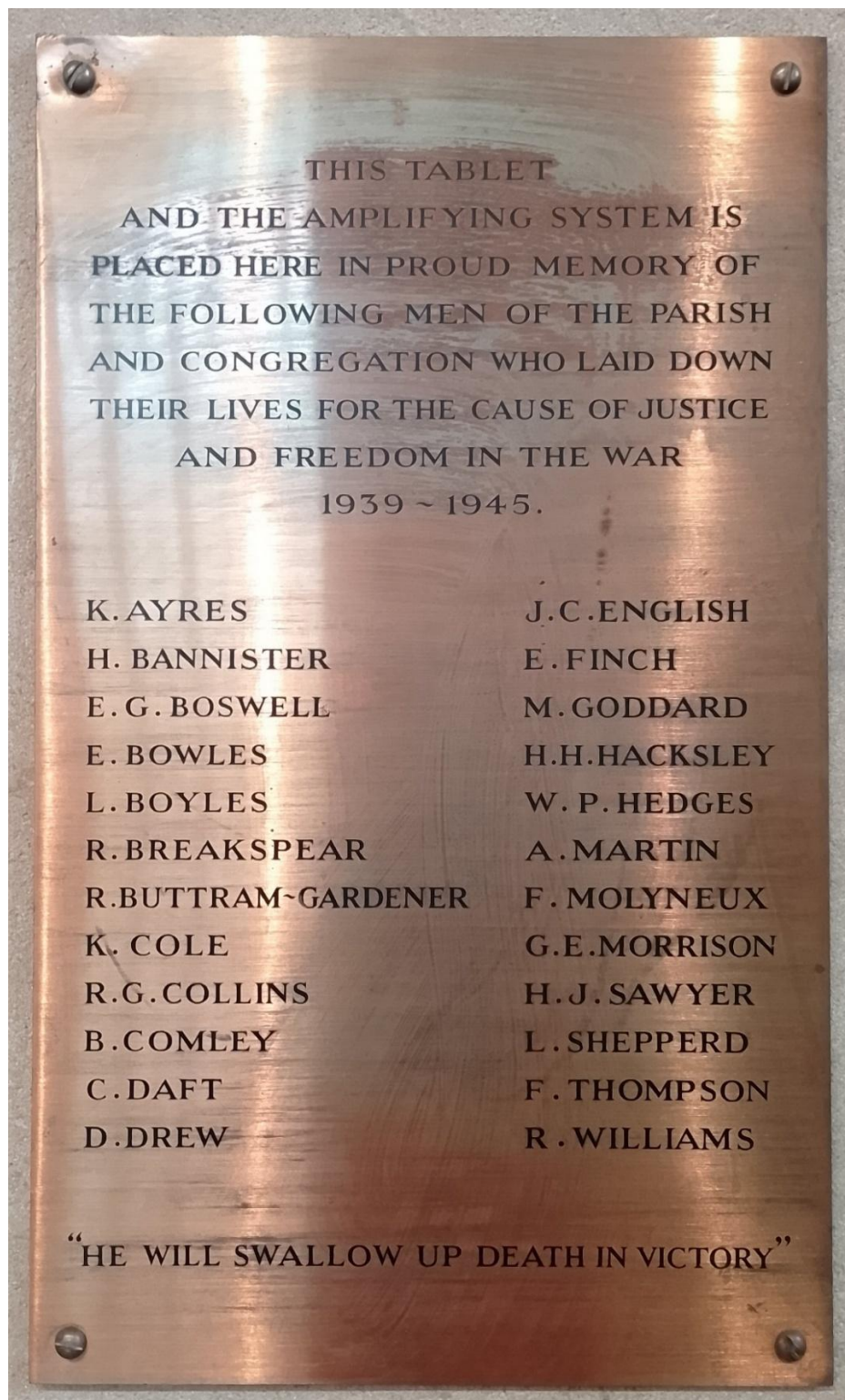
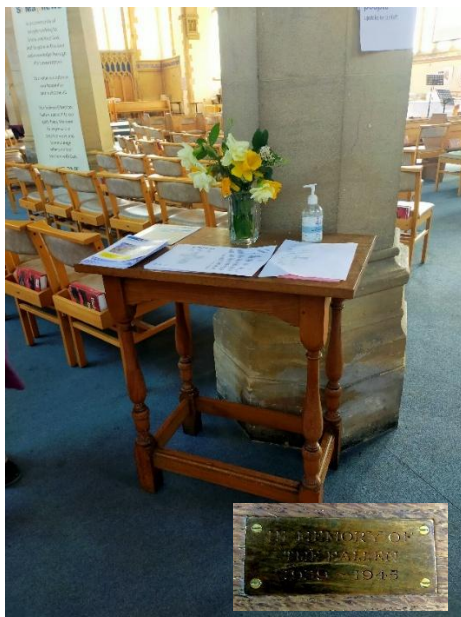


