

# Buckinghamshire in World War One: The Home Front

Much attention has been focused on the soldiers who went to war, but little has been written about those who were left behind, and even less about life in Buckinghamshire. World War I reached into the lives of every person in this country in a way which previous wars had not. From school children to old women, from farmers to factory workers every person was impacted in some way and expected to use their skills as part of the war effort. The aim of these pages is to show the impact the war had on people in Buckinghamshire and to give a flavour of what life was like for those left behind.

The text pages have limited illustrations; more can be found on a companion CD entitled "The Home Front in WWI" and which can be purchased from the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies for £10. There is also a select bibliography on the final page.

Both text pages and CD represent a small amount of the information that can be found about WWI at the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies. Teachers are welcome to visit the archives and local studies areas of the Centre, and we can organise school visits although we do not have the space to accommodate large numbers of pupils. Should you require more information about resources held at the Centre or advice about how to use this pack, please contact the archives on 01296 382587 or email [archives@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:archives@buckscc.gov.uk).



Royal Artillery leave for France after being billeted at Ivinghoe, 1916. (CBS ref phIvinghoe56)

## Part 4: The Domestic Front

# The Domestic Front

## Hoarding and Rationing

When war broke out in August 1914 the Government was worried that there would be a rush to buy and hoard food, leading to an inevitable food shortage.

They issued information that there was enough wheat to last four months and that further supplies would be coming in.

There was inevitably some panic buying in affluent areas but most people lived from wage packet to wage packet and could not buy anything extra. There is also evidence that some firms withheld supplies in the hope of raising prices and increasing profits. This led the Government to requisition some goods and discuss fixing prices. Sugar was the one commodity whose importation was badly affected as two thirds of our supplies came from enemy held lands. People were encouraged to cut down on its usage.

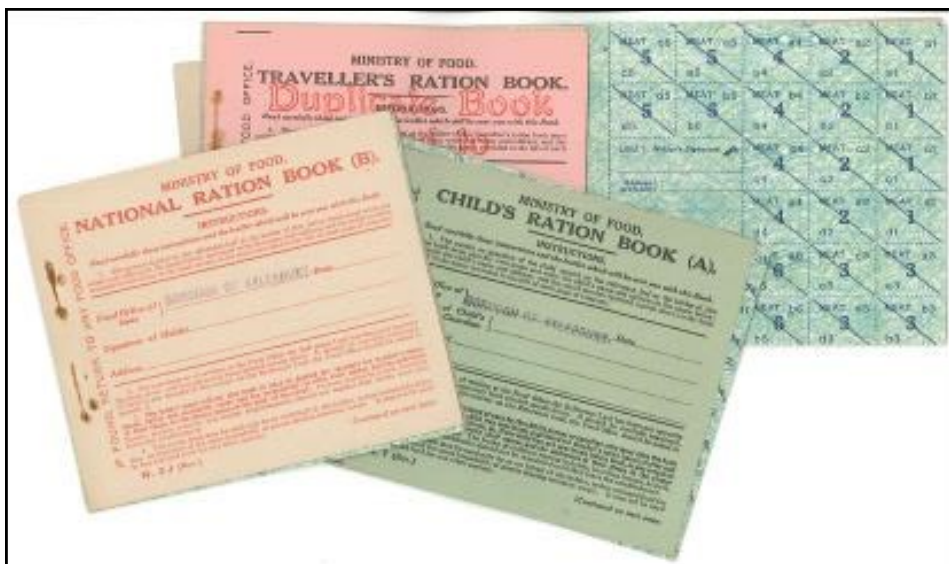
As the months passed and no major shortages occurred the panic buying stopped, although prices did rise. In the first 2 years of the war the Royal Navy was able to protect Britain's merchant fleet. It was only in 1917 when the Germans mounted a U-Boat campaign against the merchant fleet in an attempt to starve Britain into submission that any problems arose.

To overcome shortages an appeal was made to grow vegetables. Flower beds, lawns, school playing fields and parks were all dug up and turned into allotments. School children were given time off school to pick blackberries.

