

## **EAST DORSET'S HOME FRONT**

### **War comes to East Dorset**

In 1914, the August bank holiday in Wimborne was quieter than usual. Yet suddenly there were anxieties about the possibility of war. Fewer holiday makers had come to the town because of the suspension of excursion tickets and special trains on Monday as well as a feeling of uncertainty. Many Wimburnians also stayed at home, with only about 400 railway tickets issued to holiday resorts although it was reported that a fair few spent the day at Poole. The war broke out on Tuesday, 4 August.

By Thursday, a crowded meeting was held at Victoria Hall, Wimborne, organised by the local branch of the Red Cross Society. The purpose was to recruit volunteers to act as hospital attendants and stretcher bearers as the town had been selected as a centre to receive the wounded. Preparations were already being made with fifty beds at the new post office while the Church House was to be used for stores. After seventy people came forward at this meeting, the gathering joined together to sing the National Anthem.

During August East Dorset began to organise despite not really knowing what a home front would entail. The *Bournemouth Guardian* described 'The War Cloud at Wimborne': 'The slight tinge of panic experienced in business last week has been dispelled by the assurances and actions of the Government'. 'A large body of lady workers' had begun to make garments, while Sergeant Major Stride enrolled recruits into the Army and drilled ambulance workers at Sturminster and Colehill. Hardships at home were anticipated, but not everyone knew how to respond. Cornelia, Lady Wimborne, one of the most influential figures of the district, purchased a large quantity of flour for distribution among the poor should it become necessary. Wimborne Urban District Council (UDC) put off a decision as to whether it should set up a local branch of the Prince of Wales Relief Fund to deal with the economic distress caused not only by the rapid mobilisation of men for the armed forces but also by the unemployment which it was feared would result from the move to a war economy. Although Wimborne's councillors, largely local businessmen and tradesmen, could not anticipate what war would mean for the town, they were already dealing with its effects. A number of their male employees had volunteered and replacements had to be found. One was Mr Osman, the caretaker of the recreation ground. Later in the month the UDC and Board of Guardians decided to join together to raise funds for the Prince of Wales Relief Fund and to take steps to meet local distress caused by the war. Their main concern was to prevent any overlap of effort. In the first days of the war the people of East Dorset found it hard to imagine the challenges that the next four years would bring. This was an entirely new and unanticipated experience.

### **The home front in 'total war'**

The Great War was a new kind of warfare from the outset. It affected everyone in their daily lives - not just the military but civilians too - men and women, the young and the old. It was

fought on two interlinked fronts: the war front and the home front. Indeed, sustaining a robust home front was vital to winning or at least not losing this war. This was 'total war'. It applied to all belligerents in what was a global war. So what did that mean for people living in East Dorset?

Far away from the trenches, people in East Dorset were not only affected by the country's overseas battles, but were also participants in the war. Each nation had not only to keep providing men to replace dead and wounded soldiers, it also had to organise itself to equip and feed an army at the front. At the same time this could only be achieved by sustaining a civilian population to work the long hours required to produce not only the weapons but also the uniforms, the food and everything else needed by the military. There therefore had to be enough food and fuel to maintain the health, and, as importantly, the morale of civilians. It was essential to keep the support of the people if the hardships of the home front were to be borne. Otherwise there might be food queues, riots and worse. In 1917 food riots sparked the Russian Revolution, brought down the Tsarist regime and took Russia out of the war. The government could not afford for that to happen in Britain. It became increasingly clear that the war front could not succeed without a sustainable home front.

Each belligerent recognised that the home front of their enemy was a potential point of vulnerability. Right from the outset of the war, both sides exploited this by enforcing an economic blockade at sea. Britain, as an island, was particularly vulnerable to this strategy particularly once the Germans deployed U-boats against merchant as well as naval vessels. The British home front could be undermined by the loss of shipping bringing basic foodstuffs to a country that in peacetime had been heavily dependant on imported food. The challenge was how to create and maintain a home front in the neighbourhoods, workplaces and homes right across Britain when faced with a significant proportion of men of working-age volunteering and later being conscripted into the Army and thus disappearing from the workforce. How did the market towns, villages and scattered settlements of East Dorset meet this challenge? How did they respond to the increasing privations and demands made of them as the war dragged on?

Local people understood that this was a new kind of warfare, in which civilians had a crucial role to play in their daily lives. What follows explores how East Dorset coped with this new kind of warfare. First, the focus is on who made up this home front and the different ways in which they contributed to or were affected by the war. Then I will turn to identifying the local challenges of the home front and consider how the people of East Dorset responded over the war years and into the peace. Using local newspapers, particularly the *Western Gazette* and *Bournemouth Guardian*, and records of local organisations the stories of some of those who made up the East Dorset home front are told for the first time.

## **WHO WAS ON THE EAST DORSET HOME FRONT?**

It is often assumed that the cities, towns and villages of England were soon depleted of men of military age as a rush to volunteer followed the outbreak of war, leaving a largely feminised home front supplemented by old men and boys. This is a myth, and certainly does not describe the East Dorset home front even as the war dragged on with the Army making more and more demands for men. The local press reveals that the towns, villages and scattered settlements of East Dorset were populated by men, including those of military age, as well as women and children. These were not just people who had grown up in the area. People left this part of Dorset to get work or to contribute to the war front, whether as soldiers or nursing auxiliaries. Meanwhile strangers arrived or passed through East Dorset: billeted soldiers, Belgian refugees, foreign-born 'aliens' and their families, holidaymakers, gypsies, tramps as well as those who came to take jobs in the area. Counter to many assumptions, there was considerable mobility on the home front including in the more rural parts of the country.

### **MEN ON THE EAST DORSET HOME FRONT**

In many parts of the country there was fear that the war would disrupt the local economy and would lead to unemployment and financial distress. Yet there does not seem to have been widespread economic disruption in the opening weeks of the war in East Dorset. The war only began to affect the local labour market gradually. What did this local labour market look like? Over the war, adverts in the local press show that jobs were and remained highly gendered. Many men worked in agriculture, whether as farmers, labourers or at particularly trades such as a carter, or operating a threshing machine. In the towns and villages, all sorts of jobs were needed from labourers to bakers, clerks, postmen and shopkeepers, clergymen and journalists. In 1914 these were generally understood to be male occupations. In contrast, most jobs advertised for women to work locally were for servants from parlour-maids to cooks. There were also particular jobs targeted at boys or at girls.

Looking at the wartime labour market in East Dorset, it is clear that men of military age had not disappeared from local neighbourhoods. In this respect this part of Dorset was not so different from other parts of the home front. From 1916, with the introduction of conscription, the cases of the many men who sought temporary or absolute exemption from military service reveal the range of jobs still filled by men of military age. In the early years of the war employers in East Dorset clearly felt that they controlled the market and could make demands on potential employees. Cowdry's of Wimborne sought young bakers to assist in the bake-house and make deliveries. Applicants not only had to have good references but must be abstainers (from alcohol). The 'Dairy chap' wanted in Hampreston should not only be a good milker but also an early riser. The baker required by Mr Porkiss at the Central Supply Stores at Sixpenny Handley had to be used to the country trade, to be a good moulder (of bread) as well as respectable and honest.

