

THE CHALLENGES OF THE EAST DORSET HOME FRONT (1914-19)

By exploring the challenges faced by the people of Wimborne and the surrounding villages in creating and then maintaining a home front to support the war front, a different set of stories are revealed from those to be found when tracing the lives of the men whose names are inscribed on local war memorials.

The challenge for the people of East Dorset was to ensure that sufficient men were recruited for the Army and Navy without damaging the wartime economy (including agriculture) or undermining domestic morale. This meant dealing with increasing shortages of labour, food and fuel as well as coping with the relentless increase in the cost of living often without wage increases or war bonuses and with inadequate separation allowances (paid to the dependants of men in the forces). How did the people of East Dorset respond to these challenges, particularly to food and fuel shortages? Were people able to pull together or did the pressures of the war reveal more profound tensions? What was the effect of the war on the East Dorset home front? This essay explores these questions through the stories of some of the people who lived in East Dorset during the Great War.

Surviving on the home front

One of the biggest challenges for those on the home front was to make ends meet as daily life became increasingly unpredictable while also coping with the worry about male relations already at the front or who might be forced to go into the forces once conscription was introduced. The backdrop to this daily struggle was the unrelenting rise in food prices combined with increasing food shortages as the economic blockade began to bite. At the end of the war the Ministry of Labour calculated that between July 1914 and November 1918 the cost of living had increased by 120-125%, although the costs of some foods had increased much more, such as eggs which over the same period had risen by 412%. The *Western Gazette* reminded readers in Dorset that it wasn't just food that had increased in price, so had almost every other cost of everyday life. It was estimated that the weekly living expenses of a working-class family living in a town had increased from £2 4s 4d¹ at the outbreak of the war to £3 15s 5d at the Armistice with the costs of fuel and light and of

¹ It is hard to be precise about the current value of money in the past but as a guide:

£1 in 1914 would be worth £114.43 in 2019

£1 in 1915 would be worth £101.95 in 2019

£1 in 1916 would be worth £86.26 in 2019

£1 in 1917 would be worth £68.80 in 2019

£1 in 1918 would be worth £56.35 in 2019

(source: www.in2013dollars.co.uk/inflation)

clothing almost doubling. To give this some context in July 1918 the government's Agricultural Wages Board fixed a minimum rate for adult men working in Dorset of 30s a week working 48 hours in winter and 54 hours in summer². An agricultural labourer's household would have had difficulty meeting the government's assessment of average living costs during the war unless most family members brought in some kind of wage. In April 1915 the wife of a labourer was asked by Wimborne magistrates, during a case about the irregular attendance of her children at school, to state what her husband earned. She replied, 'He gets 14s, and Lloyd George's 4d has to come out of it!' – that was his National Insurance contribution. These were extraordinarily low wages for an adult man and well below the minimum that was to be set three years later.

Agricultural labourers were notoriously badly paid but in predominantly rural areas like East Dorset this could set a standard for other employers to also pay low wages. Although the government's calculation of the cost of living over the war showed that price rises were very slightly lower in small towns and villages than the national average, it was particularly hard for ordinary housewives to make ends meet when local wages were so low. This didn't just affect those who worked on the land. Other workers were also struggling: Alfred Rice, Wimborne UDC's road foreman, had been paid 26s a week when in May 1916 the Council agreed to increase his wages to 30s. Later in the war (May 1918), Rice again sought a pay rise to deal with the increased cost of living. He now asked for a further 5s a week and was granted a weekly war bonus of 3s a week – the assumption being that when the war ended so would the bonus. Wimborne UDC employed a number of people but disputes like these were all dealt with individually as none of these workers were unionised. The press didn't always report these demands sympathetically. As early as June 1915, two men working for Wimborne Council had argued that their present wages of 20s and 23s were insufficient to meet the increased cost of living and that they would leave their jobs if they were not granted an increase of 4s or 5s a week. The Councillors felt that the workers were exploiting the widespread shortage of labour caused by the war and refused to be 'brow-beaten' by their own employees. In the end the Finance Committee agreed to a war bonus for these men of 4s a week. The recreation ground caretaker, Mr Smith, whose wage was 21s weekly had had his request for a rise refused at an earlier meeting so he now announced that he would work to rule by leaving work at 5pm. The Council then agreed to pay him an overtime rate of 6d nightly, but there were doubts whether this offer would be sufficient. The report in the *Western Gazette* had the heading, WORKMEN AND THEIR WAGES: THREATS AND THE SEQUEL. Yet the effect of the rising cost of living forced local workers to continue to ask for an increase in wages although very few could threaten their employers in any way. Workers

² Using the historical currency calculator www.thisismoney.co.uk a 30s (£1.50) wage would be worth £102.27 today while the same calculator calculates that the Ministry of Labour's estimate of the weekly costs for a working-class family of £3 15s 5d in 1918 would be equivalent to £257.11 today. This gives some indication of how poorly paid agricultural labourers were.

on the East Dorset home front sought fair wages that would enable their households to survive as basic foods and fuel became increasingly expensive and/or scarce.

Households were the units of survival for most people with different generations living together in order to combine their resources. Aside from the wages of the men, women and children that we have already seen were working on the East Dorset home front, another contribution to the economic viability of a family was the separation allowance paid by the government to cover the missing wages of men serving in the armed forces. These payments were for the economic dependants of men (primarily wives and children and sometimes the mothers of single men). It took some time to translate the principle of separation allowances into shillings and pence in the household budgets of housewives at home. When they finally arrived, they were generally regarded as inadequate to compensate for the loss of the breadwinner's wages but did mean that those in greatest hardship did not have to turn to poor relief. The allowances were graded by the rank of the man – an officer got more than a private, with additional allowances for each child. The rates of allowances strove to keep up with the increasing cost of living. In October 1918, the local press reported that the War Cabinet had recommended increases in allowances to soldier's wives and dependents such as an extra 6s 6d for a childless wife unable to obtain work and an extra 5s for parents of unmarried servicemen.

