

4. More than commemoration.... Why did crowds turn out?

No-one counted the numbers in the crowds on the streets in Dover, London or Norwich, nor those standing in silence along the railway lines as the trains passed by. The total may have been between 200,000 and 250,000.

Why did the crowds come? They were there:

To give thanks – The homecoming preceded the signing of peace treaties (Versailles, 28 June 1919) and the nationwide services of thanksgiving for peace were held on July 5th and 6th.

To mourn - With a body in a coffin. The decision to bury soldiers where they fell 'on a foreign field' had meant burials on English soil were rare (only for men who died having been invalided home).

To remember – Till May 1919 only rare memorial services had been held locally (for those who had died, following news of their deaths). As yet no local war memorials had been erected, and few visits arranged to war graves in foreign fields.

To honour – A nurse and civilian doing her best for 'our boys', representing the sacrifice of all.

To learn – Many brought their children to stand by the railway track... in the hope that that the Empire should never again pay the price paid in the 'War to end all Wars'...

To wait– Demobilization of 3.8 million serving troops was only partially accomplished by mid-May. Many in the crowds were still longing to see their loved ones again, while those who would never do so were often still waiting for their medals, for more information on their deaths and for financial settlement for the price they had paid.

Photos:

Services of national thanksgiving July 5 and 6 1919 see

<https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=image+1919+thanksgiving+service&qpvt=image+1919+thanksgiving+service&FORM=IQFRML>

Swardeston war memorial with Edith Cavell's name at the top – photo Nick Miller

