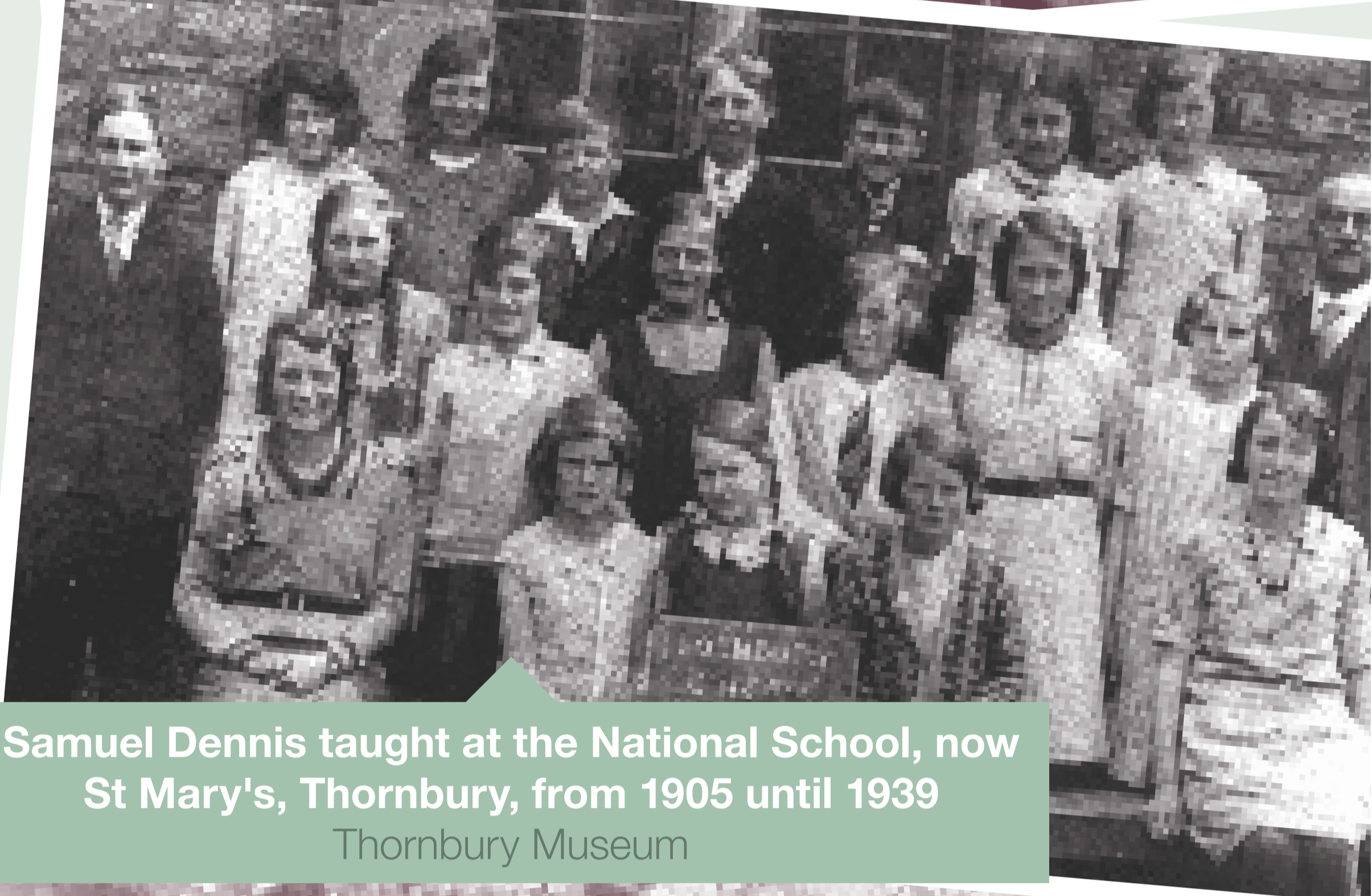
Holidays were extended to reduce fuel bills. Children were allowed time off for milking or harvest. School was frequently closed due to illnesses. Refugee children from Belgium joined the school.

A pillar of the local community, after retirement, Samuel continued as school manager until his death in 1965 aged 91.