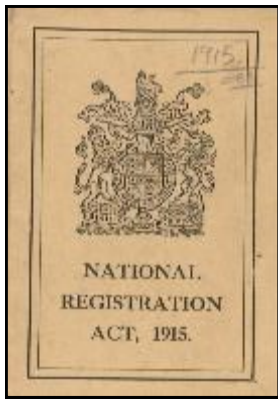
The main problem that arose after 1917 was not the shortage of food but its unfair distribution. This persuaded the Government at the beginning of 1918 to introduce rationing. This rationing system covered certain basic items: sugar, bread, butter, margarine, meat and bacon. Rationing was introduced gradually: sugar in January followed by the other items in April. The weekly ration, for example, was 1lb (450 grams) for meat and 5 ounces (140grams) for bacon.

Cards were issued to every man, woman and child. This was a huge logistical exercise which the Government managed well.

Unlike Germany Britain did not suffer a severe food shortage and although some items were in short supply everyone was adequately fed. The food shortages in Germany which led to famine in many areas had a detrimental effect on their ability to pursue the war.



Ration books such as these were introduced in 1917. (CBS ref D/X115/96)



In November 1915 an Act of Parliament required everyone over the age of 15 to have an identity card. This one belonged to Theodora Roscoe. (CBS ref D115/96)



Advert encouraging people to use less tea (Bucks Standard, 31 March 1917)

### Provisions for the troops

People were encouraged to support the troops fighting abroad in a variety of practical ways. "The Lee Magazine" shows what a small collection of villages was doing to provide additional food and clothing to their boys at the Front. Special committees were responsible for gathering resources – the Vegetable Products Committee, War-Working party and Queen Mary's Needlework Guild are named. In April 1916 a special appeal was put out to grow extra fruit and vegetables for the Navy on the basis that "the Fleet may be called upon to cope with a desperate enemy, and if that event occurs, our sailors should be in the best of health and fittest condition". At Christmas time a collection was raised to send twenty seven food parcels to their soldiers and sailors. Each parcel contained a Christmas pudding, a tin of cocoa and milk, a tin of potted meat, a tin of cheese, 6 Oxo cubes, a cake of chocolate, and 20 BDV cigarettes. Servicemen in England were each sent a box of 100 cigarettes. In addition the Baptist Chapel's Dorcas club was also sewing garments for troops. Even the school children were sewing socks, scarves and mittens. Undoubtedly the same was going on in villages across the county.

Up to date, 2,427 articles have been made and sent to Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, to Lady Smith-Dorien, or to Serbian Relief. Feeders 48, Padded Splints 22, Bed Jackets 58, Ward Bags 72, Day Shirts 32, Sets Pyjamas 44, Hospital Bags 414, Sand Bags 213, Many Tailed Bandages 574, Pairs Socks 62, Sun Shields 108, Ambulance Pillows 72, Handkerchiefs 136, Dressing Gowns 2, Tiffany Pants 26, Vests 53, Mosquito Nets 119, Grattan Caps 309, Old Linen Bandages 4, Magazine Packets 3, Serbian Relief 56.

In answer to appeals from Head-quarters 250 Articles went to the King's (Liverpool) Regiment, 450 Articles to 2/1 Bucks Battalion, 50 Caps to a French Surgeon, and 60 Bed Jackets to Malta. A grand total of 3,337 Articles.

The workers of The-Lee Common Schools have made about 240 Pairs of Socks, 38 Scarves, 22 Pair Mittens and Cuffs, which have been used almost entirely by our men on Active Service, when home on leave, or else sent to the Depot in Cavendish Square.

More workers are sadly needed for the evening party, which lasts from 5 till 7.30. It is *now* that hospital garments, etc., are needed more than ever.

The amount of work produced is quite staggering yet clearly the need in May 1917 was greater than ever. (Lee Magazine May 1917; CBS ref AR81/2001)

In 1917 and 1918 a mass Blackberry picking crusade was organised across the county, involving children in almost every school. Logs books report several afternoons in October being given over to blackberry picking "for the troops". The County Council committee in 1918 reported that "elementary scholars" had picked 131 tons 7 cwt of blackberries for jam making!