In the early years of the war there were occasional adverts that acknowledged vacancies created by the conflict. The occupant of Forest Hill, Corfe Mullen advertised in September 1914 for a groom 'wanted to fill a situation only vacant during this war'. As with many advertisers, the offer was very precise: 'A light-weight who is competent to teach riding and willing to assist chauffeur.... No accommodation for a married man available and no man eligible for military service need apply'. Yet in 1916, men were still sought for a wide range of jobs. Some indicated that a man was sought who was ineligible for the army, such as the gardener wanted for Stoneleigh House, Wimborne who must be 'good at vegetables, flowers and fruit. Strong. Willing to make himself useful'. Amongst the adverts for white collar jobs, a smart energetic man (ineligible for military service) was sought to manage the newly formed Wimborne & District Agricultural Co-operative Society. Preference would be given to someone who had had practical training as an assistant or sub-manager to a similar society. The commencing salary was £150 per annum, with commission on net profit. Others made no qualification about ineligibility for the Army, such as the nurseryman who sought a garden labourer and strong lads for nursery work. Men were needed for claycutting at Pits, Corfe Mullen and to learn confectionary making by a Wimborne baker. Barford Dairy in Wimborne sought a lad to help milk and to drive the milk cart. It was promised that he would be treated as family. By 1918, it was clearer that jobs were only open to men who were ineligible for the Army, such as the man who was wanted to look after two horses, carriages and a small garden at the Red House, Sturminster Marshall. Similarly Dibben's of West Street, Wimborne required a striker and a good nailor-on for their shoemith's shop.

### **Men still on the home front: evidence from the local military service tribunals**

Reports of the cases before two local military service tribunals for the area (Wimborne Urban, and Wimborne & Cranborne Rural), show that two years into the war there were still a significant number of men on the home front doing a wide range of jobs. In October 1916, the Urban Tribunal considered the cases of a chemist's apprentice; a manager of a building and sanitary engineering business; an organ builder, tuner and repairer; a draper's salesman and window-dresser; a market gardener; a shoeing and agricultural smith; a land agent; a managing clerk of Bankes' Settled Estates; an agricultural repairing engineer; a plumber and sanitary engineer; a carter at Walford Mills; a carman who delivered coal; and two bakers of bread. The youngest was 18 and the oldest was 38 years old. Many were part of a household economy that stretched across the generations: four worked for their fathers while one was employed by his father-in-law. There was some overlap with these jobs and those revealed by the cases heard by the Rural Tribunal the same week in October 1916. These included the following: an engine-driver; stockman, milker & calf-rearer with full management of bulls; a proprietary nurseryman, fruit grower and seed expert; a jobbing thatcher; a fruit gardener & market gardener; a builder; a pit-wood carter & small-holder; a partner, grocer & baker; market gardener; carter; cowman & help at farm; master butcher & slaughterman; single-handed butcher; brick-manufacturer's partner; farm manager of a 180-acre farm; small holder & master-woodman; carter; shepherd; and two dairymen. The age

profile was also similar: the youngest was 18 and the oldest was 38. Four worked for their fathers.

The cases before the Tribunals during the first year of conscription, not only show how greedy the war front was for more men to replace the dead and wounded but also gives us a snapshot of the state of the home front two years into a war that seemed like it would never end. Many businesses in East Dorset had already lost many of their male workers. One example was a Wimborne bread baker, aged 30, who explained to his Tribunal that five out of seven of the bakery's employees had joined the Colours. Although, the bakery was now employing women as far as possible, some work was considered only suitable for men. This particular man was the only one left to do all the work of the bake-house. The Tribunal granted him conditional exemption.

One of the grounds for exemption that any Tribunal had to consider was whether the conscription of a particular man would cause domestic hardship to his family and any other dependants. Locally, the case of a 32-year old thatcher from Sturminster Marshall was not unusual. He was a single man who was the sole support of his widowed mother. The Tribunal rejected his case and he faced immediate call-up. Other men, who earlier in the war had been rejected as unfit for military service, now found themselves recalled. One example was a single 32 year old man employed as a draper's salesman in Wimborne. He had heart disease and had been given a low medical grade, C3. He also kept his widowed mother. Neither protected him from the call-up. The Tribunal said he should now go into the Army as his work could be done by a woman. His employer argued for his employee, saying, 'A girl could not be sufficiently experienced for the position, and it would mean almost getting an old woman'. Despite this threat, the man's case for exemption from military service was rejected because his work was not deemed indispensable.

Many cases show how the war had affected the ways in which local businesses were conducted. Labour shortage was a pressing problem in rural and urban areas. The Wimborne firm of Messrs T Ensor & Sons, auctioneers and valuers, had by October 1916 lost twelve of its thirteen staff leaving one 40 year old married man to do all the work: all the selling, a great deal of clerical work as well as valuations. The employers made the case at the remaining man's Tribunal that women could not act as auctioneers, to explain their failure to employ women. The Mayor said to laughter that Lady Shaftesbury had acted very successfully as auctioneer at a recent jumble sale for the British Farmers' Red Cross Fund. The man was granted a further three months exemption, but no suggestion was made that the company make more use of women workers.

By this stage of the war single-handed businesses had become common as all other men of military age had been stripped out. One example was a 35 year old grocer and baker from Verwood who earlier in the war had been passed for sedentary work only. His case was that he now worked a grocery store single-handed and that the business would be closed if he

was called up. This in turn would mean the loss of the capital that had been invested in the business, partly by his three single brothers who were all serving in the forces. The man's two other married brothers ran a bakery business and had been conditionally exempted from service. The Tribunal weighed up the needs of the Army versus those of the local wartime economy, and granted the man a temporary exemption of about two months to make the arrangements for his business to continue in his absence.

The definition of a man's 'indispensability' to his employer or to his family was to trouble many Tribunals. The local Rural Tribunal decided in March 1916 that Lord Allington's foreman gardener at Crichel was not indispensable despite being the sole support of his widowed mother to whom he gave ten shillings weekly. He was told that his mother would get about the same sum once he was in the Army. In May 1916 Albert Polden claimed exemption at the Wimborne Urban Tribunal on the grounds that he was indispensable to the food supply. He was given temporary exemption from the call-up until the end of October that year. A contrasting case was that of Edward Price, 29 and married, who sought exemption on the grounds of his business being absolutely necessary and of national importance as it supplied food to the general public. The Tribunal decided that being manager of the Wimborne branch of Eastman's retail butchers at 6, East Street did not make Price indispensable, as they believed a man above military age could be found to do Price's work.

### **Food production, the local Tribunals and a strike**

Cases before the East Dorset Tribunals in 1916 reveal a common complaint in rural areas that farmer's sons, commonly thought to be idle, were being favoured for exemption from military service. Landowning farmers were generally believed to use their extensive influence on rural Tribunals to protect their own and other farmer's sons from the call-up. They showed no equivalent sympathy for the cases of hard-working agricultural labourers or the sons of tenant farmers whose work was essential to the economic viability of their households and to the enterprises in which they worked. A local case of such favouritism gained considerable publicity in September 1916. Several well-known farmers' sons who had previously been 'starred' (exempted as doing work of national importance) had their exemptions withdrawn by the military. Their cases to remain exempted from military service were heard by the Wimborne & Cranborne Rural Tribunal. The Military Representative told the Tribunal that he was under instructions from the War Office not to call up 'men in agricultural pursuits' until after the harvest. The first case to be considered was that of Douglas Kent (33 and single) who was described as working and managing two combined farms of 881 acres, acting as bailiff and working in partnership with his father, WD Kent. Douglas's father was one of the great and the good, being both the Agricultural Representative on this particular Tribunal and a Dorset County Council Alderman. The Advisory Committee, which considered each Tribunal case in advance, recommended that Douglas's exemption should be withdrawn as they did not consider him to be indispensable. His father challenged this, claiming that his son was in a certified occupation and that as a

74 year old he could not manage without Douglas. As the applicant for exemption, WD Kent was questioned by the Tribunal: 'Is it fact that your son has been hunting several days a week?' Kent replied, 'Not last winter. He only went out two or three times all last winter when they were close at home. If he goes hunting he always does his work just the same. You can't make young fellows have no fun at all.' The Tribunal was not convinced, turning down the request for exemption on the grounds that Douglas Kent was not indispensable and therefore should go into the Army.

