

# Belgian Refugees in Derby



44 Walter Street – home from 1914 to 1918 to Belgian Refugees

One of our local churches - St Anne's on Whitecross Street - supported a family of Belgian refugees throughout the First World War, renting a house and raising money to pay for their food and living expenses. Mr and Mrs Lintermans arrived in October or November 1914. They were supported by St Anne's parish until June 1918, when Mr Lintermans found employment and the family moved to Birmingham. During the time that the parish supported the family £268 was raised by local people: to rent a house and provide money for food, coal and gas, clothing and other living expenses. This was a remarkable achievement for an area with many low income families. An equivalent value today would be £28,000 raised over nearly four years. Mr Frederick Hamp, who lived at 22 Statham Street, administered the fund for St Anne's Church.

## THE VICAR'S LETTER.

My dear Friends,

I am glad to say we have obtained a house for a Belgian family, in the parish. It is at the corner of Walter and Leyland Streets. I am also glad to know how well you have responded to the appeal. We can still do with a little more help. Can anyone give any furniture, pictures, table linen, knives and forks, etc.? Anything will be welcome. Just drop me a line saying you can offer some article, and I will see that it is fetched, no matter how big or how small.

*Left: Extract from a letter by the vicar, Rev E F C Eardley, which appeared in St Anne's parish magazine in December 1914. The vicar appealed for furnishings and equipment for the new tenants. The congregation were already paying for the rent of the house.*

It wasn't clear from the parish magazine's reference to "a house on the corner of Walter and Leyland Street" whether the house was 44 or 45 Walter Street. By good fortune in a copy of "Le Courier Belge" a French/Flemish newspaper (more information on page 9 to 11 below) Mrs Lintermans placed an appeal for help in tracing a relative or friend which linked the family definitely to 44 Walter Street.

DELAMONTAGNE, Jeanne, van Antwerpen,  
door Maria Lintermans, 44 Walter Street, Derby.

When the family moved to Birmingham in 1918 they were sent off to start their new life with the surplus from the St Anne's fund - £1 and 8 shillings. Nothing more is known about the Lintermans family and whether they stayed in Birmingham or returned to Belgium at the end of the war.

## Belgian Refugees arrive in Derby

As early as August 1914 stories started to appear in national and local newspapers telling of the plight of refugees from Belgium who had fled to Paris.

In late August 1914 the first refugees, displaced by the establishment of the battle front in Northern France and Belgium, arrived in London. Eight refugees from Antwerp arrived in Derby on 11 September 1914 and by the following week the Borough Council and other organisations, including churches had started to co-ordinate a response. Initially the aim was to find accommodation for refugees with local families followed by setting up schemes to fund the renting of houses with ongoing weekly subscriptions to feed and clothe the refugees. The Mayor of Derby set up a shilling fund on 15 October, with the commitment of the Derby Refugee Committee to provide housing for 100 refugees. Within a week the fund had reached nearly £240 (today worth about £25,000) with contributions from individuals, local traders and collections made at companies including the Midland Railway Carriage and Engineering Departments, Boots and Longdon's (a large textile manufacturing company on Agard Street). Edward Hulse of Parkfields House (off Wheeldon Avenue) gave 100 shillings (£5).

Derby residents were anxious to welcome the refugees. On 15 October 1914 the Derby Daily Telegraph reported the disappointment of people who had gathered at the railway station to greet an expected party of 60 refugees only to be told that their arrival had been delayed by congestion in London. The only Belgians aboard the train were a small group bound for Kedleston Hall. The group that arrived had "practically no luggage, the man having one little bundle, which he secured in his hurried departure from home." The same report recorded that on Burton Road "commodious premises" were secured to house 30 people; others were housed in the Isolation Ward of the County Asylum (which one hopes was a short term measure!) and 3 or 4 families were housed in cottages in Mickleover which had been made available by a local landlord.

In October 1914 members of the Congregational Church on Victoria Street agreed to rent a vacant house in Arboretum Street. An appeal from the pulpit for weekly donations of shillings and sixpences aimed to raise an income of £4 per week. It then transpired that donations were so generous (£8. 16 shilling) allowing the church to rent a second house on Vicarage Avenue.

Nineteen Belgian refugees were supported for more than four years by the congregation and a brass plaque in the church records this response. The church on Victoria Street was replaced after WW2 by a modern building incorporated as part of Debenhams and now, in 2020, is due to be relocated.