This money was usually paid directly to women, and some resented this. At a meeting in Wimborne in July 1915, Lieutenant Marshall Hall claimed that within a twenty mile radius there were 500 women who were receiving twice or three times as much weekly from their separation allowances than they had ever done before the war. Moreover, within a few days of receiving their allowance some of these women had spent the whole of it and wanted to borrow. These kinds of stories were told across the country often twisted up with tales of the spendthrift tastes of munitionettes who were often represented as frittering away their 'excessive' wartime wages on fripperies. In East Dorset there is little evidence of local women flush with the riches of separation allowances. However, these comments are a reminder of just how low agricultural wages were so that what were viewed nationally as inadequate allowances could be seen rather differently in Dorset. In 1916, the Chairman of the Dorset War Agricultural Committee felt that 'the somewhat generous scale of separation allowances' was the reason for a 'growing distaste' for agricultural labour that he observed among local women.

For those in the greatest hardship the system of poor relief overseen by the Board of Guardians continued to function throughout the war. The effect of the rising cost of living was soon noted by the Wimborne Board of Guardians who in January 1915 decided to give the 'outdoor poor' – those who were supported at home rather than in the workhouse – an extra shilling for four weeks because of the increased price of coal. Later that year, the rising cost of living also prompted the Guardians to discuss whether they should cut back on what

they provided to inmates of the workhouse, substituting bread and cheese for a meat dinner.

Making economies

By the summer of 1915, it was clear that the war was not going to be a short-run affair. Managing the demands of the new home front for the long haul meant that there were now voices demanding economies. Meetings were held across East Dorset which urged local people to practice personal and household economy because 'money [was being] spent like water in every direction'. Instead people were asked to invest in War Loans. There was local discussion on whether this appeal for thrift was aimed at working men or at the population as a whole. Local landowner, Lady Wimborne, was one of the speakers urging thrift on others. Such lectures from the local elite did not sit well with everyone: the meeting at Wimborne had a 'disappointing attendance' while Mr W Burt of Witchampton said that it was a bit of a farce to talk about economy when the Government themselves were guilty of gross extravagance. Many of the better-off saw economy in a rather different way to the hard-pressed housewife struggling to feed her family in the towns and villages of East Dorset. In the summer of 1915, Lady Wimborne launched a 'Women's War on Luxury' aimed at 'titled people' who were asked to set an example by eschewing luxuries, new fashions, the use of motor cars except for charitable purposes, unnecessary entertaining at home and in restaurants while only employing manservants who were ineligible for military service. Wearing their Economy Badges, members of the Women's War Economy League were urged to influence their friends and families to practice economy. Although this got some local publicity there is no evidence that this particular initiative had much effect in East Dorset. However it did mark a range of ways in which increasing moral pressure was put on civilians to economise in their daily lives if the country was to remain resilient while fighting a war overseas.

In launching the scheme Lady Wimborne claimed that one of the great challenges in enforcing economy was the example of Government waste. She illustrated this with a rather revealing portrait of her household at Canford as well as of the social attitudes that underpinned the early demands for voluntary economy during the war:

In my own house there are 160 men quartered, and the amount of food thrown away is disgraceful. The same quantity of rations is allowed, no matter how many of the men may be away for week-ends. Five thousand men were encamped for one night in our park, and the agent said that it was almost impossible the amount of hay, bread, and other things they left behind them. Besides this kind of waste, we have municipal waste, such as the upkeep of public gardens and the planting of flowers, as if there was no war and people had endless leisure. We must save every penny we can, and the warm welcome our League has received in the few days it has been before the public is making us confident that the well-to-do woman is prepared to cope with waste as far as she can. Those who say that certain luxury

trades will suffer if our campaign is successful do not seem to realise that every capable worker is wanted in war trades, and that the demand for workers is so great that no-one, unless unemployable, need be idle. Even if certain trades had to suffer badly, I think that this would be preferable to having the Germans here, as is not unlikely if the strictest economy is not practised.

Demands continued in the press, pulpit and in local meetings for civilians to make economies in consumption, particularly of food and fuel. However for the first two years of the war the regulation of demand was left to the free market. By 1916 the effect of this could be seen in the regular reports of prices gained at Wimborne market. In February 'everything on offer sold at high prices Fruit and vegetables at very high prices'. By June, 'All kinds of garden produce very dear'. Short supplies and thus particularly high prices began to be noted too, such as of poultry in August. By November 1916 vegetables were very scarce and dear. Everyday food was in effect being rationed by price with the wealthy prospering at the expense of the poor. One bugbear was the role of wholesalers and middlemen interfering in local trade. That was the reason for the formation of the Wimborne and District Agriculture Cooperative Society formed in November 1915 to bring the agricultural producer into closer touch with the retailer and the consumer. It saw its role as encouraging the small holder and small producer, of which there were many within the district, as well as providing a market for their produce. At their first annual meeting an enthusiast for the scheme, Lady Wimborne, made clear to a local audience the extent of the challenge that faced them all. She argued,

The whole of the agriculture and food question was one of the weapons by which we must hope to win in the terrible war which was going on. Unless we could hold out with regard to food we could not hope to defeat the enemy for although it was important we should find men to fight, and munitions for them to fight with, it was also important that we should be able to secure a necessary supply for our people. She did not think that in the past the people of England had realised the importance of the food question. They had been so accustomed to get their food cheaply and easily that they did not trouble to enquire where it came from, but now at last, they were awake to the fact that more than half of their food came from abroad, and that there were very serious dangers in securing that food supply.

The economic blockade was now directly affecting everyday life, particularly shopping for food. When the German submarine offensive intensified in early 1917, the challenge became acute in everyone's home and now for government too. Despite demands for government intervention in the food supply from the outset of the war, it was only at the end of 1916 that the country's first Ministry of Food was established.

A food crisis

What were the local effects of the growing intervention of government in what was now a food crisis? Food Orders issued by the Ministry's Food Controller initially focused on trying

to control the worst effects of the crisis by setting maximum prices for particular foods wherever they were sold. These orders then had to be enforced at a local level. Mr WH Parham was appointed by Wimborne & Cranborne RDC to carry out these duties – he was later to become, in effect, their local food controller. In June 1917 he had already visited all of the 104 shops and inns in the Wimborne and Cranborne district to explain the regulations. He found that shopkeepers in the remote parts of the district were very imperfectly acquainted with the various Food Orders and were selling food stuffs at prices in excess of those fixed. This would open them to prosecution, although at this point Parham was satisfied that they were motivated by ignorance rather than profiteering – the new offence for which shopkeepers and shoppers could now be prosecuted and for which the consequence could be large fines and even prison. Anyone who sold food was now obliged to keep up-to-date with all the regulations.