Kent's father immediately announced that he would appeal against this decision. The Dorset Appeals Tribunal overturned the local decision and granted Kent a temporary exemption until 31 March 1917. This was a wealthy farming family: the farmhouse had thirteen rooms and in 1911 housed two domestic servants in addition to the family. Douglas was an only son although he did have a sister. He must have managed to maintain his exemption and does not seem to have served in the Army. He was on the electoral roll after the war and died in 1976. This was not the only case of this kind in East Dorset. Meanwhile WD Kent remained an influential local figure, speaking out against what he saw as 'the insuperable difficulties' posed for local farmers by the Cultivation of Lands Order 1917 which demanded the ploughing up of grassland in order to grow more food. At a meeting at the Griffin Hotel, Wimborne in June 1917 the local district commissioner of the Board of Agriculture had told local farmers including Kent that 'sacks of corn were as important as shells at the present time to win the war, and he appealed to the farmers' patriotism to help the Government in the present crisis.' This might mean giving up their sons to the Army as much as turning over their grasslands to growing staples such as potatoes and grain.

The case of Kent and others like him disturbed the Wimborne and Cranborne Rural Tribunal. It became increasingly unhappy about the choices it was being forced to make when faced by the tension between the voracious demands of the military and the emergency of a growing food crisis where the government demanded increases in food production from an industry which was suffering severe labour shortages. This Tribunal balked at the suggested system of substituting men into agriculture who were unfit for military service in order to release any fit single men who remained in farm work. Very unusually it chose to go on strike to make its point and refused to hear any cases from June 1917 onwards. Their complaint was that substitution was not working effectively. The Tribunal was particularly concerned that the higher Dorset Appeals Tribunal was overturning local cases where further exemption had been refused to farmers on behalf of their single sons. By the end of August the Tribunal offered its resignation to the RDC because no substitution was now allowed in agriculture. This meant that fit single men - just the men wanted for the Army, they said - could not now be taken to fight for the country. For the Wimborne & Cranborne Rural Tribunal, the unjust consequence of this new regulation was that married men, many with families, had to break up their homes and businesses to fight for their country when it was single men without responsibilities who should be joining the Colours. The RDC

accepted the resignation of the whole Tribunal but with forty appeals pending had to take steps to appoint a new Tribunal. As the Council felt that the Tribunal had 'given every satisfaction', its members were asked to accept re-election en-bloc, but this request found no support. They said they could not continue in office 'as it only meant a waste of time'. One member of the Tribunal claimed that there must be thousands of disabled soldiers who could take the place of these young single men, releasing them for military service. Revealing the tensions within the local community that conscription had exacerbated, he protested that the Tribunal had to send to the front struggling tradesmen, often 40 years old and with a family, but could not touch any of these young men said to be employed in agriculture. The RDC decided to inform the Local Government Board that the Council did not propose to elect another Tribunal and to leave the matter in their hands. In September the LGB was still consulting with the Board of Agriculture and hoped that the Tribunal would reconsider its resignation. The government also threatened that as a last resort compulsion might be used because of the national interest. The Tribunal members said that they would only reconsider their position if all single men of A & B1 class (the highest grades of military fitness) were allowed to come before them and have their individual cases gone into on their merits.

By the end of 1917 the Wimborne and Cranborne Rural Tribunal was meeting again although references were still being made to cases that had not been heard earlier because of the strike. The Tribunal continued to argue that every case relating to agriculture should come before the local tribunal and be dealt with on its merits, although by now a system was operating whereby the Dorset War Agriculture Committee (WAC) issued certificates to individual men who worked in agriculture which absolutely exempted them from military service provided they remained in their occupation. However, as a case before the Tribunal in December 1917 showed, the issue of what constituted agricultural work was not straightforward. In East Dorset, there were all sizes of agricultural enterprises from large farms to smallholdings. A case brought about men working at Leigh Vineries raised questions of whether growing grapes and tomatoes was work of national importance. Although the Tribunal was told that the Vineries produced sixty to seventy tons of food a year in their miles of glasshouses, it remained sceptical and surprisingly ignorant of this important local business. In an earlier case for a worker at Leigh Vineries, the Chairman of the Urban Tribunal had asked whether grapes were luxuries and had been told by the representative of the worker: 'They are very suitable for the sick'. Brief and final temporary exemptions were given because it was expected that by the end of the year there would be sufficient experienced men and women to enable the Vineries to grow tomatoes, grapes and flowers on a commercial scale.

Market gardening continued to be an important part of East Dorset's contribution to the maintenance of the home front. Yet many Tribunal cases show a reluctance to recognise this kind of work as being of national importance. The comments were usually about the relatively small scale of the operation which suggests that Tribunal members, many of



whom were farmers or landowners, understood agriculture in a narrow way as the farming of tens or hundreds of acres. Yet market gardeners regularly made their cases to East Dorset's Tribunals. At a case brought by a market gardener in July 1917, the Military Representative said that it was nothing short of a scandal that tomatoes should be charged for at the rate of one shilling per pound. He said that they were a luxury, which people with money would have, and he claimed that there was no need to grow them.

In another example of small-scale food production on the home front, some local landowners in East Dorset converted their private greenhouses to produce food. Lady Cornelia Wimborne turned her greenhouses at Canford into a rabbitry in 1916. However, others continued to employ and seek exemption from military service for their own gardeners. In 1916 private homes in the area, such as Stoneleigh House, Wimborne, were still advertising for gardeners who were 'good at vegetables, flowers and fruit', although it was noted that the man should be ineligible for the Army. The wife of the Chairman of the Rural Tribunal, Mrs HJ Mills, applied on behalf of her head gardener at The Knole, Corfe Mullen in June 1916. The whole of the four acre garden had been turned into a nursery. Most of the flowers had been got rid of and tomatoes, cucumbers, and all sorts of vegetables had been substituted. These were for sale and for wounded soldiers. The fruit had always been given to the hospitals. Conditional exemption was given to the Mills' head gardener as the Tribunal considered the circumstances exceptional. Sir Richard Glyn also obtained a conditional exemption at the same Tribunal for his head gardener. He was responsible for six acres of vegetable gardens, with some of the produce going weekly to the hospitals for wounded soldiers. Gardeners for domestic homes were still being sought in Sturminster Marshall in July 1918: a discharged soldier was preferred.

Another issue that particularly affected rural areas was the accusation that some men were moving to work in agriculture in the hope of avoiding military service. In June 1916, the local Rural Tribunal heard the case of Hubert Kerley of Shapwick. He was 27 and newly married. The Tribunal said that as he had only recently taken to farming (in May), this was taken as evidence that he was avoiding his duty. The Tribunals were supposed to have local knowledge, yet because Hubert's case was made by his employer, he was unable to explain what we can see in the 1911 Census: Kerley had a strong background in agriculture with his father and brother working as agricultural labourers while he had been a horseman on a farm. In the 1920s he and his wife Lily lived in Winterborne Zelston, so he clearly survived the war and may well have remained on the home front working on the land as Tribunals were soon instructed to take a different attitude to farm workers.