For a while the church's schoolroom was used as a classroom to teach Belgian children, until a more permanent home was found at Unity Hall which stood on the corner of Normanton Road, Burton Road and Babington Lane and belonged to The Old Friendly and Trades Societies.

It was estimated that by 29 October 1914 110 refugees had been welcomed and housed in Derby, with many groups and individuals working in different ways to support them.

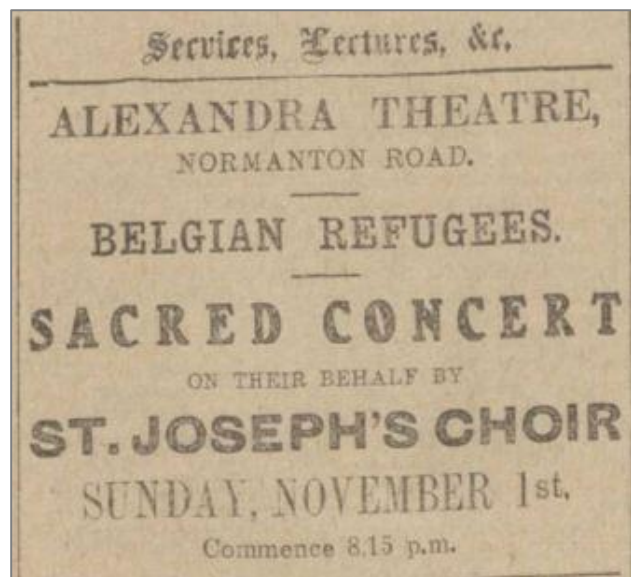
## Fundraising and Support for Belgium Refugees

Newspaper articles and adverts along with reports in church magazines show how the town's residents rose to the challenge of raising money to help the refugees. Concerts and recitals took place in halls and churches. Welcoming teas were held by organisations like the Derby Co-operative Society.

St Alkmund's Parish magazine for January 1915 recorded that Miss Domleo's "Patriotic Concert" on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> December 1914 raised £2. 8s for the Belgian Relief fund.

**Right:** *Derby Daily Telegraph, 31 October 1914*

**Below:** *Transcript from Derby Daily Telegraph, 21 October 1914*



### *Late Advertisements*

**IN AID OF THE BELGIAN RELIEF FUND**  
**Midland Railway Institute, Wednesday, Nov.11,**  
**7.30 p.m.**

Extremely interesting and popular LECTURE on "Louvain. Antwerp. Brussels. Rheims. etc. by the REV. DR. J. CHARLES COX (the distinguished Derbyshire Archaeologist and Historian). Illustrated by numerous Lantern Slides of Pictures taken both before and after the German invasion.

Unreserved Seats. 1s. Reserved and Numbered Seats, 2s. 6d. BOOK THE DATE.

**Right:** This letter appeared in the Derby Daily Telegraph in November 1914. Paul Pauly was one of the editors of "Le Courrier Belge" a nationally distributed newspaper published in Derby for Belgian refugees (see page 9 below).

**THE BELGIAN REFUGEES.**

**AN INVITATION TO TEA.**

To the Editor of "Derby Daily Telegraph."

Sir,—I have pleasure in sending you to-day an invitation for tea which I am giving on Wednesday next to the Belgian refugees, and I shall be glad if you can accept the same. May I ask you to insert this in your first issue, and mention that all Belgians, even without special invitation, will be welcome. —Thanking you in anticipation, yours faithfully,

Paul Pauly.

Derby, Nov. 14, 1914.