## Belgian Refugees

The invasion of Belgium by the Germans led to a flood of refugees coming into Britain. An estimated 100,000 came to Britain. They were sympathetically received and Belgian Refugee Committees were set up in villages and towns up and down the country including Buckinghamshire. Special collections were made and fundraising “Belgian Days” were organised to raise money to help feed and house the refugees. In Buckingham a Belgian flag was flown and badges made in Belgian colours were sold. £25 was raised in one day and went to assist 57 Belgian refugees living in the villages around Buckingham.

The Lee village received two families of Belgian refugees, the Fonteyns and the Beukelaers. They arrived in autumn 1914 and were provided with rent free cottages by the Liberty family and their children attended the local school. A special fund called the Lee Belgian Refugee fund collected £117 6s 1d during their stay to provide for their needs. By the end of 1915 they had both left: the Beukelaers moved back to France and the Fonteyns moved to Chesham where they remained for the rest of the war. A letter published in the Lee magazine of September 1915 from M Beukelaer expressed their thanks:

*“We shall never forget the assistance we received from the whole population of the Lee, and really I cannot find the necessary expression to thank them all again for the sincere welcome we have had everywhere.”*

(September 1915 AR81/2001)

## School life



Queens Park School in Aylesbury was used as a hospital for part of the war (CBS ref phAylesbury3367). This photograph shows nurses and patients in the schoolyard. Other schools, particularly in the towns, were similarly used—Aylesbury Grammar school, Wycombe High School, and Priory Road school, High Wycombe were among them.

Life in most schools continued much as it had always done, little changed from the end of the nineteenth century. School records, notably the log books, reveal a preoccupation with the health and attendance of pupils and bear little evidence that a war was going on which was affecting the lives of almost every family in the county. Nonetheless there were real issues affecting them: schools with male teachers (largely boys schools, secondary and grammar schools) were losing teachers to the army. This meant that staff shortages were acute and women were brought in to fill the gaps (at junior schools the teaching staff were already mainly women). School children were involved with making socks and scarves to send to the troops abroad and all junior schools in the county seem to have been involved with the mass blackberry picking drives in the autumns of 1917 and 1918. There are a few other references to the war – a visit by Belgian refugees, families moving in to the area having left London because of bombing, putting up posters urging people to collect eggs. For the children themselves, the war was very present in their minds as fathers, brothers and uncles left for the front, many never to return.

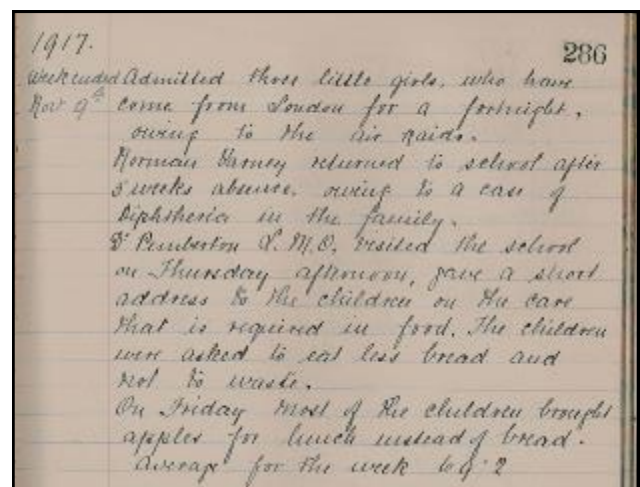
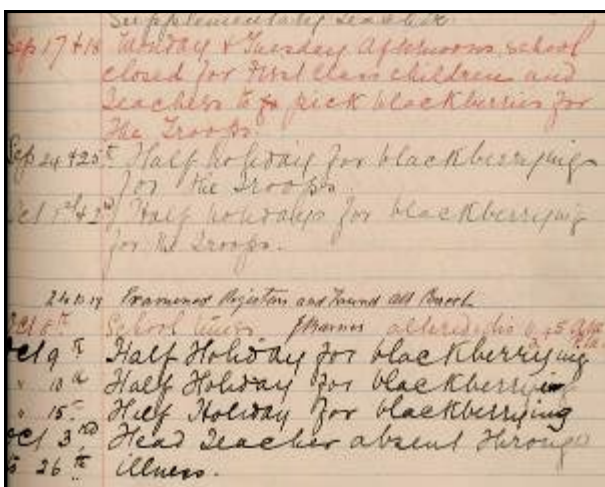
A glimpse of school life in Marlow in WWI was given by Lily Cox in an interview recorded in 1987:

*Lily: My Dad] got called up twice. To me, I was terribly disappointed because everybody at school said "my dad's in the army" ... My dad didn't go in the army. He had to come back on the farm because he couldn't use a rifle. When he was a boy of nine he fell off a hayrick while he was working and broke his arm and never got it set, so he was no good to the army because he couldn't use a gun... I was disappointed, I wanted my dad in uniform like everybody elses. Quite disappointed that he came back and he'd got work on the farm.*

*Interviewer: Did you change you view as time went on?*

*Lily: Oh yes, oh yes, when you saw the tragedies you know, everyone coming home and crying that their father had been killed, yes, we were very thankful that dad didn't go.*

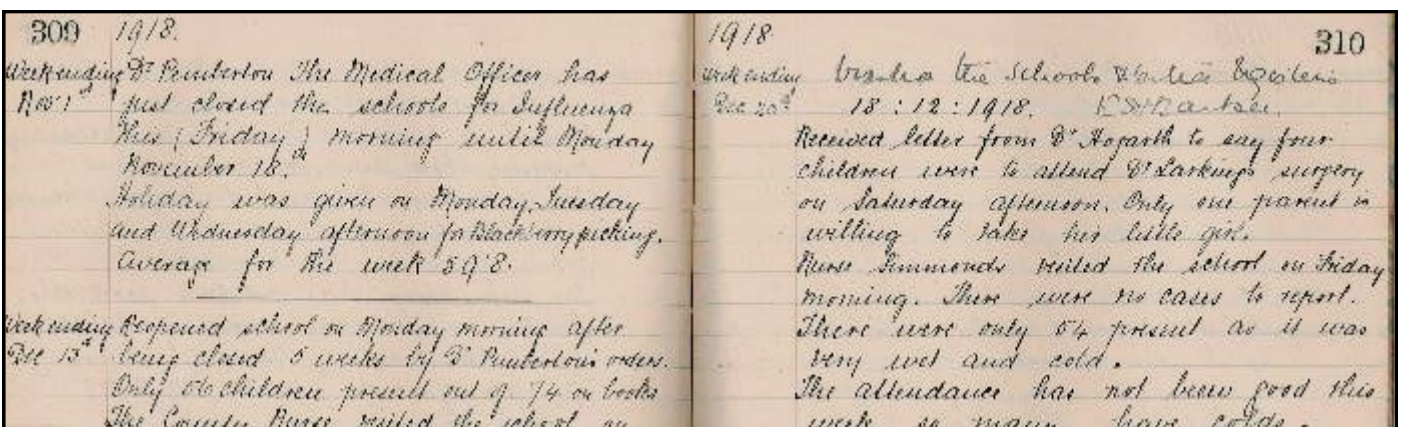
(From D/X1904/9)



Blackberry picking at school involved not just one afternoon but day after day! The blackberries were to make jam for the troops. These are entries from a Chesham log book in 1917. (CBS ref E/LB/44/1)

Civilian bombing in WWI: three girls started school at Buckingham "for a fortnight", having left London on account of the air raids. (CBS ref E/LB/29/3)

The influenza epidemic which struck at the end on the war in 1918 occasioned more comment in the school log books than the war with repeated references to children being off school. In Buckingham the schools closed down completely for 5 weeks at the beginning of November 1918 on the order of the Medical Officer of Health.



Buckingham school log book records the school's closure in November 1918. Note the reluctance of parents even to attend the doctor's surgery for fear of infection. (ref E/LB/29/3)