

## **Bury Choral Society concert, 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2018 – *The Great War: Armistice***

### **Leonie Ashworth**

*The Memorial at Emmanuel Church, Holcombe lists 27 “members of Holcombe Church and Sunday School who laid down their lives in the Great War 1914-18”: 26 men and one woman. The woman was Leonie Ashworth.*

*Leonie was not from the local area – she was born in Belgium and came to this country in 1901 aged about 18 to teach languages at a girls’ school in Derby. Like some young men she claimed to be older than she really was. She subsequently met and married Captain Edmund Ashworth and settled in the Bury area, moving to Plant House in Holcombe before the outbreak of the war.*

*The early days of the war were difficult for her as her husband was posted to Egypt in September 1914 with the 1<sup>st</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers*

*In September 1914 a small group of Belgian refugees arrived in Bury. Leonie immediately became involved in supporting them, acting as interpreter and helping in practical ways. A contemporary account comments:*

*“From the day of their arrival till she left for Egypt she devoted herself to them; speaking Flemish and French she quickly gained their hearts. Never was love more deservedly bestowed; she not only gave time and labour freely, but she helped them with a tact and delicacy that made them idolise her.”*

*She brought the plight of Belgium and its people to the attention of the residents of Ramsbottom, giving a talk about them to a packed church in Holcombe. A relief fund was set up, and eventually a house was acquired to re-house four adults and three children.*

*In February 1915 she left for Egypt, hoping to see her husband there. She found work at a café for wounded soldiers at the docks and saw Edmund regularly in Alexandria until the end of April 1915. After he left for Gallipoli, she volunteered her services as a nurse. Though her qualifications were only basic, she was immediately taken on and put in charge of a ward with 80 patients in the San Stefano hospital, working twelve-hour shifts. During this period she cared for several men from Edmund’s regiment who had*

*been evacuated from Gallipoli back to Alexandria, and was able to pass on news of them to their families at home in the Bury area.*

*Leonie's service in Egypt was cut short when she contracted typhoid. She died in Alexandria on Friday July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1915; she was 32. She was buried in the Anglican cemetery in Alexandria.*



The story of Leonie Ashworth was one of four stories of local Bury people, or enlisted men in the Lancashire Fusiliers, presented as part of Bury Choral Society's concert.