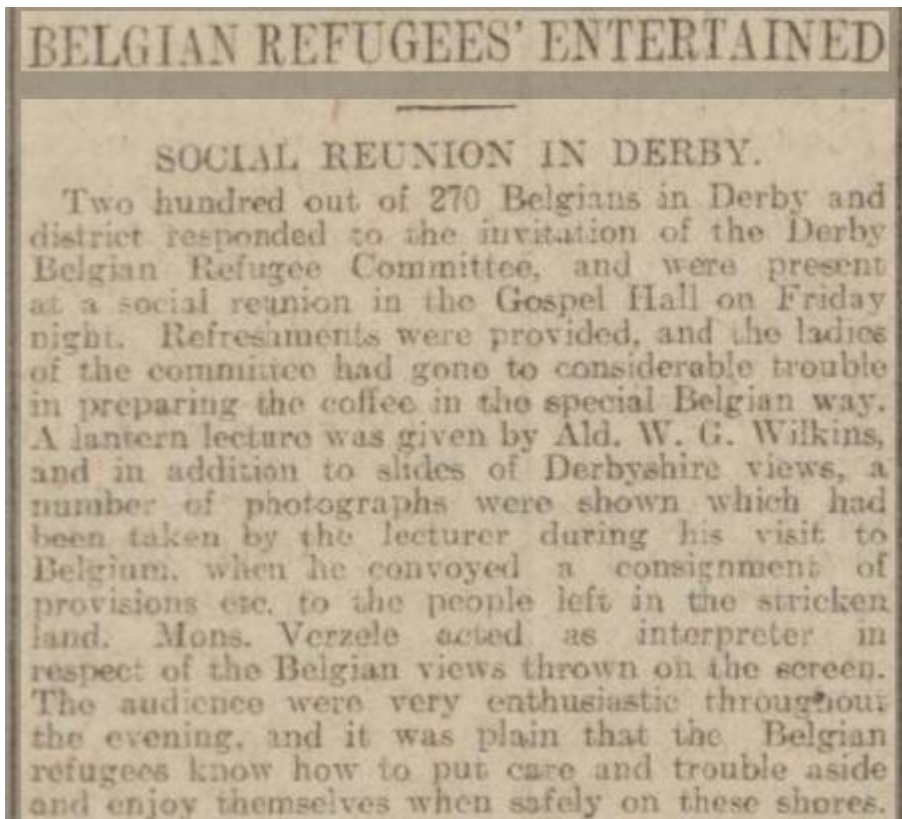
**DERBY CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY AND  
BELGIAN REFUGEES**

About 150 Belgian refugees at present resident in Derby (men, women and children) were entertained to tea at the Temperance Hall on Wednesday by the Derby Co-operative Society. An excellent repast was provided, and in the evening a concert took place, the performers being the junior and senior choirs and the employees' band connected with the society. The general public were admitted to the concert by payment, and the whole of the proceeds are to be given to the Belgian Refugees' Fund. During the evening fruit and chocolates were handed round amongst the Belgians who appeared deeply grateful for the kindness shown them.

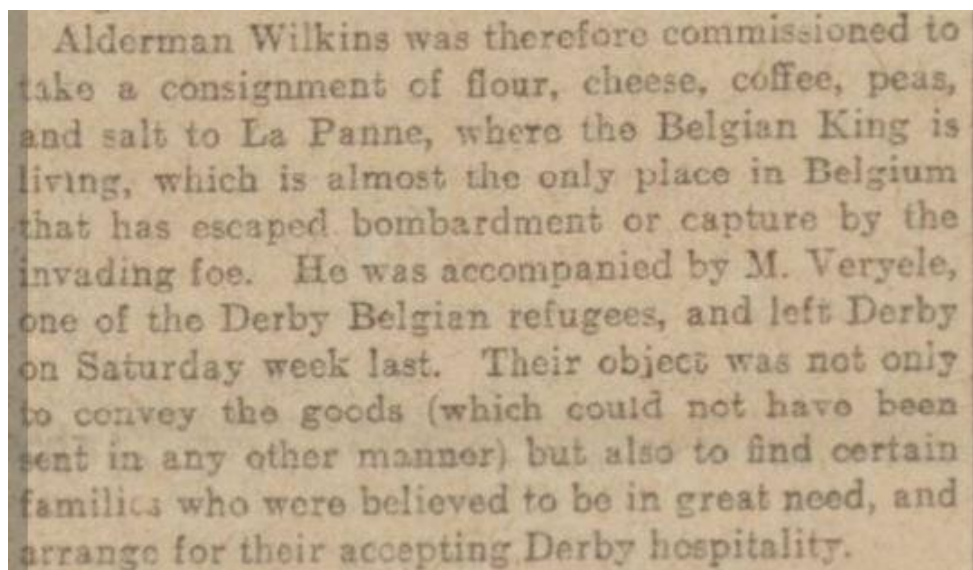
**Left:** This concert on 2 December 1914 combined fundraising with entertaining refugees at the Temperance Hall in Derby. What is interesting is that it gives an idea of the number of refugees already in Derby by December 1914. (from the Derby Daily Telegraph, 3 December 1914).

