

GEM FROM THE ARCHIVE

Archivists from around the country reveal how their favourite record could help your research

The Bromsgrovian, 1881-2016

Nikki Thorpe of Bromsgrove School Archives tells **Liz Palmer** about the wealth of information to be found in school magazines



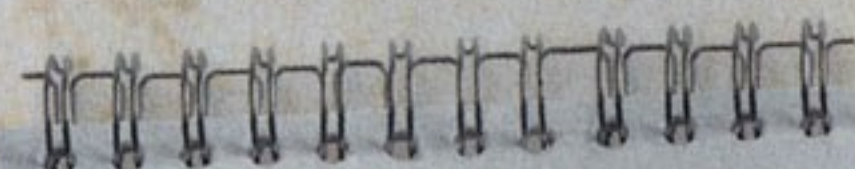
NIKKI THORPE is the school archivist at Bromsgrove School

Diving into our family histories, we often try to discover which schools our ancestors attended. Many schools have their own archives, while for others you may find records deposited in county record offices or city archives. Among the collections, you find magazines which give us insight into school life and if you're really lucky you may find mentions of your ancestor or even articles written by them.

This month, Nikki Thorpe, archivist at Bromsgrove School in Worcestershire, tells us about why she loves its historic collection of school magazines.

Which document have you chosen?

I have chosen *The Bromsgrovian*,



Fact file

More details of Bromsgrove School Archives can be seen on the school website here: www.bromsgrove-school.co.uk/archives.aspx

Documents can be viewed by appointment.

Enquiries should be sent to the archivist nthorpe@bromsgrove-school.co.uk

Bromsgrove's school magazine, which was published termly from November 1881 and has continued for 135 years. The first issue lays out clearly the principles for the magazine: to record school news, print correspondence on "legitimate school topics", publish receipts and expenditure of games and other school funds, "record the doings of old boys", publish at least one literary contribution and

"endeavour to make the magazine the genuine outcome of school-boy brains". It was used as a means of connecting old boys, many of whom were living abroad, with the school and as a place for "present members [to give expression] to their wants and feelings".

What does it reveal about the lives of our ancestors?

Over the course of 135 years, the school magazines reveal a great deal about everyday life at Bromsgrove School and how that changed from clubs and interests, to expectations of behaviour and dress, and styles of communication and marketing. Many individuals are mentioned as sports team members, house monitors,

drama and music performers, or authors of articles about the expedition club or leading lights in the debating society.

However, although mentions and sometimes photographs of individuals will be gold to family researchers, it's the social history that forms the backdrop to the magazines. It's endlessly fascinating and gives a real sense of what life in a school such as

obituaries and commemorative listings of old boys who had died in the First World War, boys whose photos appeared in issues just a year or two earlier.

The Valet section detailing the destinations of pupils tells us the career options of the time for boys and later girls who attended, and the letters sent to the school from old boys in far-flung parts of the world tell a

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Bromsgrove must have been like at the time the magazine was printed. The topics for the debating society, for example, give us much insight into what was of current concern, reveal how linked to the outside world school children were and are, and how many of our current worries were also cause for concern a hundred years ago: reform of the House of Lords, defence budget, censorship of the press, and so on.

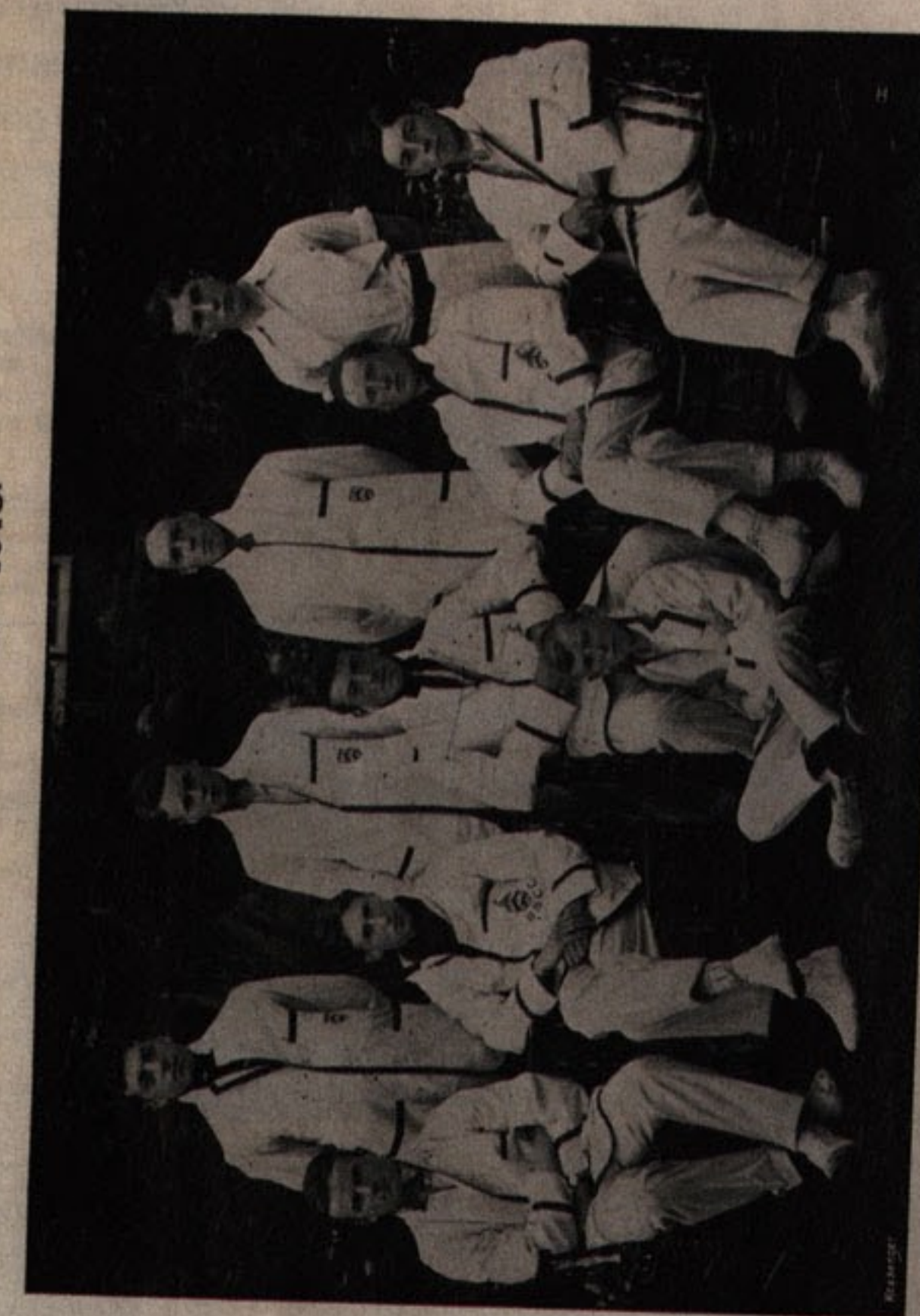
We are able to view key moments of national and international significance through a personal lens. The magazines are particularly poignant in 1914-18, where issues are peppered with

