

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.



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

Part 1: Recruitment

Recruitment

On August 4th 1914 Britain declared war on Germany following the German invasion of Belgium on August 3rd.

Kitchener's 100,000

On August 5th 1914 Lord Kitchener was appointed Secretary of State for War and the next day he outlined plans for an expanded army based on a regular army system. He ignored the Territorial Army units which were based in the counties although the local County Associations were made responsible for recruiting to this new Army.

Kitchener's aim was to enlist 500,000 men but the initial appeal was for 100,000.

A recruiting office was established in Temple Square in Aylesbury where 2,105 men were recruited between August and October 1914. The numbers recruited outran the supply of uniforms and weapons so they had to train in their own clothes, using sticks etc as make-do weapons.

The Territorial Army in Buckinghamshire

When war broke out the Territorial Army in Buckinghamshire comprised 65 officers and 1660 men drawn mainly from the High Wycombe Chair industry and the Carriage Works for the railways at Wolverton. Their army training was largely confined to annual training camps. However they were at least accustomed to army discipline and were clothed and equipped from the Territorial Army's resources. At the outbreak of war they were immediately put on the call-up list. Between August and October 1914, about 2,358 were recruited into the Territorials. They were sent all over Britain to fortify and defend the coastline from enemy attack whilst the New Regular Army was being equipped and trained.

Buckinghamshire territorials were sent to Portsmouth to defend the port and in November they went to the East coast to dig trenches to defend the beaches. In March 1915 they went to France to fight.

The combined number of recruits in Buckinghamshire was 3,463. This was about 5% of the total male population and 20% of those considered eligible (A number of men were in reserved occupations).

Ivor Stewart Liberty, local landowner and editor of "The Lee Magazine" expressed the view of many that the war would not last long. (CBS ref AR 81/2001; August 1914) A member of the territorials, he fought with the Bucks Battalion of the Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry and was awarded the Military Cross. He was invalided home following the amputation of his leg at the battle of Fromelles in 1916.

once and honour himself and us by enlisting.
From a merely worldly point of view the countryman who enlists now is providing for himself an entire change of life (which almost amounts to a holiday—for it is not for a long time), a knowledge of the world and his fellow-creatures, a strong and healthy body, a feeling of self-confidence and possibly a trip to India or Egypt. Those of us even who attach a supreme importance to the value of our own skins need not be very anxious as it is unlikely that we shall be called into the actual firing-line.

IVOR STEWART-LIBERTY,
Editor.



Lord Kitchener's iconic recruitment poster (fCBS ref D/X 1882) and recruits outside the Recruiting Office in Temple Square, Aylesbury (CBS ref phAylesbury243)

Recruitment meetings were held in village and town halls up and down the county. Posters, often quite emotive, were put up in all parts of the county and recruitment adverts placed in newspapers. Retired military leaders living locally and local dignitaries were called upon to give stirring speeches and explain the theory of modern warfare. Lord Desborough and the Marquess of Lincolnshire, both local men, were active in national politics as well as heading up the Territorial forces in Buckinghamshire.



Crowds in Market Square, Aylesbury watching the departure of the Territorials for Portsmouth in 1914 (CBS ref phAylesbury 1095)

Conscription.

In spite of the recruitment campaign not enough men were enlisting to meet the needs of the army. From a high in September 1914, when 462,901 men were enlisted, numbers fell dramatically to 55,152 in December 1915.

In January 1916 the Military Service Act became law. All voluntary recruitment ceased and every male British subject between the ages of 18 and 41 years of age were liable for military service. A large number of exemptions were introduced and local tribunals established where men could apply for exemption. The army was still 165,000 men short at the end of 1916.

In early 1918 the manpower crisis had become critical and men in essential services, such as coalmining, were called up and the age limit for conscription was raised to 50. In May 1918 all men born in 1899 and 1898 were called up and in June this was extended to those born in 1897 and 1896. The entry of the USA into the war helped alleviate this manpower shortage.

Exemptions

Men who had jobs in work that was crucial to the war effort were initially exempted from enlistment. Even so, the conflict of interests between the need for soldiers at the front and the need for labour at home was acute. Exemption Tribunals were set up in every district council in the county to consider the claims against being conscripted. The proceedings of these tribunals were published in the local newspapers.

Tribunals varied from place to place. The Chairman of the Chesham Tribunal was worried that his Tribunal was too lenient as its recruitment target was not being met. Figures for the period August to December 1916 show that 7520 claims were received across the county of which 1480 (less than 20%) were refused. Newport Pagnell RDC refused only 74 of the 514 claims for exemption that were submitted. By contrast Aylesbury RDC refused 150 out of 311 claims.