### **Dealing with labour shortages on the land**

Late in 1916 the Board of Agriculture announced a temporary moratorium on the conscription of men from agriculture in order to maintain the production of food supplies. Dorset's WAC oversaw a census at the beginning of 1917 to establish how many men of military age were still working in agriculture while the War Office produced a tariff for the

guidance of Tribunals of the minimum labour-force required on a farm for the number of stock kept or acres tilled. Wimborne RDC was asked what additional land could be brought into cultivation if labour and machinery were provided and what further land could be brought into cultivation for the 1918 harvest. It was also asked about the facilities available to house German prisoners if they were to be employed on local fields. However the local Rural Tribunal was not yet persuaded to enable men to begin the necessary 'ploughing up'. In January 1917 Harold Wagner, a 29 year old smallholder of Three Cross, asked for exemption until the end of March to 'plant up the farm'. Harold had previously been a theatrical manager and actor and had been given exemption by the Staines Tribunal to support his brother who had been discharged from the Army with consumption. The brother had no pension. Wagner and his wife complained that they had sustained a heavy financial loss while nursing his brother. The brother had now died and the couple wished to recoup their position with this new enterprise. The application was refused because the land had only recently been taken and had not yet been broken up. Wagner had to go into the Army. Some complained that it was hard to find substitutes despite the labour shortage because of local conditions: a farmer at Bradford, near Wimborne, said that as his farm was 1½ miles from the nearest village 'men not used to it could not put up with the loneliness'. These employers hoped that as a consequence they would be able to keep their experienced agricultural workers.

Other kinds of workers were urged on Dorset farmers who from 1917 were instructed to identify 55,000 acres in the county to plough up to grow much-needed food. These additional workers were soldiers released for particular tasks such as harvest as well as women and prisoners of war. The village women who were urged to step forward to help on farms and small holdings in August 1916 amounted to over a 1,000 across the county but they are not very visible in East Dorset. Instead many farmers looked to mechanical assistance. In October 1917 after the land had been identified that was to be ploughed up for cultivation for the 1918 crop, there were still local farmers who complained that they had insufficient horses or labour to do what was asked of them. Dorset now had thirty three tractors at its disposal, a significant increase from earlier in the war. By March 1918 that number had risen to sixty five when the WAC claimed that three quarters of the target acreage to be ploughed up for food production had now been achieved. At this point a large scheme was set up for the employment of German prisoners. Yet two months later WAC announced 'one of the severest blows they had received since the beginning of the war'; an extra 30,000 men were now to be called up from agriculture across the country. WAC claimed the supply of labour in Dorset was already 'at bedrock'.

### **Other men on the local home front: the COs**

Another group of men on the home front were the conscientious objectors (COs) – now thought to have numbered about 20,000 across the country. Many quietly lived and worked on the home front until the introduction of conscription forced them to declare their

objection to war, whether on moral, religious or political grounds. Britain was unusual in allowing for conscientious objection as one of the grounds for seeking exemption from military service. CO cases were rarely heard by the two Wimborne Tribunals, although there were many more over the border in Poole. Nevertheless, there remain indications that some were unhappy about being conscripted into the Army. Percy Todman, a 24 year old grocer's assistant from Cranborne, told his Tribunal that one of his brothers had already been killed in France, another's health had broken down during training, while a third was now serving overseas. He feared that if he joined the Army 'he would go under as he was not strong'. When his application was refused he said that 'he had an awful dread of military service or killing anyone'. Sidney Lane of Crendell, a hamlet near Alderholt, was a 29 year old hurdlemaker whose case was heard by the local Rural Tribunal. When he was called up he said he was an objector to combatant service believing it to be as harmful to kill a German as an Englishman. He also had health problems. His objection was not accepted and like many COs he did not answer his call up. His record shows that he was accepted into the 31<sup>st</sup> Bucks regiment in Dorchester in March 1916 but was discharged from the Army by August that year as medically unfit for further medical service. He returned to live in Crendell where he and his father had been born. He was still a hurdlemaker in 1939.

It is not clear whether Lane formally identified as a CO. Doing so in East Dorset would not have been easy as local opinion does not seem to have been supportive: when the RDC was asked in May 1916 whether it would be willing to employ COs provided they were suitable for the job, the Clerk was instructed to reply in the negative. However, others were less hostile. Later that year in August, a petition urging the government 'to seek the earliest opportunity to promote negotiations with the object of securing a just and lasting peace' was placed in the porch of the Wimborne Baptist Tabernacle and circulated in the neighbourhood for signature. The Pastor was said to be responsible for promoting this initiative of the Peace Society. Although 250 people had signed, there was a difference of opinion among local Baptists on the wisdom of such a petition at that time.

Local men still occasionally made a case that they were COs. The Rural Tribunal heard the case of Markham Holman, a 20 year old single farm hand. He claimed to be a CO in October 1916 and his desire to hear his case privately was agreed to by the Tribunal. He was ordered to do work of national importance. His father described himself in the 1911 Census as a preacher for the Evangelist Brethren Mission. His son may well have made religious objections to military service as other members of Christian sects did such as the Christadelphians, the Quakers and the Plymouth Brethren. Another CO case that came up locally was that of Charles Burbridge, a 28 year old market gardener from Higher Lytchett who had declared to the Poole Rural Tribunal that he was 'a saint of God'. The Tribunal rejected his case for exemption as they did not believe him to be a CO because he had worked at Holton Heath, presumably on munitions work. He must have gone on the run as he lost his Appeal in September 1916 and then in January 1917 he was arrested for failing to

answer his call up. He was brought before Wimborne magistrates who fined him £3 and handed him over to the military. At his earlier Appeal, Burbridge was reported as having dilated eyes, continually repeating that he was a saint of God while gesticulating with his hands. He shouted, 'You can do what you like. I shan't go'. This troubled man was now sent to the Colours.

In the final years of the war, the many cases heard before the two local Tribunals show that although there were labour shortages, there remained significant numbers of men of military age still employed on the East Dorset home front. Many were now exempted from military service provided they maintained the same occupation. Conscripted men were getting older as the upper age limit increased. The military appealed against continuing exemptions or challenged the legitimacy of certificates issued to men in particular occupations, as Tribunals continued to try to balance the demands of the war and home fronts as the conflict dragged on. Moreover, the goalposts set by the military could change in terms of the age, employment and health of who might be called-up. There remained debate about what constituted work of national importance, whether substitutes could be deployed such as males below or above military age, those unfit for military service, prisoners of war and even women. So what of women's role on East Dorset's home front?

#### **WOMEN WORKING ON THE HOME FRONT**

The war quickly brought labour shortages to the local economy as men volunteered and later were conscripted into the armed services. The suitability of women for particular paid work or even to work at all was something that caused comment on the East Dorset home front as elsewhere. Some jobs were understood to be suitable for women, such as teaching. In August 1917 Hampreston C of E School (Mixed) advertised for an Uncertificated Mistress for Standards 3 & 4. The salary was £50, rising annually by £2 10s to £60. At less than a £1 a week this was poorly paid white-collar work. A man or a certificated teacher would have commanded a higher salary, which may well have been the reason for the school to frame the advert in this way. East Dorset's school log books show that when male teachers were called up they were sometimes replaced by women. One example was when Mr Lock of Gaunt's Elementary School left to join his regiment in May 1916, he was replaced by a supply teacher, Miss Burt. However, when Lock returned to the school a year later her employment was terminated. In some local schools, women teachers were themselves released from school to undertake Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) duties. Miss BA Palmer & Miss Cutler of Woodlands school were granted permission to be absent from their posts for one day a month to be VADs. Beatrice Annie Palmer certainly did her bit on the East Dorset home front, combining paid work as a teacher with volunteering as a VAD. She worked unpaid as a nurse for 1,020 hours for just over a year from March 1916 in Wimborne. Before this she had worked for six months as a nurse at the St Giles VAD hospital near Salisbury for three days a week.