Samuel and Mabel Dennis were together for over 60 years  
Thornbury Museum



Samuel Dennis taught at the National School, now St Mary's, Thornbury, from 1905 until 1939  
Thornbury Museum

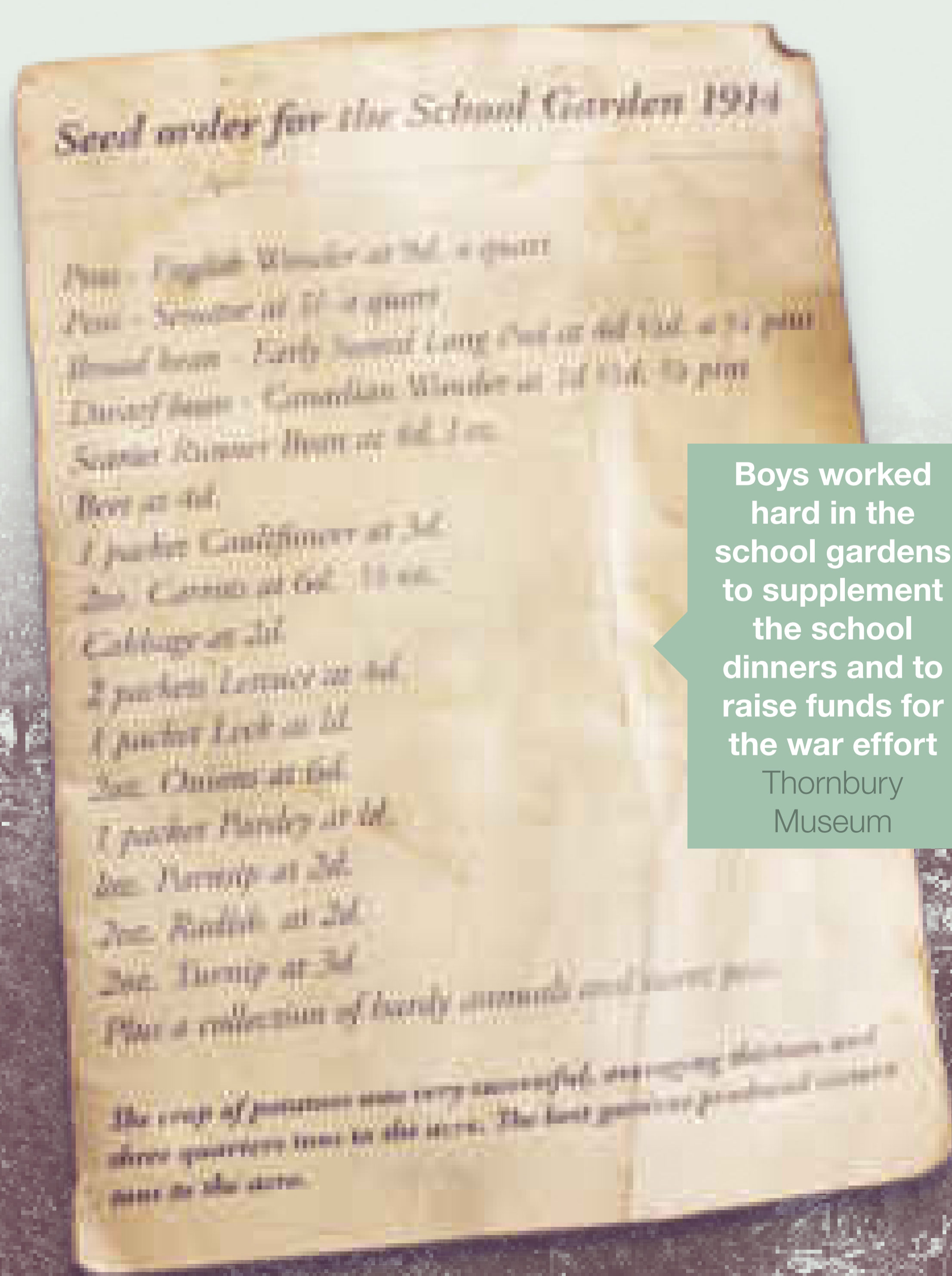


Samuel Dennis passed on his passion for horticulture to his pupils  
Thornbury Museum



Gardens were the Gaffer's passion.  
Gazette Series: Murray Dowding: Yate Heritage

Belgian refugees  
Gazette Series: Murray Dowding: Yate Heritage



Boys worked hard in the school gardens to supplement the school dinners and to raise funds for the war effort  
Thornbury Museum

