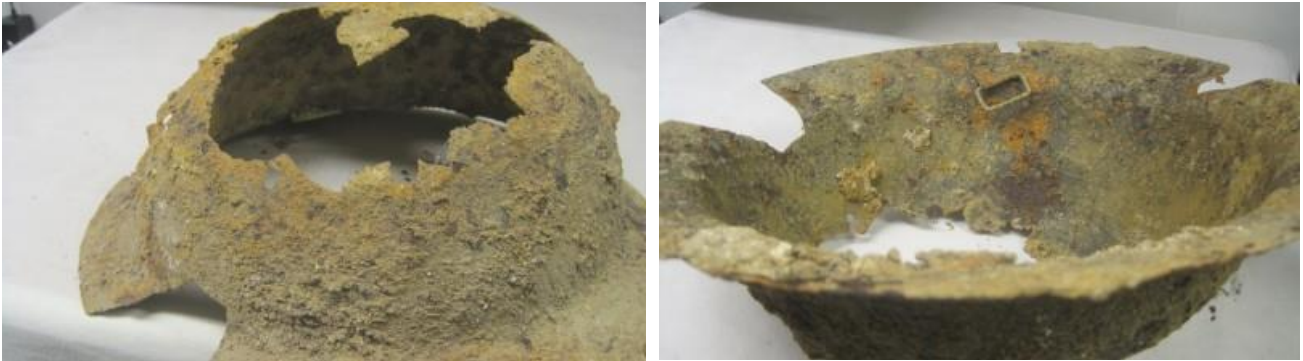


One of the saddest and least regarded items in our collection is a badly damaged and fragile World War One British army helmet. Our steel helmet was donated by a resident of the Frieth Road who discovered it in the ground whilst having a new garage built. Did a former local soldier bury it in his garden out of sentimental regard? Or did it perhaps come from the well-known training trenches on Marlow Common just half a mile away?



We'll never know, but we are able to show you photos of a similar helmet in good condition, courtesy of our very good friend and local collector of militaria, Jon Hilton.

Jon has confirmed that our helmet is a 1915 Brodie Model B because it has a plain rim and the edge is unreinforced.



By mid-1915 the War Office had belatedly realised that cloth and felt headgear offered no protection in this new type of warfare, and that the head was particularly vulnerable to bullets and shrapnel on the battlefield. After an unsuccessful trial of a mild steel prototype, this hardened steel helmet was patented by John Brodie and introduced in October 1915. Production proceeded slowly and the first issues were kept in military stores near the Front and issued to soldiers engaged on raids into enemy lines. It was not until the spring of 1916 that the helmets were on general issue to our troops.

Our helmet was originally an apple green colour and it measures about 310cm wide by 336cm long at the rim, being longer front to back than side to side. It was not capable of stopping a direct impact from a bullet or a piece of shrapnel, but it might deflect it or reduce the force of the impact, hopefully lessening the resulting injury. The helmet was secured by a canvas chinstrap fastened by bent over prongs and there was an oilskin liner inside for comfort, although this was rather slippery and caused the helmet to move around on the head.

The Model B was quickly phased out in favour of the Brodie Mark 1 which had improved protection and fastenings, and a khaki matt finish. But both types were generally in use up to the end of the war in November 1918.

The museum's helmet has a large jagged hole in the crown and I'm tempted to believe that a piece of shrapnel was deflected by it, thus saving the soldier's life. Perhaps the grateful chap brought it home to Marlow and buried it in his garden as a lucky talisman. Nowadays it has found a home with us and I hope that it continues to bring some good fortune to our little museum.

Geoff Wood

The Marlow Museum leads walks to the WW1 Training Trenches at Marlow Common. These 1-2 hour walks follow the track of the soldiers and are illustrated by the guide. Group numbers can be from 12 to 20 starting from Bovington Green. The Chilterns Walking Festival hold a walk but other dates can be agreed. Donations are appreciated. If interested contact [michael.hyde@marlowmuseum.org](mailto:michael.hyde@marlowmuseum.org).



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