Before the war, the number of women teachers was comparatively small in East Dorset compared to the biggest employment for women - domestic service. During the war, domestic service continued to dominate the many columns of Situations Vacant in local newspapers. However, these adverts – almost entirely for females, often seeking girls rather than women - suggest that some women had been tempted away from service by the better wages paid by war industries. By May 1918, the *Western Gazette* carried adverts from middle-class Wimborne households who despite the challenges of wartime still sought domestic servants:

GENERAL SERVANT Wanted. Two in Family. – Miss Chissell, Cowgrove Farm, Wimborne.

GENERAL SERVANT Wanted. Small Family. Reference – Mrs Richards, Ashleigh, St John's Hill, Wimborne.

COOK-GENERAL – Can any lady RECOMMEND good COOK-GENERAL? Nurse-housemaid kept. Churchwoman. Age 20-23. Wages £20-£24 – Mrs Stote, Colehill Vicarage, Wimborne.

These were not that different from the adverts that appeared at the beginning of the war. Indeed Miss Chissell had an identical advert in the *Gazette* in August 1914. This was Daisy Chissell, who was a VAD from December 1914 throughout the war, working fulltime as an unpaid assistant nurse at Beaucroft Red Cross Hospital in Wimborne. This may explain her requirement for a servant to attend to domestic duties in her household. In 1919, she was elected as the first woman to sit on Pamphill Parish Council, joining her brother Owen who had become a councillor in 1916.

At the outbreak of war many East Dorset households advertised for servants. Mrs Wheeler of the Rectory at Hampreston wanted a house parlourmaid while Mrs Crouch of Hill Butts, Wimborne sought a trustworthy general servant who was asked to state her age and the wages sought in any application. Mrs Solly of Bell's House, Colehill wanted a parlourmaid who should be under 35 years old, be a churchwoman and have good references. The successful woman would join five other maid servants. This was Helen Nash Solly, 48 in 1914, whose husband was a man of private means who served as a magistrate. They had two young sons. During the war she volunteered as a nurse at the local Red Cross hospital working for 2,575 hours unpaid between March 1916 and January 1919. In June 1917 she was again advertising for staff: a housemaid (experienced, singlehanded) was wanted, with help. There would be 'no maiding or parlour-work. Small family, good reference.' This suggests that the Solly household had down-sized. It seems that employers now had to compete to recruit staff by providing more attractive employment.

Over the war it tended to be the wealthier households in the larger houses of East Dorset who continued to seek servants, usually women. But they were not alone. In November 1914 the Griffin Hotel, Wimborne wanted a housemaid/waitress to work in what was described as a comfortable home. She must be respectable and would be rewarded with

seven shillings a week – a meagre amount. As the war continued, employers had to make a stronger ‘offer’ as other often better paid opportunities opened up in the war economy for girls and women. By February 1918, the Bernards of High Hall, Pamphill were willing to offer good wages to a cook, noting ‘Rations strictly kept’. Mrs Moore of St John’s Vicarage, Wimborne wanted a young general cook to join two others who served her small family. She offered a good home and outings with wages according to experience.

While the advertisement columns of the *Western Gazette* rarely featured jobs for women other than those in domestic service, the number of columns did decline later in the war suggesting that fewer women were willing to countenance the restrictions of domestic service, had found alternative employment or employers were learning to manage with less staff. However, as we will see, it did not take long for East Dorset households to seek domestic servants once again as the war ended.

If domestic service, teaching and, indeed, voluntary nursing were understood to be women’s work, there was more ambivalence about how women might do their bit in wartime agriculture. In East Dorset, most of those sought for agricultural work were men. There were exceptions: in August 1914 Miss Wicks of Ivy Cottage, Woodlands advertised for a capable middle-aged woman to do dairy work as well as housework. At the end of 1915, the Wimborne & Cranborne RDC discussed the issue of whether the local shortage of labour in agriculture could be met by employing women. Ernest Drew, Vice Chairman of the RDC and a farmer at Moor Crichel, said:

in a district like Witchampton, for instance, women workers at that time of year would be of no use whatever. Of course where there was a list of milking to be done the employment of women was all right but women could not look after a flock of sheep, cattle or horses, nor go to plough.

At this point the RDC was reluctant to become involved in the War Agriculture Committee which every county was asked to set up. However, in early 1916 when Dorset formed its’ own Women’s War Agriculture Committee (WWAC), Wimborne was represented by Miss Katherine Style. She was one of a number of local women for whom the maintenance of a robust home front created opportunities for new forms of civic engagement. The WWAC saw its task as to appeal to the patriotism of women to offer their services ‘to perform such agricultural work as women are able to perform’ in order that the food supply could be maintained despite a severe shortage of agricultural labour. The Chairman of the Committee said this was necessary not just because of the men who had volunteered but also because of the growing ‘distaste for outdoor work’ displayed by soldiers’ wives and dependants. The Committee discussed what was and could be women’s work: it was argued that work on the land was just as important as working in munitions. However, the latter was much better paid work than agriculture. In East Dorset women who had to earn a wage had fewer choices than in more urban areas, because of the dominance of agriculture and because there were no munitions factories within the area. The nearest was at Holton Heath, which

drew on local labour from Poole in particular as well as recruiting women from further afield. Although there are references in the local press to East Dorset men working at Holton Heath, it is hard to find equivalent evidence about local women. In April 1916, a local Tribunal heard a fruit and vegetable grower claim that he was unable to keep men who 'left for the better pay given on munitions'. However, East Dorset saw very few of the complaints found elsewhere about the deleterious effects of 'munitionettes' on the local labour market for servants and other poorly paid women's work nor about the supposed profligate spending habits of women flushed with the higher wages paid for the dangerous work of shell filling.

Ascertaining the other kinds of paid work undertaken by women on the East Dorset home front is more difficult. Cases before the two Wimborne Military Service Tribunals do not reveal many working women. This may be because many of the cases sought exemptions from military service on the grounds of economic hardship. There was therefore little reason to reveal the additional economic contributions, however small, made by female members of the household. As in other parts of the country, a number of men argued for exemption because they were needed to support a 'delicate wife' who could not step into their shoes as principal breadwinner. One example was a carman who delivered coal. He supported a delicate wife and four children, working in a business he had taken over from his father who was now unable to work. At the Urban Tribunal, shop work was now seen as a possible occupation for women although many still resisted it. By 1916 a number of Wimborne bakers were employing female labour 'as far as possible', having lost most of their male employees to the Army.