**Below:** Derby Daily Telegraph, 15 July 1916

**GARDEN PARTY**  
(Belgian Refugees and Red Cross Society),  
At PARKFIELD CEDARS, KEBLESTON ROAD,  
JULY 19th. To be Opened at 3 by  
LADY MAUD CAVENDISH.  
TOY SYMPHONY at 5 and 5.45.  
Admission 1s., Children under 10; 6d. Tea 6d.  
each. Indoors if wet.



The newspaper article (above) from 2 January 1915 suggests that within Derby and District about 270 refugees were now in residence. It mentions Alderman W G Wilkins who was a leading force in Derby's response to the Belgian refugee crisis. His home at 59 Uttoxeter Road was a collecting point for furniture and household utensils. He also took vital food supplies to Belgium for the relief of civilians caught in the military zone and a newspaper report on 21 December 1914 detailed his trip to Belgium at the beginning of December.



The task of getting into Belgium was more difficult than had been expected, with all means of communication and travel restricted by military rule. The practical relief taken "more than filled an extra large piano case, and weighed over a ton".

## Practical Help

Stories abounded in the newspapers of refugees that had to flee their homes some with only the clothes they were wearing, or only having time to wrap a few possessions in a small bundle. There were reports of some who fled their homes shoeless. Collection points for clothing, household equipment and furniture were quickly set up.

### *Late Advertisements*

#### **CLOTHING FOR BELGIAN REFUGEES**

Garments of all kinds, old and new, are urgently needed. They may be sent to the Receiving and Distributing Depot, Municipal Secondary School for Girls, Abbey Street, between 1 and 2 p.m., or 4 and 5 p.m. each day except Saturday, or parcels will be collected on receipt of a postcard

*Above: from the Derby Daily Telegraph, 21 Oct 1914*



*Left: This article in French, Flemish and English appeared in the Derby Daily Telegraph on 28 December 1914, informing refugees where clothing could be collected.*

Adverts appeared in the local newspaper offering discounts on clothing, boots and other goods to Belgian refugees and they could have teeth pulled out at discount prices with one dentist. The Co-operative Society supplied free milk to many refugee families each day.

## Welcome or not welcome?

There was an overwhelmingly positive welcome to the Belgium refugees who arrived in Derby.

However, in February 1916 rumours began to circulate that some of the Belgian men now employed in factories could be spies for the German government and Olivier Platteau (see page 12) spokesperson for the refugees, had to ask the authorities to double check the identities of the men to counter the small number of people “*who are throwing suspicions on honourable refugees*”.

Initially in the autumn of 1914 there was also some disquiet about how the children (who were mainly of Roman Catholic upbringing) might be integrated into local schools, but this was quickly quashed when it was made clear that a special school for the refugee children would be set up – this was first at the Congregational Church on Victoria Street, and later at Unity Hall which stood on the corner of Normanton Road, Burton Road and Babington Lane. Monsieur Charles Platteau (no relation to Olivier Platteau) and Monsieur Gesquiere were appointed as teachers, with Mr van Troostenberghé (who conducted negotiations with the Borough’s Education committee) appointed to teach English.

The Tramway Committee provided free travel passes for the refugees but this caused some ill feeling amongst poorer Derby residents, especially when the travel offer continued to apply to Belgian refugees with paid jobs – many filled jobs vacated by men signing up for the armed forces.

### **FREE RIDES FOR BELGIANS**

Coun. Bennett, in a second question to the chairman of the Tramways Committee, asked whether Coun. Dean could inform him if it was a fact that all the Belgian refugees had been granted free passes for the cars whether in employment or not. Many of them were in receipt of wages, and there was considerable feeling among the poor people of the town that Belgian refugees should receive free passes which were withheld from themselves. Of course they were prepared to extend the utmost hospitality to the refugees, but he (Coun. Bennett) thought it right to mention the feeling existing among the poorer classes.

Coun. Dean said it was a fact that people held passes who were earning pretty good money. Cases had been brought to his knowledge where they were in receipt of 37s. a week, and the matter was to be considered at the next meeting of the committee. Perhaps it was time some alteration was made.

Coun. Potter protested against any interference with the privileges granted to the Belgians. The Belgians had suffered enough, and the few coppers they allowed then were surely not too much.