story not just of experiences in different countries, but of how it was to live that life coming from that social background.

Glimpses of student voices come into the magazine and there are running jokes such as the noticeboard that is forever without a light and, "To the editors, dear sirs, - I am so cold! Yours, The Library!" The structure remains more or less the same over the years, with school news, detailed accounts of sports matches, societies, examples of student work, commemoration speeches, and news from the houses.

Later issues, of course, have many more photos of school life and activities, and the flavour

FIRST XI - 1915.



H. F. Alexandre, W. A. C. Haines, B. C. B. Jagger, H. G. Fowler, A. G. Pienley, P. D. Leary, D. Magrath, J. D. White, G. M. Key, J. P. Ham, Absent - J. S. Head (Captain) and N. T. King.

of contemporary life is visual rather than the vivid written accounts of earlier issues. Each issue used the medium of its time to convey its messages and meaning.

Why did you choose this document?

I can honestly say that it is the record in the school archive that I turn to the most frequently to answer the many enquiries from family historians, relatives of Old Bromsgrovians, colleagues looking for information about a sporting record, or a story for an assembly or a special event.

For family historians and researchers, it is very rich source of social history and gives an

insight into school life that you would be unlikely to find as a first-hand account from many sources. Reading an issue for a particular year gives a flavour of that particular time, be it an immersion in 1970s fashion and the pre-occupation with the arrival of computers in school or a sober read during the First World War years, where cricket matches and weather reports are a backdrop for a palpable sadness and bewilderment at what is happening to the school community and out in the wider world beyond.

The whole set of magazines at Bromsgrove School is currently being digitised with a searchable online catalogue so that

researchers will have access to this information. This will give opportunity for genealogists to track down ancestors but also researchers to find unpublished references to some of the more famous Old Bromsgrovians such as Skelton, chief engineer on Scott's Antarctic expedition, or AE and Laurence Housman, poet and playwright respectively.

Tell us more about your collections

Bromsgrove School Archive covers over 300 years of school history with a wide range of material from administrative and financial records, house and school registers, the foundation charter from 1693

and an extensive collection of photo albums documenting the sporting and cultural history of the school.

Its treasures include an original soldier's diary from the First World War "found in France" and presented by an old boy who went on to lose his own life just before the end of that war, and a collection of AE Housman material, including typescripts, first editions and related papers.

More recently, digitisation of photographs loaned from alumni and video recordings of the wonderful accounts of life at the school by previous students and staff contribute to this growing and living archive. ■

THE BROMSGROVIAN.

NOVEMBER, 1915.

EDITORIAL

It was a hot day, very hot, in the sun, the kind of day on which you can see the heat quivering over the dusty roads and the only sound that disturbs the stifling quiet is a motor and even that seems hot and tired.

Therefore, being wise, we retired to the most secluded retreat to be found, namely, the school house. There we sat—it was pleasantly cool and quiet compared with that old-world noise of traffic and glare outside—scenes that roomed around us, and thought of the many ancient volumes of our predecessors of the "Bromsgrovian," and read in it the writings of daily repasts of the school. And we wondered what names that never again will look on the same things as we School House, nor, alas! upon the imagined them sitting in the same things as we School House, nor, alas! upon the before the big fireplaces, just as men were like, whether they be leaving their footsteps deeply impressed on the same thoughts. And some there be which have no memorial, which are as though they had never been.

And then we passed on in our thoughts to the present, and then to the future: that perhaps in the years to come some future Bromsgrovian would come on some far distant summer's day to seek peace as we had, and sit in the self-same corner and think the same things, of us; nay, might even read these very words, and wonder what we were like, we who lived here at the time of the Great War; and feel a certain pride in all those who had fought in it, and in those whose names they saw in the pages of the volume set about with a deep black line; and from that same pride might gain resolution to carry and hand on more worthily the torch which these had kept burning bright and passed on unscathed.

And it seemed to us that this thought was a good text, as it were, in which to begin a new school year—nay, one to remember always—a year in which courage, endurance, and self-sacrifice will be demanded more than ever in the past. And so here we have set it down, putting forward as an excuse for its seriousness the seriousness of the times.

Here, then, will we begin the story, only adding thus much to that which hath been said, that it is a foolish thing to make a long prologue and to be short in the story itself."