Employers often asserted that women could not possibly undertake the occupation of the particular man under discussion by the Tribunal. In Wimborne 'women could not act as auctioneers', time was needed to train them as hairdressers and in fruit and vegetable growing women could only do light work. When the Rural Tribunal heard the case of Henry Head who was employed by the Guardians as relieving officer as well as vaccination and school attendance officer, it was his responsibility to remove lunatics which was felt to preclude the idea of a woman being employed to do his job. Sometimes it was thought acceptable for a woman to take over from her husband temporarily. In 1916 Mrs Parham became temporary inspector of nuisances for Wimborne & Cranborne RDC while her husband was away in the Army. His salary was divided between them with her part being used to defray the cost of any additional assistance she might require such as in the work of disinfection. However future appearances of WH Parham before the Tribunal suggest that this arrangement was short-lived. Later in the war he became the Executive Officer of the RDC's Food Control Committee.

Once women were seen in new roles the local press tended to report them in a jokey way: when in June 1916 five or six women had been spotted at Ashington, Canford helping with the hay, it was noted that two of them were over 72. The kind of work women were doing

could cause disquiet. By the end of 1917, the county's National Service Representative commented at an Appeal Tribunal hearing at Wimborne:

Apropos the scarcity of labour, that a lot of women were being employed in tea-shops and eating-houses in Bournemouth, waiting on idle tea-drinking women, when they should be better employed. It made him savage when he thought about it.

Others were surprised at what women could do. In 1918 the prodigious production of a Colehill small holding was congratulated in the local press with particular attention being drawn to the fact that this was due solely to the labourers of one industrious woman aided by two small boys. At the same time by the last year of the war, local employers seem to have been more willing to employ soldier's wives and widows. This was the case when Wimborne UDC appointed Mrs James to be the caretaker of the Council's premises. In September 1918, Mrs List of Hill Butts, Wimborne specified that she was looking for a soldier's widow to do cooking for a small family. A comfortable home was offered along with good wages to a suitable young woman.

Overall, the East Dorset home front seems to have been remarkably conservative about the types of economic activity that it was acceptable for a woman to pursue. This was despite an undoubted labour shortage. On this local home front, women were much more visible in the public sphere through the increasing amount of voluntary work undertaken in support of the war effort rather than through their intrusion into the labour market in occupations from which they had previously been excluded. This may be because of local conservatism or just that local newspaper coverage of 'women firsts' in particular jobs has been lost or that people quickly became used to the apparent novelty of a woman serving in a shop or delivering the post. What is clear is that in East Dorset many women did 'their bit' for the war effort by giving many hours in voluntary labour.

### **Women 'do their bit' in East Dorset**

The patriotism of women in East Dorset was often assumed and sometimes was the subject of a direct appeal. The war was not many weeks old when Lady Cornelia Wimborne addressed a well-attended meeting at Colehill Parish Hall with one of her MP sons – Henry Guest. The aim was to stimulate recruiting as it was felt that the response had not been as strong as expected. It was said, 'Women could not fight, but they could supply the courage and the endurance which would enable their husbands and brothers to go forth and fight the battles of England'. Quickly women were been asked to make a more practical contribution to the creation of a new phenomenon, the home front.

Before the outbreak of war local women who could afford to work for no pay – essentially those from the servant-keeping classes – contributed their efforts to all sorts of charitable works often through organisations associated with local churches or chapels. Some of these skills were then turned over to supporting the war effort, either to provide comforts for the troops or to help those on the home front who were suffering distress. The Dorset Guild of



Workers, led by Lady Wimborne, had groups across the county who made goods for the troops, for prisoners of war as well as for hospitals. The Wimborne branch raised £109 8s 7d between November 1914 and January 1915. They also distributed 1,891 comforts (having made 1,134 of them) to battalions billeted locally as well as to the navy depot at Poole, the local Red Cross hospital and through Lady Margaret Levett for recruits at Merley. By April 1916, they were sending hospital supplies (including bandages and dressings) to the camps in the district as well as socks and shirts. They were also collecting sphagnum moss to be used for wound dressings, at the request of the War Hospital Depots in London. Aside from sewing and knitting all sorts of garments and hospital supplies, many women were mobilised to organise the vast amount of patriotic fund-raising that was needed to keep going the war and home fronts. The Guild was also active in other parts of East Dorset such as Crichel and Witchampton. From November the East Dorset Guild of Workers re-christened itself the Dorset Guild of Workers. It was now regularly sending over 120 parcels a week of its members' creations to forces overseas; it had 'adopted' 392 Dorset men who were prisoners of war (POWs) in Germany and sent them fortnightly parcels. The Wimborne branch had already made 6,086 articles since the beginning of the war. The Christmas parcels they assembled that year contained jam, apricots, biscuits, preserved fruit, tins of beef, Christmas puddings and two packets of cigarettes. When they could not make the desired items themselves they raised funds to buy them.

One Wimborne woman's increasing activity across the war years gives a sense of the scope of such voluntary labour. The name of Mrs EAC Kemp is increasingly visible in reports on wartime fundraising in Wimborne. This was Susie Kemp. In 1914, she was 38, married to a journalist employed by the *Western Gazette* and had one son who was 13 years old. The family lived at 23, West Borough, a seven-roomed house. In none of her entries in the Census does she have an occupation. In July 1915 she was one of the collectors acknowledged for the French Flag Day organised by the UDC in Wimborne. Townspeople displayed the tricolour in their houses while miniature flags were made for sale. The committee of ladies who had organised the collection included Mrs Solly, who was earlier mentioned in search of servants. The considerable sum of £67 12s 3½d was raised with the *Western Gazette* listing the many names of the lady collectors as well as shops and schools with the amount they raised – a public display of their individual patriotism. Later that year the town had a not quite so successful Russian Flag Day. At this stage Susie Kemp was just one of the collectors but soon she became an organiser of local fundraising efforts. By November 1916 she was the honorary secretary of the house-to-house collection and flag day in aid of workshops for disabled soldiers and sailors. She also organised a sale of flags and other souvenirs on behalf of the Dorset Guild of Workers fund for providing comforts for fighting men. Increasingly she became the go-to organiser for local flag days whether for the Red Cross, Dorset POWs, Rumanian Relief Fund, YMCA Hut Fund, Armenian Refugees, the National Egg Collection for the Wounded and the Salvation Army. This list shows the range of wartime flag days held in Wimborne for a variety of causes and to which the local

citizenry continued to give despite the enormous rise in the cost of living and the many demands being made of them. By September 1918 the Chairman of Wimborne UDC commented that Mrs Kemp 'had always done remarkably well with her splendid team of workers' although a fellow councillor, Dr Fleming, noted 'the amount raised locally by flag day efforts had been so extraordinarily creditable he feared there was a danger of going on too long with these appeals' – what we might call compassion fatigue was setting in. It also seems that flag days could provide temptations for some of the collectors. In September 1915 Wimborne's town crier, George Pearce, was sentenced to a month imprisonment without hard labour for taking 7½d from a collection for POWs in Germany. This seems to have been a rare case although there were a number of local court cases where soldiers were charged with stealing from local people. Crime still continued on the home front.