*From the Derby Daily Telegraph, 3 February 1915*

## “Les Dernieres Nouvelles”

In the early months of the war the Derby Daily Telegraph published a regular column in French to update the new Belgian residents on the progress of the war. This column, for the benefit of those who could not speak English, ran almost daily between 20 October 1914 and 31 March 1916. The translations were supplied by Mr Freeman, French Master, at the Municipal Secondary School (later Bemrose School).



His interest in helping Belgian refugees may have been prompted by being in Paris as the first refugees arrived when war broke out in August 1914.

Mr Freeman had taken a group of his pupils on a trip to Paris – among the party was a local boy Charles Steer who lived at 92 Kedleston Road. The school group had arrived in Paris at the beginning of August, but chaos broke out with the declaration of war on 4 August 1914. The group returned home after a week, cutting short their stay and their arrival back at Derby station was greeted by a large crowd which included anxious parents. It was reported that their boat back to England was accompanied by a military gunboat. A full account of their adventure was published in the Derby Daily Telegraph on 11 August 1914.



Thomas Freeman went on to be a founder member of Le Cercle Français de Derby, inaugurated in 1931. He was a keen swimmer, produced many school plays and was involved with the Scouting movement. He taught at Derby Municipal Secondary School on Abbey Street / Bemrose School from 1920 until his retirement in 1936.

On occasions he also acted as interpreter for the Borough of Derby on official trips abroad or when foreign dignitaries visited the town. During World War One as well as writing his column for the Derby Daily Telegraph he visited wounded Belgian soldiers in hospital, and opened his own home to a Belgian refugee student, Alphonse Gautier.





## Le Courrier Belge/ De Belgische Koerier

Frederick Hampshire (1863-1941), a local manufacturing chemist who ran a successful business in Derby, had business interests in Belgium and France and he responded to the refugee crisis by setting up a newspaper for Flemish and French speaking refugees. (Incidentally, Frederick Hampshire also had links with the Six Streets area as he lived at **33 White Street** with his wife and children between 1903-1910).

This transcript (**right**) from the Derby Daily Telegraph for 28 October 1914 reports on the setting up of the newspaper in the heart of Derby.

The newspaper was published weekly in Derby and distributed nationwide for refugees. The editors were Paul Pauly and Albert Schoutissen.

### A NEWSPAPER FOR REFUGEES

#### PUBLISHED IN DERBY.

It will be a matter of interest to our readers to learn that a newspaper is being published in Derby for the benefit of the Belgian refugees. It is called "Le Courrier Belge." And to quote from the editorial columns of this week's issue:

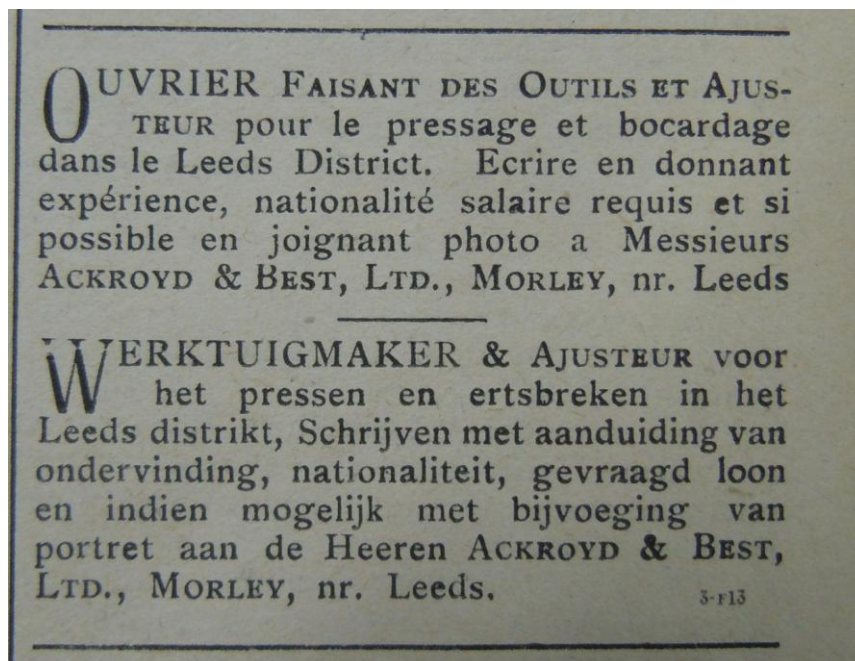
Cet organe sera comme une voix de la patrie dans notre exil force, et fera renaître l'espoir dans la prompte et bonne réussite de la "bonne" cause.