Meanwhile, local people were encouraged to grow food themselves, particularly potatoes. Early in 1917 it was decided that Wimborne hockey ground should be turned over to allotments while rough ground opposite Victoria Road was also to be used to grow vegetables. The Council decided to allow allotment holders to have manure at 1s a load to help their endeavours. By March the following year it was decided to create wartime allotments from the land that had been acquired for an extension to Wimborne cemetery. In October 1918 forty two ratepayers petitioned the UDC to assist them in taking over some land adjoining Leigh Road, near St John's Church and Leg Lane. They said they wanted to establish allotments because some of them only had small gardens whilst for others the existing allotments were too far away to be of value. The allotments at Leigh and Oakley necessitated a tiring journey. The Council decided to approach the owner of the 2½ acre site to see whether they were willing to lease the land. If not they would proceed to use the compulsory powers they held under the Allotment Act.

As the Food Controller's orders multiplied, it soon became clear that the only way to make this new system of food control work fairly across the whole country was to make local authorities responsible for its implementation. Each council was required to set up a Food Control Committee in the late summer of 1917. East Dorset had two FCCs, one formed by Wimborne UDC and the other by Wimborne and Cranborne RDC. These bodies were supposed to represent the consumers' interest in the food crisis and were obliged to have a labour representative and a woman amongst their membership which had to be agreed by the Ministry. This arrangement was supposed to widen the committee from the 'usual suspects' and particularly local shopkeepers. In East Dorset, the Urban FCC had two representatives of labour (Mr Cribb & Mr Denning) and two women (Mrs Kemp & Miss Bartlett) while the Rural FCC consisted entirely of local councillors aside from Miss Style. There were local debates about how representative the FCCs were of ordinary people with the local branch of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) pressing for organised labour to be represented rather than the men who had been selected by the UDC. In February 1918

their demand was met when Arthur Young of the NUR joining an expanded Urban FCC. These committees lasted until well after the war. Their responsibilities grew as the system of wartime food control extended and moved relentlessly from voluntary to compulsory economising.

The biggest challenge everywhere was how to ensure that scarce resources were shared out fairly. Local FCCs had to find ways to make national instructions work which was as much about persuasion as direction. It was recognised that such fundamental changes in the home life of civilians would only work if there was broad consent. The government was rattled by the food queues and even food riots which erupted across the country, particularly in the severe winter of 1917-1918. Although there is no surviving evidence of either queues or riots in East Dorset, there were certainly extensive food queues in nearby Bournemouth and some form of queueing may have become so ubiquitous in and around Wimborne that it was hardly worth a comment except when such gatherings began to get out of hand.

East Dorset's FCCs got on with the business of food control – initially a voluntary ration was suggested which eventually became a compulsory nationwide system which covered most foods other than bread. In January 1918 the Rural FCC was trying to set up its own scheme for the rationing of butter and margarine. The national scheme was not rolled out until later in the year. At this point the Ministry advised the RDC that as it covered a rural area it should work together with the towns through which its supplies came. Therefore it was suggested that they should consult with Wimborne, Poole and Bournemouth to ensure that there was uniformity in action even if they did not operate a single scheme. It had already been learned that if the amount of a voluntary ration or the means to access it was set differently by nearby FCCs, then consumers would migrate across into other areas swelling the queues and exacerbating bad feeling.

Maintaining a sense of fairness between producers, retailers and consumers was a difficult line to walk. The Rural FCC told the Food Controller that the price of milk had been fixed too high and that everyone who kept a dairy should be compelled to produce a certain percentage of butter or supply the milk to make it. This suggests they were forwarding complaints from local farmers, some of whom were members of the FCC. In February 1918 the Urban FCC wrote to a local firm of grocers requesting them 'to be a little more fair in their distribution of cheese to customers'. Local knowledge was the key to making food control work. The FCCs also received letters from local people reporting their neighbours, for example an old woman was reported to the Wimborne Urban FCC as she was thought to be feeding her dogs 'the best of food' – it turned out to be cooked horseflesh. This was not an offence whereas if she had been wasting good food she could have been prosecuted. Wimborne's workhouse master asked for special consideration for the meat supply to the

institution as the proposed reduction would mean each inmate would only be allowed 8½ ounces of meat per head per week.

At the same time the Urban FCC was making efforts to establish a communal kitchen to provide meals for elementary school children. Many FCCs established communal kitchens, sometimes called central or national kitchens, where collective cooking led to significant economies on food and fuel as well as a reduction in waste. Many of these kitchens not only served take-away food but also set up restaurants so people could eat together at a low cost. These kitchens and restaurants were determinedly not charitable soup kitchens but were aimed at the wider population. Bournemouth had several communal kitchens as well as a national restaurant at Malmesbury Park. James Burns, the chairman of the town's sub-committee on Communal Kitchens, explained to readers of the *Bournemouth Guardian* why such provision was needed even in places like East Dorset. In January 1918 he described how on the previous Saturday morning, meat had suddenly disappeared from Bournemouth's butchers shops so that 'many households in this borough were compelled to observe a meatless day on Sunday, a very unique experience, I imagine'. There were already about 100 such kitchens across the country: 'they are intended further to provide against a sudden general failure in food supplies in which case they could be made available for the whole population. The sudden break in the supply of meat last week is a stern forewarning that we must forearm now and here'. Using a telling example he argued,

We have, as a nation, hitherto associated economy with the idea of saving money.