East Dorset women like Susie Kemp seemed to have found a new purpose in their wartime activities. For her they were not limited to fundraising for various wartime causes. For the home front found that it needed women to act in other voluntary capacities too. Given her increasingly visible voluntarism, it is perhaps not surprising that when the Wimborne UDC had to find at least one woman to serve on the new Food Control Committee in 1917, Mrs Kemp was one of the women appointed. All local authorities were tasked with setting up a new kind of organisation, FCC, to manage the effects of the food crisis on their local communities. Each committee had to have at least one representative of labour and one woman amongst its members. Many authorities found it hard to select a woman as women councillors were rare (there were none in Dorset) and women, who were still not formally citizens, were not visible in civic life. That was why many local authorities turned to the wives of their own members. This was the case with Wimborne and Cranborne RDC's Food Control Committee. In 1918 when they added a further woman to their number, the Chairman of the RDC nominated his own wife. Anna Mills, was 64 when she joined the Wimborne & Cranborne Rural FCC. Her husband, Henry John Mills, was a member of the local elite: he was a long retired Captain of 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskilling Dragoons. He must have done well from his military career for by 1911 he and his wife, who had never had children, lived with seven servants in a twenty-seven roomed house, The Knoll in Corfe Mullen – now Castle Court School. Mills chaired the local RDC, Board of Guardians and from 1916 the local Rural Military Tribunal. Anna's participation in the local FCC produced particular benefit for her village, Corfe Mullen. In January 1918, as a result of the 'efforts of Mrs HJ Mills and the Food Committee', a school kitchen was set up so children from outside areas could be fed a two course meal for a small sum. It was reported that: 'This was admirably served daily by a band of ladies, and is much enjoyed by the children, who, as well as their parents greatly appreciate what is being done for them in these days of food scarcity'. By July, the average daily attendance of children was 105. The organisation, cooking and serving was undertaken by women volunteers – another way in which women did their bit on the home front.

The other woman who agreed to serve on Wimborne FCC demonstrates other kinds of voluntary activity. She was Miss Ada Bartlett. Bartlett, like Kemp, had no need to undertake

paid work. In 1911, she was a 35 year old single woman who lived with her two younger sisters, their widowed father and two servants in a twenty-three roomed house, Belmont on St John's Hill, Wimborne. Her 69 year old father now lived on private means but had formerly been a farmer at Shapwick. Ada was one of those middle-class women who volunteered as a VAD for the Red Cross. Between December 1914 and July 1915 she was in charge of stores and housekeeping at Beaucroft hospital, Wimborne, working 840 hours for no pay. The man she was to marry in 1918, Charles Ellis, was also a VAD again working for no pay. Although the majority of VADs were female, male volunteers were not unusual particularly offering medical and administrative skills. Ellis, a brewer and wine merchant, volunteered over the whole war at the Red Cross hospital in Wimborne, working 270 hours as a superintendent. In September 1917 he added to his unpaid work when he was asked to join the UDC to replace a councillor who had left the town. The month before when the UDC set up its own FCC at the request of the government, Miss Ada Bartlett was asked to be a member along with Mrs Kemp. After her marriage as Mrs CA Ellis she continued to serve on the FCC into the post-war period when the urban and rural FCCs were amalgamated.

For some women, the many informal and formal committees that grew up as local people responded to the new conditions of war-time were an opportunity - a means to take a step into the public world even though they were not yet voting citizens. The women who were asked to join the FCC set up by Wimborne and Cranborne RDC illustrate this. Aside from the wife of the RDC chairman, Miss Katherine Style was appointed to the FCC. In 1911 Katherine was 41 years old, living with her parents and two servants in the sixteen-roomed Chalbury Rectory. After her father died in 1922, Katherine and her mother moved to Hillbutts, Pamphill. She was already civically engaged before the war, sitting on Dorset's Education Committee which she continued to do through the war and into the peace. In 1916 she became a member of another committee generated by the home front: East Dorset War Pensions Committee. It is therefore not surprising that when her local RDC was casting around for women to join the new FCC they alighted upon her. As a woman of private means she could undertake this committee work for which she would not have been paid. After the war Style took a leading role in the Dorset Federation of Women's Institutes (another wartime creation) as well as being appointed to the local Profiteering Committee when it was set up in 1919. She was elected to Wimborne and Colehill RDC in 1925 as well as being appointed one of the first women magistrates in the county.

When Miss Ethel Lucas (1880-1961) was nominated by the National Agricultural Labourers Union to fill a place on the Wimborne and Cranborne FCC after the labour representative died in the influenza epidemic in November 1918, she looked to be from a different social background to the other local FCC women. Yet she too was part of a clergyman's family, in this case her brother-in-law Rev CFC Knapp's household at the Parsonage, Woodlands (nine rooms and two servants). Earlier in the war she had been a VAD, working full-time for no pay as Commandant at the thirty-bedded St Giles House near Salisbury. Like Katherine Style, who she often worked alongside, she continued her activities after the war on the FCC and

the Profiteering Committee, was elected to the local RDC and to the Board of Guardians. Having found a role as a consequence of the war, she determinedly served her local community in the years after the Armistice. She is still remembered fondly by those who grew up in Woodlands. She is just one of the more visible women who gave many hours unpaid labour as part of the East Dorset home front: making comforts for the troops, fundraising for many wartime causes, as VADs and serving on the many committees that sprung up to mitigate the effects of the war on East Dorset and to support the fighting men.

### **Children 'do their bit' too**

The first total war mobilised civilians of all ages to sustain the new home front. Children had a role to play too. For many in East Dorset, school became the means to engage in all sorts of practical war work. In February 1915 the day school children at Canford put on an entertainment in aid of the Belgian Relief Fund, attracting an audience that included soldiers billeted in the village. They raised £3, once expenses were paid. In May that year, children in Alderholt began to collect eggs to send to wounded soldiers. In two weeks they collected thirty dozen at their depot at the school-room. They appealed for donations from local people. At the same time Minster school children held special 'Children's Days' to collect fresh eggs for the wounded, bringing in more than twenty-two dozen as did the boy's school. Fundraising amongst schoolchildren was also used to buy comforts for the troops. In 1916 the children of Pamphill School brought in sufficient pence to send 200 cigarettes as an Easter offering to the wounded soldiers at Beaucroft House, a local Red Cross hospital.

The need for children to make a contribution to the home front could lead to the closure of local schools, sometimes for weeks at a time. There are many examples of schools closed so that boys could help with hay-making (Shapwick, June 1916), to collect acorns (Wimborne County School collected eighty-five bushels to send to the cordite factory at Holton Heath) or for blackberrying (in September 1918, Horton school picked 356 lbs and Holt collected an extraordinary half ton topped by Wimborne Council School's 1 ton 32 lbs). Most of the blackberries went to the factory in Romsey that made jam to make war bread more palatable for the troops.

Boys, in particular, might be given official exemption from school in order to work in the fields. However, some parents acted precipitately. In March 1915, William Vincent, a dairyman of Chilbridge, was prosecuted for not sending his child to school. Although the Education Committee had taken powers to release boys over twelve to work on local farms because of the shortage of agricultural labour, this boy was only eleven. He was helping with milking because of the difficulty of getting labour. The magistrates were clearly sympathetic and only fined Vincent five shillings. The log books covering East Dorset show that most schools had children who were granted exemption certificates. The majority were for agricultural labour although one was to work in a paper mill. For girls the certificates tended to be issued to enable them to leave school early to go into domestic service. In April 1915

at Horton a mother came into school to ask to have a girl of eleven years presented with a Labour Certificate so that she could help a farmer's wife in the house.

School children were also encouraged to make articles for the troops as well as to grow food. In November 1914, Horton school children were knitting and making underclothing for Belgian refugees. These activities carried on across the war. In September 1918, Lady Wimborne provided six skeins of khaki wool to Canford Magna school for the children to knit mittens and scarves for the troops. Other school children were encouraged to grow foodstuffs in their own and in school gardens. At Woodlands, thirteen children volunteered and Miss Beatrice Palmer handed over her garden for the purpose. At other schools, whole classes could be absent to help in the fields. Horton school children were potato-planting in May 1917 while later in the year Canford Magna pupils were absent to pick potatoes.