**The history of the Second World War plaque
at St Matthew's Church, Marlborough Road,
Grandpont, Oxford**



The memorial in St Matthew's commemorating the 66 men of Grandpont who lost their lives in the First World War consists of an attractively engraved brass plaque in a substantial carved wooden frame on the south wall of the church. The Second World War memorial is altogether a more humble affair, with a somewhat odd inscription commemorating the amplifying system before mentioning the 24 men who "laid down their lives for the cause of justice and freedom in the war". The plaque was erected in 1948, during the long incumbency of the Revd David Stather-Hunt, who was vicar of St Matthew's from 1929 to 1975. He was said to have a booming voice and could make himself heard perfectly well without the use of an amplifying system and, indeed, such apparatus would have been considered new-fangled and perhaps unnecessary so soon after the war, when money was particularly tight. One theory is that a member of the congregation gave a sum of money towards the cost of the amplifying system – perhaps someone who was hard of hearing – on the understanding that mention of the sound system should be included on the plaque. The Church Council applied to the Diocese for the faculty (permission) required for the installation of the plaque, the sound system and a small memorial table. The reason given for the amplifying system was in order to be able to broadcast music, presumably from 78 rpm records, during weekday services, weddings and funerals when no organist was available.



When the petition (application) for the faculty was submitted to Guy Harden Guillum Scott, the Chancellor of the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Oxford, the response was somewhat critical and sceptical: he stipulated that the wording should be amended, he did not like the fact that the plaque was to be placed on a pillar (rather than on an outer wall), and stated that "The petitioners should be warned that if the amplifying system proves a nuisance, it may have to be taken out". This was not a strong vote of confidence in what must have been considered a new-fangled idea. Guillum Scott found further fault with the petition in that the applicants had failed to answer a question about the "disposal of church property". This related to the proposal to replace a small table (left) with a new one which would bear a plaque with the inscription "In memory of the fallen 1939-1945" (inset).

There were other comments relating to the petition: the Secretary of the Oxford Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches, Mr RF Bale, opposed the mention of the "amplifying apparatus" on the plaque. However, the comments made by Guillum Scott and Bale seem to have been ignored, and the faculty was granted. The church was required to post a notification of the intended work on the church door for a period of a week so that any objections could be raised by members of the congregation or the general public. There being no objections, the work was duly carried out at a cost of £150, £130 of which had already been raised by the time the petition was submitted. The new table was sourced from Mowbrays, church publishers and furniture suppliers, who were based at 9 High Street. The table is still in use today, which is more than can be said for the amplifying system. A parishioner who remembers the system with its globe-shaped speakers suspended on poles from the beams, commented "I remember St Matthew's from the 1970s, and it didn't work then and was removed in the 1990s."

Recent research for the *24 Men of Grandpont* project has revealed that there are errors in the spelling of several names and initials on the plaque, and that two more men – Joseph Piddington and Charles Webb – should have been included on it. Joseph lived at 163 Marlborough Road; he died three months after the end of the war, but the fact that he has a Commonwealth War Grave at Wolvercote Cemetery means that he was considered to be a casualty of the war. Charles should be on the memorial, as he and his new wife moved to 82 Chilswell Road straight after their marriage in 1938.

Three years had elapsed between the end of the war and the installation of the plaque, which is probably why these errors crept in.

John Stobbs, April 2025