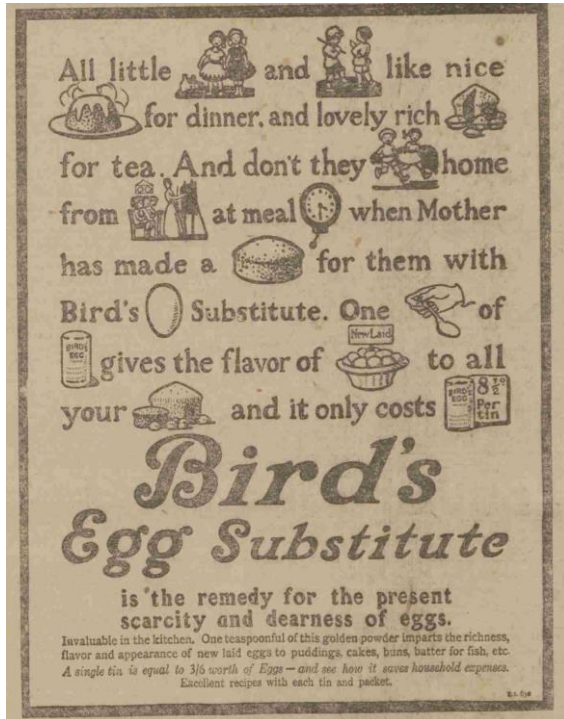
Today, for each and all of us, economy of food is the most vital problem. It has been pointed out that from the nation's point of view to burn a one pound note is

nothing, but to burn a crust of bread is to burn the nation's irrecoverable treasure.

However local councils were divided on whether to take action, so although Bournemouth proceeded with costing and then implementing provision Poole hovered unable to agree on whether the cost was necessary or the need apparent. In the smaller towns and villages of East Dorset there were varying responses. Some might have agreed with Shaftesbury Town Council's response to the Food Controller's call for more communal kitchens; 'The Corporation considered the conditions of Shaftesbury were so different from larger towns. Here almost every householder grew their own vegetables, and it was thought the kitchen would be of no advantage to the town'. Yet in Wimborne the FCC discussed establishing a communal kitchen for elementary school children while in Corfe Mullen the Food Committee set up a school kitchen in January 1918 to provide an appetising and nourishing two course dinner at a low cost to pupils who did not live nearby. On average 105 children were served daily by a band of ladies; 'the children....as well as their parents greatly appreciate what is being done for them in these days of food scarcity'. Cranborne had a similar scheme.

Voluntary economy becomes compulsory rationing

In the last year of the war East Dorset continued to have meetings urging economy in the use of food. Advice was also offered on how to cook in ways that saved scarce fuel or to manage without foods that were either short or too expensive to continue to buy. Foods were marketed to help the housewife deal with these new challenges. One example was Bird's Egg Substitute, 'a remedy for the present scarcity and dearness of eggs':



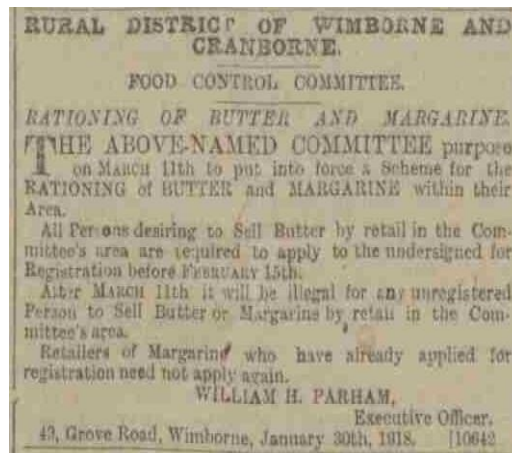
(Western Gazette, 28.12.1917)

There were also practical demonstrations such as the 'homely talk' on the best methods of saving and cooking food that was given to a large audience at the Minster Girl's School in January 1918. However, soon the issue was not just volunteering to eat less bread to aid the war effort or agreeing to observe 'meatless' days. Instead, the threat of compulsory rationing was becoming a reality. In January 1918, James Burns, had warned of compulsory food rations if people did not adopt communal kitchens:

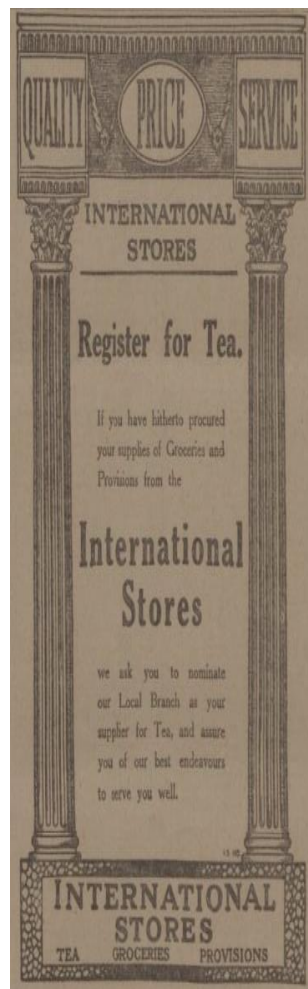
This is a prospect which no-one can contemplate without trepidation, as it would mean that we were face to face with starvation. At present it seems to be a remote contingency, but not one to be lost sight of. The only consolation we could enjoy at being forced to adopt it would be that we would rather do so than be beaten by Germany.

In the next months a system of rationing individual foods such as margarine and meat was devised – some started locally and some were responses to a drive to implement a uniform system across the country.

The implementation and policing of rationing was the responsibility of local FCCs. Adverts began to appear that informed local people of the new arrangements:



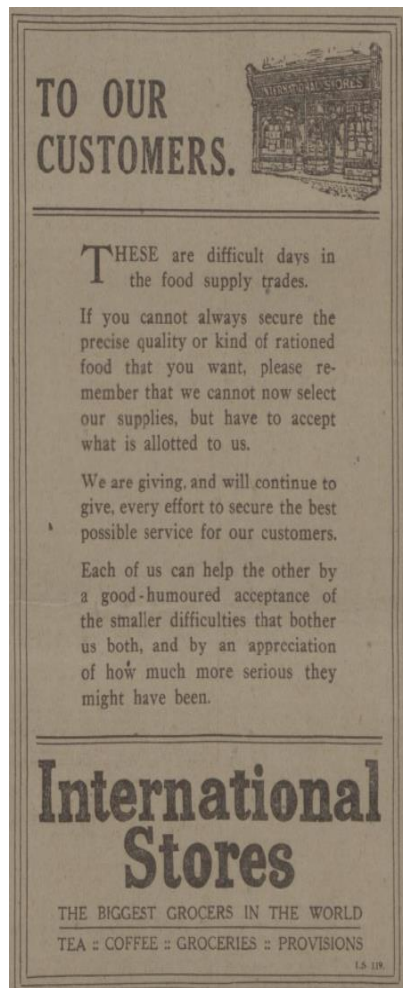
By March 1918 a Wimborne resident complained that a local shopkeeper had informed those who wanted to register with him for their butter ration (a new nationwide system was being established) that they would only be accepted if they also bought his milk. This kind of action by retailers was outlawed. Once rationing was introduced a consumer could only use their ration card at the shop where they were registered and a shopkeeper could not impose conditions on prospective registered customers. Stores were keen to get this local business. Those who could afford it took out adverts in local papers:



(Western Gazette, 7.3.1918)

Customers could apply to the FCC to transfer their cards to another registered supplier, but often these requests were for trivial reasons and the FCC declined to agree. Similarly residents could apply for an extra ration if they undertook particularly heavy work. In April 1918 Wimborne's Urban FCC received forty eight applications from railway workers for the extra ration. Meanwhile a farmer applied to the Rural FCC for supplementary rations for the three German POWs who worked for him as agricultural labourers. The Chairman observed that he supposed that if these men worked on the land they must be allowed the supplementary ration like other men. Each FCC had to conduct frequent censuses of their local population so that all who were eligible for a card for each rationed food had one and when people left the area or died their card was handed back. They also needed to know exactly how many retailers they had in their district. As each commodity came to be rationed, shopkeepers had to apply to be a registered retailer or dealer. For example the RDC's area had sixteen retailers of milk – nine produced the milk themselves, three produced none while four produced some and bought the rest. This figure did not include farmers who sold less than five gallons a day who were not required to register.

As the Wimborne district prepared for butter and margarine rationing, 2898 adult cards and 631 children's cards were issued. Initially it was said that 14 cwt of margarine would be sent to the district to be shared out amongst the retailers on the basis of the number of cards they held. A customer could only buy their allocation of whatever margarine or butter was available if they held a card. A room in West Borough had been acquired to store, cut up and weigh out the margarine. Meat rationing was managed across the Rural and Urban district with 14,000 cards being issued. If you wanted to make jam then an application had to be made for the special sugar ration, so that what sugar was available could be shared out equitably amongst those who had the necessary fruit. Preserving sugar could not be bought in the shops. Once it was clear that rationing actually eased the food crisis and stopped the desperate food queues of the winter of 1917-1918, there were requests for the system to extend further. In May 1918 the Urban FCC called for cheese to be rationed 'with a view to securing more equitable distribution' across the country as well as within districts. As people tried to settle into new routines, the larger stores urged patience on their customers:



(*Western Gazette*, 3.8.1918)

Shopping

Although Wimborne continued to be a busy market town during the war, it still had to deal with the growing food crisis. Conscription continued to affect how many shops were available to buy goods and this mattered even more once rationing began to be rolled out. In May 1918 the Rural FCC received a numerously signed petition from the residents of Verwood pointing out that if the local butcher, FC Cobb, was taken for military service the village and surrounding district would be left without any source of supply. There was no other butcher within a radius of 4½ miles. Cobb held the ration cards of 1,000 registered customers, yet the local Tribunal had decided he must go into the Army. West Moors was also reported to be similarly situated as its only butcher had also been called up for military service. He had 700 customers. Earlier in the war, it had already been claimed at a military tribunal that the number of bakers in Wimborne was as low as it could possibly be. Those bakers who remained had lost most of their male staff to the Colours.

Even if the butcher or baker was still trading, there was also an issue of decreasing opening hours of shops. In April 1918 Wimborne council called a meeting with local tradesmen in order to consider the question of early closing during that summer. The tradesmen agreed amongst themselves that shops would be open until 6pm on Monday, Tuesday and

Thursday, 7pm on Friday and 9pm on Saturday. These were reductions on pre-war opening hours but were meant to ensure that workers could access shops to use their ration cards.

Daily shopping was further complicated as new items were added to those that were now rationed:



Local people began to see a change to the experience of shopping as well as to the meals consumed at home or in restaurants and cafes. Comparing two surviving directories for the town of Wimborne – one early in the war (1915) and one just after the war (1920) – it is striking that there were at least thirty seven food shops of one sort or another (including eight butchers, four bakers & six confectioners, ten grocers, three greengrocers, one fishmonger) in the town. The effect of the war was to reduce this number by nearly 12% to thirty two by 1920. In addition to independent shops, there were also a number of branches of national or regional stores such as the International Stores, the New London Central Meat Company, and the Parkstone & Bournemouth Cooperative Society. There were also four refreshment/tea rooms whose numbers had nearly doubled by 1920 as well as two temperance hotels. The town also had many pubs and hotels. In 1916 at the magistrate's licensing session for Wimborne, it was stated that there were 78 houses in the locality that were licensed to sell intoxicating liquors which included alehouses and beerhouses where

you could consume both on and off the premises, as well as registered clubs. By 1918 that number had only decreased to seventy six.

Fuel shortages

Fuel shortages in East Dorset affected the heating and lighting of all homes as well as the cooking of food. In June 1917 Dr Le Fleming had suggested to the UDC that it should obtain a supply of coal that could then be sold to the poorer classes during the coming winter. However concerns about identifying a suitable store and finding men to do the necessary weighing coupled with anxieties about whether it was appropriate for the Council to become traders meant they did not proceed. Yet by September shortages of coal were being noted locally and the two local councils set up a joint Coal Control Committee, consisting of four councillors and a Wimborne coal merchant. First, as with food, the approach was to control prices, as one of their notices from November 1917 shows:



By April 1918 this committee was being asked to appoint a salaried officer to manage a scheme to ration coal. Housewives now found themselves advised on how best to make rationed coal last. One way was to wash clothes in cold water, which *Rinso* apparently allowed you to do:

NEW GAS AND COAL RATIONING.
DRASTIC REDUCTION FOR PRIVATE HOUSES.
HEAVY PENALTIES FOR INEFFICIENT USE.