The director of the journal (or editor, as we should call him in our own parlance) is Mr. F. W. Hampshire, of Derby, a gentleman who has considerable business interests in this town and also in Antwerp and Paris. It is being printed by the firm of Francis Carter, Iron-gate, Derby, and the news is of varied character. Lists of Belgian wounded, names and addresses of refugees in this country, and above all a "Lost Friend" column, are features which will appeal to its special readers. In the mad rush from Belgium, families and friends became separated, and something like three columns are devoted to inquiries as to missing relatives. The paper is being published free of cost, the distribution being undertaken by refugee committees throughout the country, and we have reason to know that its appearance is eagerly awaited.

Mr. Hampshire appeals for a few honorary workers to assist him in his correspondence, of which he receives an enormous number daily. Mr. Giles Austin has kindly placed the premises, 28 Market-place Derby, formerly occupied by Messrs. Binns, corn dealers, at Mr. Hampshire's disposal, and he is establishing an office there.

Two copies of this newspaper have survived in the Derbyshire County Archives in Matlock; the earlier copy (edition 3) dates from 31 October 1914. This publication consists of 8 pages with articles covering current war news in French and Flemish (with topical cartoons), a feature on the situation from Antwerp, a report on refugee camps on the Dutch border and a list of hospital casualties. A letter of thanks for the welcome the refugees had received was also published, and in this earlier copy a children's column was included. Information and Questions for Belgian refugees in England were included and a considerable amount of space is given over to "small ads" where people could try to trace missing friends and relatives where contact had been lost during flight from Belgium - a claim in the newspaper states: "Our newspaper has resulted in family reunification".

The other surviving copy (edition 16), dates from 30 January 1915, and by this time the paper had reduced to 4 pages, with news of the war over the last week summarised (presumably for those unable to follow news in English language papers), local events and news, thanks for social events organised for the refugees, announcements of births and deaths, and offers of jobs – for example a glove maker in Dorset was advertising vacancies while precision turners were sought by Gimson & Co. engineers in Leicester.



The above advert was placed in both French and Flemish by Ackroyd & Best who were known for making miners' safety lamps, but also made a range of tokens, checks and tallies, both for the mining industry and for wider use, including for currency. "Bocardage" is a process of crushing metal ore and "pressage" is stamping or pressing tokens and tallies out of molten metal. Applicants were asked to apply in writing stating experience, nationality and to include a photograph if possible.

Other features in the newspaper included an article entitled "Is peace between Germany and France Possible?" along with poems and letters. Appeals for information on missing people were an important feature and in this later surviving copy an advert was placed by the refugees sponsored by St Anne's Church and living in Walter Street.

DE CROES-VAN SAN, familie, van Mechelen,  
door Louis De Croes, thans 21 West End Road,  
Morecambe, Lancs.

DE PANN-VAN DESSEL ouders en familie,  
van Mechelen, door de Pann Vanhoegaerden, van  
Mechelen, 17 Monteith Row, Glasgow.

DELAMONTAGNE, Jeanne, van Antwerpen,  
door Maria Lintermans, 44 Walter Street, Derby.

**E**

ELODE, Leon, van Gentbrugge, door Romain  
Altermann, van Gentbrugge, soldaat 4de Cie  
Fusiliers, a Ste Adresse (P.D.C.), France.

ERESELL, Mme. Vve., par Arthur Vercruyse,  
c/o Warwick Refugee Committee.

*Sample of the adverts placed to trace missing friends and relations. In the middle is an appeal for information about Jeanne Delamontagne. placed by Mrs Lintermans of 44 Walter Street, Derby. Before this advert was found in the archives it wasn't clear in which house in Walter Street they lived. (Le Courrier Belge no 16, 30 January 1915).*

## Le Courrier Belge.

*All communications to be addressed to Mr.  
F. W. Hampshire, Hon. Editor, Office of  
"Le Courrier Belge," 26 Market Place, Derby.*

Parcels of LE COURRIER BELGE, containing twelve copies and upwards, are sent by passenger train at special newspaper rates which do not include delivery from railway station, therefore we shall be glad if friends will arrange to fetch all parcels from the station.