3. <u>Employer</u>	A.C.B.Watts 21. Market Square Aylesbury	✓
Boot and shoe maker.		
<u>Attested man</u>	Arthur C.B.Watts 21 Market Square Aylesbury	2 nd Group Rejected
	Electrician, now assisting in father's boot shop.	
<u>Group No.</u>	S.2.	
<u>Recruiting Officer's comments:</u>	The case is referred to the Local Tribunal for careful enquiries. In my opinion there is no case made out whatsoever as the man is put down as an electrician who is needed for a boot shop.	

Aylesbury District Tribunal: a case from January 1916. (CBS ref TA/7/25-26)

Billeting

The mobilisation of so many young men across the country coupled with the need to train and transport them by train and road to the channel ports gave rise to a need for accommodation for soldiers for anything from a few days to several months. At Halton vast tent camps were erected but also householders might be expected to take in one or more soldiers— this was called billeting. William Crouch, clerk to the county, reflected on the several soldiers billeted on him and his wife in Aylesbury from the early days of the war:

"During the first few days and weeks our house, like many other houses, was practically open to anyone who happened to be in Aylesbury in connection with the War... In the earlier days of the war we had two young officers of Kitcheners New Army billeted on us, and later when they had left Lord Addington and Sister Allen. Major Arnett was our billet for about six months. He was an Irishman.."

(from Reminiscences of a retired county official by William Crouch, 2010)

The government provided a billet payment to householders, but inevitably some found getting hold of the money difficult.

Local newspapers reported on the benefits to local traders brought by the numbers of soldiers staying nearby and also billeted in the town: at Amersham special events were laid on for the soldiers from Halton camp; at Tring the military presence brought a welcome lift to sales at an otherwise slack time of year; people at Chesham complained that soldiers were not being billeted in their town, implying they were missing out on the advantages the soldiers' presence brought to other towns.

This newspaper report shows how the soldiers presence enlivened the social scene and economy of Amersham (Bucks Herald, 21 November 1914)

TROOPS AT AMERSHAM.

The arrival of between 400 and 500 soldiers from Halton Camp on Saturday did much to enliven the town, and the inhabitants were intent on doing all that was possible for those who have patriotically responded to the call of the King by making the visitors comfortable and happy during their short stay. If the cheerful faces of the "Tomnies" count for anything, success has been achieved. The Town Hall, through the kindness of Mr. W. W. Tyrwhitt-Drake, has been laid out as a writing, reading, and games room; here light refreshments can be obtained at low prices, and it is scarcely necessary to say that great advantage is being taken of the convenience. The requirements of the soldiers are being attended to by an energetic committee of ladies. On Sunday there was a church parade and a special service at St. Mary's Church. Large congregations also attended at the Baptist Chapel, where special music was provided on Sunday evening. At the Conservative Club the troops have been welcomed, and the fine suite of rooms have been much used for writing, boxing, and games. Dr. Gardner, as chairman of the local Patriotic Association, has already received the thanks of Colonel Blewitt, commanding the troops—part of the 13th Battalion King's Royal Rifles. Further entertainments, etc., are in course of arrangement, and include football matches in aid of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association, and concerts. It is too early to predict the probable length of the stay of the troops, but there seems little doubt that it will extend over a few weeks.

Army Training Camps: Halton

Alfred Rothschild was a friend of Lord Kitchener and offered his park at Halton for a military camp. He had already made it available to the army the year before for the Territorials' annual summer manoeuvres.

Halton was the ideal place for a camp, having good road and rail links to London and the army quickly moved in. Using billets at Wendover the South Staffordshire Territorials pitched a large number of tents and, amid very basic conditions, the 21st Yorkshire Division of Kitchener's New Army moved in.

The new recruits for Kitchener's Army were found to be keen but also very unfit and not ready for active service. The army used training camps like that at Halton to toughen the men up and turn them into a strong fighting force. They spent months getting fit through drill and route marches, learning how to use guns and bayonets, building bridges and digging trenches. In November 1914 the camp at Halton became waterlogged owing to the heavy rain and the latrines overflowed. The men had to be moved out to billets all over Bucks.

In addition to the tents, semi-permanent huts were built in three different areas – two in Halton Park and a third at Aston Clinton Park, the home of another Rothschild. Halton Park covered 700 acres, and altogether there was enough space for 1200 men.

Between 1914 and 1916 over 25000 men passed through these camps. The camps at Halton were amongst the most important army training camps in the country.

Life in towns near army camps changed dramatically. There had been little motorised transport on the roads before 1914, but now there was constant movement of noisy trucks, which quickly damaged the roads not built for such vehicles. There was also the noise of hundreds of men marching to their various training areas, the sound of bugles and the shouting of NCOs. Some of the surrounding countryside was covered in trenches and holes where the men trained.

On the positive side, local shopkeepers did a roaring trade in tobacco, pipes, woollen socks and scarves. The barbers were kept busy giving 'short back and sides' and public houses were filled.



Halton camp (CBS ref pHalton80)