Use Rinsol and save coal

Rinsol washes while you sleep

THE DIRT-DISSOLVER

YOU can't stretch your coal ration, but you can make the best use of it. Save the copper fire and you'll have more coal for kitchen and parlour.

Rinsol is a cold water washer and is as effective in cold water as more costly but less scientific preparations are in hot. Rinsol saves work and worry and washes while you sleep.

Just soak the clothes in Rinsol and cold water thoroughly, rinse and hang to dry in the morning. That's all.

SOLD IN PACKETS OF TWO SIZES.
 By all Grocers, Drapers, Chemists, etc.
 R. & B. HUDSON LIMITED, LIVERPOOL, WOLY SHERWOOD AND LONDON



The fuel ration, based on how many rooms one occupied, was reduced several times and was to continue into the years after the Armistice. Wasting precious fuel remained a challenge for all:

CINDERS
Save them all.

Every year millions of scuttles of cinders are wasted. Cinders are partly-burnt coal, and their heat value is 3 lbs. of cinders to 1 lb. of coal.

Unless you save the cinders you are losing a large part of your coal ration.

Statistics prove that the average waste is nearly two weeks' coal supply for each household.

Great economy is still necessary with Coal.

Issued by the Coal Mines Dept. of the Board of Trade, Holborn Viaduct, E.C.1.

6.12.1918

Nor was fuel the only commodity that people in East Dorset were urged not to waste. There was increasing moral pressure to not waste food, particularly bread, and to save materials

that could be re-used – in effect to re-cycle. By 1918 Wimborne's Waste Committee instructed the town's scavengers to collect and store all paper, cardboard and waste rags. To encourage this, the men were allowed to keep the money they could make from selling the waste paper. The collection of old tins was also being considered. Collecting waste food that could be fed to pigs was also being considered.

Tensions on the home front

In the last year of the war there was a growing sense that the unrelenting challenges of maintaining the home front and the necessary corollary of civilian morale could only be sustained if communities set aside their differences, if only for what was called 'the duration'. Some of those good intentions were beginning to fray as the Armistice came into sight. East Dorset was no different from other parts of the country, although perhaps the areas of tension in this conservative semi-rural area are more surprising.

In October 1918 Wimborne UDC was under pressure from local representatives of labour to begin to open up their deliberations beyond the rather narrow social group from which they had long drawn their members. The local branch of the National Union of Railwaymen put forward two nominees to represent the interests of organised labour on Wimborne's Food Control Committee. One, Arthur Young, was already a member. The Council decided to re-affirm the existing membership of the FCC rather than to directly respond to the NUR's request. They had received instructions from the Food Controller that there should be no more than three members of the FCC who were 'trading in any business of food manufacture or distribution'. Wimborne's response suggests some touchiness on the matter and a sense of a polarity of interests between trade on one side and labour on the other. The Council pointed out that 'there were only three tradesmen on the Committee, whilst labour was represented by three persons'. The issue remained who spoke for the interests of the ordinary consumer.

Similar tensions were also apparent at the Wimborne and Cranborne Rural FCC. In November 1918 they received a series of resolutions from local branches of the National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union (Hinton Martell, Shapwick, St Giles), as well as from Woodlands' Pig Club. Together they made a similar case:

In view of the fact that the majority of farmers are today sending in all their milk to town, and the consequent deprivation of the agricultural labourers and their families of the necessary supplies of milk and butter, this meeting urges that no milk should be allowed to be sold out of any village until proper provision has been made for the supply of local milk and butter to the inhabitants.

This made explicit two sets of tensions within rural communities: between farmers and labourers as well as between rural and urban areas. FCC members said they were sympathetic but 'had not the slightest power to deal with the matter'. The Executive Officer was instructed to write to the union branches requesting the names of families who could not get milk.

Although the railways and agriculture were rather different kinds of industry, the East Dorset home front shows that there were links between their workforces. It seems that it was actually through the encouragement of the NUR that the Agricultural Labourer's Union began to set up branches across the county. During the war the Poole railwaymen in particular were the catalyst for agricultural labourers to organise. One of the areas that responded to this drive was Woodlands in East Dorset. A meeting was convened by the vicar of Hinton Martell. This was remembered as a unique occasion because four vicars were present, with the chair being taken by Rev Knapp of Woodlands. As a direct result, four branches of the agricultural labourers union were formed. Moreover, at the end of 1918 when the Wimborne & Cranborne Rural FCC needed to replace a member who had died in the influenza epidemic they invited local branches of the Agricultural Labourers Union to provide a nomination. This shows that already the union was seen as speaking for, or at least linking to, local people. The union's choice was Miss EM (Ethel) Lucas. She was not a militant woman farm worker – there really weren't many women who can be so-described in East Dorset at this time, partly because many in agriculture thought that women had no place in the fields. The union reflected these dominant views, discussing women's place in the union in their journal *The Land Worker* in 1921. The most vocal supporter of women's place on the land was Margaretta Hicks who had come to work on the land in Hampreston during the war. Lucas was a rather different figure to the socialist activist Hicks: she was the sister-in-law of Rev Knapp. She had been a VAD and the war saw her increasingly involving herself in public work. After the war she was a member of the county's War Pensions Committee, the local RDC, and the Wimborne & Cranborne Board of Guardians. She remained a key part of her rural village of Woodlands.

Effects of the war on the East Dorset Home Front

By the end of 1918, it was clear that the experience of being a home front had marked East Dorset in various ways. The demands of the war had unsettled the local economy. Farms had had to be sold. In Longfleet a farm was offered for sale in 1917 because the shortage of labour had driven the farmer to give up dairying. Urban areas were affected too: the New Borough Restaurant was put up for sale because the owner had been called up. The trade was said to be good as the premises were close to the station and the market. However, it was not easy to find purchasers for businesses during the war.