*This cutting from the front page of the newspaper gives information about how the newspaper was delivered nationwide. However there were obviously distribution problems as copies sent by post were being delayed, leading to complaints from subscribers. This delay was blamed on the disorganisation of the Post Office due to the war.*

## Olivier Platteau & Broadway Baptist Church

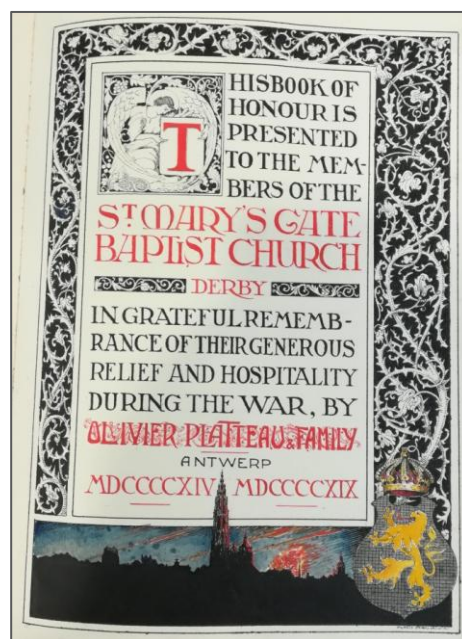
Broadway Baptist Church (then St Mary's Gate Baptist Church) supported the Platteau family from Antwerp throughout the war, renting a house for them at 156 Uttoxeter New Road from November 1914 to February 1919.

Olivier Platteau was a successful business man (printer and bookbinder) and civil judge in his native Antwerp and escaped with his wife, daughters and other family members. Two of his sons were fighting in the Belgian army. He became president of the Belgians' Refugee Society in Derby – the "Leopold Charles Club" and spoke for the community when needed – he was later described as their "Unofficial Consul".

Early in 1919 refugees began to be repatriated to Belgium. A crowd of well-wishers waved off a party of 200 who left Derby by train on 27 February 1919, supervised by Monsieur Platteau. Before his family left on 27 February a leaving party, with entertainment and supper, was held for the Platteau family at St Mary's Gate Baptist Church. The Derby Daily Telegraph reported: "*M. Platteau, whose four years residence enabled him to address the meeting...in our own tongue...expressed the great gratitude of himself and family and trusted they would see many of their English friends in Antwerp.*"

During the evening Olivier Platteau expressed his intention of sending a gift to the church made at his printing press in Belgium – a "Book of Gold" which could be used "*for the recording of extraordinary events in the future history of the church, an account of their sojourn here being naturally the first entry.*"

The Platteau family maintained links with members of the church, who visited him and his family over the years and his death in June 1935 was reported in the Derby Telegraph.



*The book presented by Olivier Platteau in 1919 is still used as a visitors' book at Broadway Baptist Church. The cover of the book (tooled brown leather, now faded) and the illustrated frontispiece.*

The Derby Belgian Refugee Committee was disbanded in May 1919. After the refugees left announcements about the auction of furniture and household goods donated in 1914 by Derby residents appear in local newspapers.



*Derby Daily Telegraph, 5 April 1919. The auction advert lists some of the locations of the houses used by refugees: Uttoxeter New Road, Swinburne Street, Hartington Street, Portland Street, and houses in Littleover and Alvaston.*

It is difficult to know the exact numbers of Belgian refugees accommodated in Derby during the war. A newspaper article in February 1915 reported from the Derby Belgian Refugee Committee, who calculated that about 320 Belgian refugees were housed in Derby, and that it was “undesirable to invite other guests”. The committee was directly responsible for 12 houses in which were housed 120 people. There were believed to be at least 30 other houses in use, supported by many other organisations and an unknown number of private arrangements.

It has been estimated that about 250,000 Belgian refugees were housed in the United Kingdom during the First World War; about 90% returned home after the war.

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*All Derby Daily Telegraph illustrations and quotes are ©Local World Limited (Image created courtesy of the British Library Board). Transcriptions have been given where the original text is unclear.*

*Extracts from Le Courrier Belge are by kind permission of Derbyshire Record Office, who hold the only two copies of Le Courrier Belge known to have survived. If you know of any other editions please contact them or contact 6streetshistory@gmail.com.*

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