Another effect of the creation and maintenance of the home front which is not dramatic in East Dorset but is still apparent was that women stepped a little further into civic life. Rumbling alongside the challenges and sorrows of the war, was the issue of who should be citizens in the new world that might emerge after the Armistice. In 1918 many men were added to the franchise but so were about eight million women. The East Dorset constituency faced the novelty of 12,000 women voters on the electoral roll in 1918. Four years before, some local women were already active in public life, such as Lady Wimborne,

but for others it was the war that made a difference. Women were drawn into serving on the many committees that helped to sustain the home front, whether supporting the Red Cross or enabling food control. In the short campaign in December 1918 that preceded the first general election fought on the new franchise, meetings were held in East Dorset to galvanise the new women voters. The sitting MP for East Dorset, Captain Guest, was the government-backed Coalition candidate. He held local meetings addressed by Lady Handley Spicer (wife of the founder of the patriotic boys organisation the Empire League; before the war she was a member of the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union and in 1920 was to be part of a notorious divorce petition against her husband). Guest's candidature was supported by a women's meeting in the Victoria Hall, Wimborne. Here the candidate was joined not only by Handley Spicer but also by his mother, Lady Wimborne. Not to be outdone Guest's rival, the Labour candidate (a novelty for East Dorset) also had a meeting solely for women in Poole having held other public meetings in Holt and Sturminster Marshall. However, these special meetings did not indicate as yet any fundamental shift in attitudes to women's participation in civic life. It was not until 1922 that the first woman was elected to Wimborne UDC: Margaret Munckton. Unlike nearby Bournemouth where their first woman councillor, Florence Laney (elected in 1919), had been particularly active on the local FCC, Munckton was not among those women who began to emerge into public life in wartime East Dorset.

The other aspect of the national home front that is also apparent in East Dorset is that working-class people began to be more vocal. Organised labour, in the shape of trade unions and the Labour Party become more confident despite a local culture of paternalism. This is most striking in the last year of the war. With a new extended franchise and the prospect of a general election once the war ended, working-class organisations began to organise in East Dorset. In January 1918, Wimborne was one of the areas where the cooperative movement formed an election committee working with the local Labour Party. The following month railwaymen in Wimborne met at New Borough Restaurant to form their own branch of the NUR. Hitherto, they had been part of the Poole branch. There was not the only trade union meeting in Wimborne. The Workers' Union (one of the more radical trades unions that had flourished in the war years, organising men **and** women in a wide range of manual trades) held a meeting in the Cooperative Hall in Wimborne in March 1918. This was presided over by W Kemp, a local activist in the NUR. Meanwhile, as we have seen, local agricultural labourers were also organising.

A different sort of organisation of working men was formed later that year in Wimborne which was also going to be significant for the local home front's transition to peace. This was a Wimborne branch of the National Association of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors. This was an increasingly militant organisation of returned ordinary servicemen (some wounded, some unemployed, many in distress) who began appearing on the home front well before the Armistice. They were a rank and file organisation with links to the labour movement who were determined to speak up for the ordinary soldiers and for the widows and

bereaved families of those who had died. A rival returning soldiers' organisation, the more official and less radical Comrades of the Great War, also formed a branch in Wimborne which by September 1918 had forty members out of Dorset's claimed membership of 400. These groups, particularly the Association of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors, were to lobby locally on behalf of soldiers who on demobilisation found it hard to get work when they returned home to East Dorset.

Political party organisation also began to be more apparent in East Dorset in the last year of the war. The national Labour Party admitted individual members for the first time in 1918 and began to organise at a grassroots level across the country. The chairman of Wimborne NUR, Arthur Young, presided at a public meeting held by East Dorset Labour Party in the Square in Wimborne in September that year. He was joined on the platform by WS Waller, secretary of East Dorset LP, and as well as a speaker from the Bournemouth branch of the socialist Independent Labour Party. These are markers of a relatively radical local LP. At the same time the local NUR was campaigning to get Young onto Wimborne UDC to replace a man who had left the district. The UDC were reluctant to agree just as they were when in October Young was also nominated by an increasingly vocal NUR branch to represent organised labour on Wimborne's FCC. Although it was noted in October 1918 that active party political work was still being held in abeyance because of the war, it is also clear that other political parties were organising. The East Dorset Liberal Association set up an executive committee with a man and a woman (in recognition of the new female electorate) in each of the polling districts of the area.

By December 1918 activity had stepped up a gear in preparation for the first post-war general election. Labour put up a candidate for the first time in East Dorset against the sitting MP, Guest. Wimborne electors were amongst those who signed the nomination papers of Alfred Smith, a trade union secretary from Willesden. He even had one set of nomination papers which only bore female signatures. Well-attended public meetings were held across East Dorset, including in Victoria Hall, Wimborne. He was presented to the meeting by two Wimborne citizens, WG Kemp and Mrs W Plowman, as a man whose principles were those 'upon which alone a sound, stable, prosperous, happy Commonwealth can be erected, the cause of International Brotherhood, lasting peace, prosperity, and happiness be attained, and the world be truly and lastingly made safe for democracy'. Among the issues commented on by the candidate was that he welcomed the extension of the franchise to women, was in favour of shorter hours for workers and believed that workers should be given an opportunity for recreation and rest. However, reflecting some of the tensions in the labour market, he objected to workingmen's wives going out to work to supplement the pension of a husband disabled in the war. It is not clear if he was arguing that these pensions were too low or that women shouldn't be competing with men in the labour market. He told the crowd the story of a man living on the outskirts of Wimborne, who had been in the same employ for twenty nine years. He had never had a day's holiday

yet recently he had had two days off to visit his son and on returning had been sacked. Despite appeals, he had been unable to get his job back. The Labour candidate, Smith, said of Wimborne, 'And yet it was said slavery was past in this country'. He also commented that some local housing and sanitation reminded him of the thirteenth century, to which a voice in the crowd shouted out, 'All over Wimborne'. The meeting then turned to one of the most pressing post-Armistice issues: housing. When the candidate was told that the plan to meet Wimborne's housing needs was to build twenty houses at rents of 8s 6d to 9s 6d, he commented that the number contrasted poorly with Willesden's plans to build 1,000 houses. He also thought the proposed rents were high. To acclaim, he said that he thought one day's wage should be sufficient to pay the rent, certainly not 8s 6d or 9s 6d in a country or rural district.

Smith also held local meetings at Holt and Sturminster Marshall, which prompted the comment in the *Western Gazette*, that 'The Labour element is stronger in the constituency than many people seem to realise'. This combined with the observation that many local Liberals were reluctant to return a Coalition candidate while high levels of apathy were noted among electors, meant the paper thought that the East Dorset constituency might produce an unexpected result. It didn't: Lady Wimborne's son, Captain Guest, was returned once again. However, there was a sense that the war had disturbed the settled hierarchies of the past and that post-war East Dorset might look and feel a little different.

A new era was beginning. After the Armistice the challenges of the home front continued because of food and fuel shortages, but now the unifying effect of being at war had gone. Significant tensions re-emerged as it was felt that not everyone had made sacrifices during the war, indeed some had profited. Slowly the soldiers returned and had to be re-integrated into their families and communities, as well as into the post-war labour market. The vast organisation of each local home front which had reached into people's homes, private decisions and daily lives, now had to be wound down. The new task for the country, including the people of East Dorset, was how to build and sustain the Peace.

Aftermath: the home front begins to wind down

The Armistice was signed on 11 November 1918. The battles ceased but this wasn't really the end of the war. Certainly, it did not end the home front. It took time for demobilisation to occur – in some places Peace Day in July 1919 was postponed as insufficient local men had returned home to take part in the celebrations.

In East Dorset the continuing dislocation of the labour market was apparent but caused less explicit protest or even discussion than elsewhere. The issue everywhere was whether demobilised servicemen would find their pre-war jobs still there and open to them when they eventually returned. The war had changed the economy. Businesses had gone or been significantly reconfigured to employ less people and to break down skilled jobs into less

skilled ones. Some demanded that those who had stepped up to take jobs vacated by men who had voluntarily gone to the Colours or been conscripted, should now return to their earlier employment. For women this often meant either returning to domestic service or to unpaid labour within the home. In nearby Bournemouth, the Trades and Labour Council protested that eight months after the Armistice there were as many as 1,200 unemployed in the borough of whom 800 were discharged soldiers. Some of their members were opposed to the continuing employment of married women if their husbands were also in work. One asserted that cheap female labour was being employed whilst men who had served in the forces were walking the streets with nothing to do. However, a local Councillor said he did not think that they were going to get women out of industry. He argued that the only solution was to see that they got equal pay for equal work. That year the local press wrote of an 'Unemployment Crisis' in both Bournemouth and Poole with deputations of the unemployed protesting to the Mayor of Bournemouth as well as lobbying by the Workers' Union and the newly formed Discharged Soldiers and Sailors Association. There were widespread demands for public works to employ unemployed servicemen.

In East Dorset the debate was more muted but dislocation and unemployment can still be found. Soon after the Armistice, adverts appeared from local men seeking work. A gamekeeper from Canford Heath needed a new situation in December 1918: 'Leaving through head-keeper returning. Married. Recommended by Lady Cornelia Wimborne'. A carpenter from King Street, Wimborne sought a job as a house or estate carpenter. There were still local shortages of labour – the issue was matching the vacant jobs to the swelling labour force. Bakers were still wanted by Cowdrey's in Wimborne while CP Henty Esq of Henbury Manor, Sturminster Marshall was looking for a middle-aged cowman to work with his Jersey cows in his private dairy. In addition Henty required the cowman's wife to make butter.

The volume of servants sought in East Dorset showed no sign of declining and seemed to indicate that some local families had not been too inconvenienced by the demands of the home front. Many of the same family names are to be found seeking domestic servants, before, during and after the war. The Bernard sisters lived in the twenty-six roomed High Hall in Pamphill. In 1911 the household had seven resident servants. Immediately after the Armistice they advertised for a lad of 15 or 16 'for indoor work under [a] parlourmaid. Wages 8s to 10s, according to age, with working suit and washing paid'. Later that month Mrs Philip Belben of Forest Hill, Corfe Mullen advertised for an under housemaid. 'Wages £24-£26. Six servants. Wait on school-room. Lift for meals'. In 1911, eight resident servants worked in this seventeen-roomed house as well as a governess. Philip Belben was part owner of G & T Belben Steam Flour Mills on The Quay, Poole. His household had not shrunk significantly over the war. He was Chairman of the management committee of the Cornelia Hospital, Poole but other than that there is no surviving record of his war service either in the military (he was 43 in 1914 so may have always been too old to be conscripted despite

the continued raising of the age limit) or as a volunteer on the home front. However, his business may well have been deemed to be in the national interest.

Other requests were to work in less grand homes as when Mr Brent, a widower, sought a housekeeper to work in what he called a 'working man's home' in Wimborne. There were still adverts for both male and female workers but often for the kind of jobs required before the war. A 'dairy chap' was sought to live-in at Longclose Dairy, Wimborne and Long Crichel Rectory wanted a cook of good plain food. Although discharged soldiers did advertise for work in the *Western Gazette*, none declared an East Dorset address. Yet that did not mean that the area did not experience unemployment as the war ended and both the war and home front began to be wound down. In February 1919 the local Labour Exchange requested Wimborne UDC to find as much road work as possible to employ the labour that had now become available. The month before the Surveyor of the RDC reported that there was real difficulty in obtaining enough labour to repair the roads at Cranborne. As a result the Council had applied for the early release from military service of the former road foreman, aged 45, who was serving in a Labour Battalion. The Army turned down this request so the Council appealed to the Ministry of Reconstruction for the man's immediate release. Later still a deputation from the local Trades & Labour Council told the UDC in June 1920 that there were still 160 men unemployed in Wimborne. Most of them were discharged soldiers. It was hoped that a local housing scheme could be started in order to put many of these men to work.

Moving from a war economy to one fit for peace took time. An Armistice could not halt food and fuel shortages overnight. Although controls were gradually lifted, some remained in place into the 1920s. Wimborne's FCC still existed in 1920 and the RDC only closed the offices of the Local Fuel Overseer the same year. Winding down a home front took time and it was local authorities who were tasked with taking the lead in their communities as national life was reconstructed (to use the language of the time). However, the story of how East Dorset re-built itself in the post-war years is for another time.