Although in many ways the war is surprisingly absent from the day-to-day activities of schools noted by the head teachers in their log books, there is still some evidence of events designed to reinforce children's patriotism, particularly the regular celebration of Empire Day in May each year. Collections were also made at school for War Savings certificates. Sixpenny Handley school noted that quite a lot of their children were investing their savings in a War Loan. Many log books do not note the Armistice as quite a number of local schools were shut due to the influenza epidemic. These included Mannington Holt, Canford Magna, Gaunt's Elementary, Holt, Horton, Verwood and Wimborne Infants. There was nevertheless at the end of the war a real sense that local children had stepped up to 'do their bit' for the war effort, contributing one significant element in the carefully constructed edifice of the home front.

And their contribution did not stop with school. Boys and girls were a significant part of the workforce, usually doing jobs that were different to adult jobs which commanded lower wages and were almost always differentiated by gender. When Barford Dairy, Wimborne advertised for help their offer was specific: 'Lad wanted to help milk and drive milk cart. Treated as family'. The latter point would have reassured the boy's parents.

### **Strangers on the home front**

Men, women and children were an active part of the East Dorset home front but not all of them were local people. There were also many strangers - some were welcome and even invited into local communities but others were viewed with anxiety and even suspicion. They were all part of the home front.

East Dorset was one area of the country where soldiers were billeted on local people in the early months of the war, as well as setting up camps. By December 1914 it was reported that a large number of soldiers, 'mainly recruits to Lord Kitchener's Army, at present in training', were billeted in Wimborne and neighbouring villages. It was anticipated that they would remain for up to seven weeks while wooden huts were being erected to accommodate them at Bovington. In Wimborne, various public buildings including schools

had been used with meals cooked at fires built in the school yards. Local Scouts and the Church Lads' Brigade acted as guides to the officers and men when they arrived in what they deemed 'a strange land'. This hospitality could put some strain on local resources. In May 1915 the West Riding Regiment agreed to pay 1½d per man per day to Wimborne Council because of the extra sanitary work occasioned by the presence of the soldiers. The Council then made similar claims to other regiments who were also billeted locally.

Locals provided entertainment for the soldiers. However, some clearly over-indulged. Wimborne police court saw so many cases of drunkenness that local pubs were forced to implement early closing, to the frustration of local publicans. By May 1915 the restriction of moving closing-time back from 10pm to 9pm was relaxed as many of the soldiers had now gone. However it was commented that there were still problems, because there were 'an immense amount of artificers and workmen employed at Corfe Mullen – strangers who were housed all over the place'. Drunkenness and disorder were not the only problems that resulted from the billeting of men in and around Wimborne. There was other crime too. In January 1915 Private John Southall was sentenced to 14 days hard labour for stealing 31s from the landlord of the Smith's Arms on East Borough while in June two soldiers who had been billeted in Wimborne received the same custodial sentence with hard labour as Southall. The soldiers had stolen a case containing seven razors, a pair of opera glasses and a clock worth £4 from 'The Firs', West Street. They had taken advantage of the owner's Bank Holiday trip to Bournemouth to burgle his home. Both soldiers had been drunk, however the Bench viewed their case leniently because both had volunteered in the opening days of the war.

The other group of strangers who were invited into local communities were Belgian refugees. The Wimborne Belgian Relief Fund was holding successful fund-raising events by November 1914. A whist drive at Victoria Hall attracted 250 people, raising £55 11s 7d to support the Belgian refugees that had already arrived in Wimborne. The refugees were of all ages and soon the admission of Belgian children was being noted in local school log books. Wimborne Council School noted Belgian children becoming pupils in the autumn and winter of 1914. They soon settled in, to the extent that by the time of the 1915 prize-giving Pierre Doyen was singled out for praise having come to the school the previous November with practically no English. He was now eighth in the class. In July 1918 a farewell presentation was given in Wimborne to Mlle Esther de Leger and her mother who were leaving the town where they had lived since their flight from Ostend. The younger woman had obtained a position in the French post office. They received £10 as a parting gift from East Street Belgian Committee.

Other foreigners were not so welcome, particularly those who were citizens of countries that Britain was now at war with, even when they had long been residents in the country. Defined as enemy aliens, they were often viewed with suspicion and were subject to

increasing scrutiny and regulation, including internment. Although East Dorset did not have a large German or Austrian population, there were nevertheless issues for some foreign born people who lived in East Dorset or who came to reside there during the war years. August Weizenheimer was a musician who was living in Avenue Road, Wimborne in 1915. Born in Bavaria, he had come to England in 1878 with his family. He had lived and worked in Bournemouth from 1907 but had had to leave when restrictions were brought in on where enemy aliens could live. He said he had a certificate of naturalisation (this was later challenged) and was unable to speak German, but he was still interned at Dorchester in October 1914. When he was released in December after it was decided he was not German, he returned to live in Wimborne. He found that there were now restrictions on his movements: he had to carry his papers at all times and needed permission to travel any distance. Having been arrested for visiting Bournemouth, he was charged with being an enemy alien in a prohibited area without a permit. The subsequent court case centred on whether he was German, British or, as August claimed, 'of no nationality at all'. His brother who lived in Manchester was able to produce his own naturalisation papers and claimed he had also applied for papers for August and another brother. He said that none of them had left England since they arrived in the 1870s and, as proof of his loyalty to Britain, his son was serving in the Manchester Pals Regiment. Other local musicians spoke up on August's behalf noting his good character and that his family were well-known and well-respected. Bournemouth magistrates decided that August was an alien and that he must enter into a bond of £50 to comply with the provisions of the Aliens Registration Order. When challenged by August's defence on whether this meant the defendant was an enemy alien, the magistrates havered, saying they had made their decision. Interestingly the 1911 Census that shows August living with his British born wife and their six children in Bournemouth, noted that he was of German nationality while she was British. Many wives of those defined as aliens in wartime found that they had lost their nationality on marriage and indeed a number of British born wives of aliens were deported to Germany during the war despite knowing no-one there and being unable to speak the language. As August died in Bournemouth in 1934, it seems that whatever happened to him, neither he nor his family were deported. Nor did the family choose to change its name as a way of disguising his origins – unlike the British royal family.

Women enemy aliens were treated differently to men. Only men were interned. In the toxic atmosphere after the sinking of the Lusitania in May 1915, there were anti-German riots in some parts of the country and action was taken against those who were thought to be German. None of the Lusitania victims were from East Dorset, but still there was increased scrutiny of those who were suspected of being enemy aliens. Elizabeth Dorn of Wimborne was summoned for travelling from Devon to Wimborne without a permit. Her job had ended and with nowhere else to go she had returned to Wimborne. She had applied for a permit but it had not arrived before she travelled. On arrival she reported herself to the Wimborne police. Despite this the magistrates fined her £1 0s 10d, warning her that she

could have been fined £100 or been sentenced to six month's imprisonment with hard labour. Elizabeth was English-born but was viewed as an enemy alien as she was married to a German man. In 1911, the couple were living in Bournemouth. He was a butler in a hotel, while she was a cook housekeeper. It is not clear if 'Fritz' Dorn, as he was named in a court case in 1912, was interned during the First World War but Home Office papers show that in the Second World War there was discussion of interning Frederick William Dorn of Wimborne, a retired butler, even though he was 81 years old. He had no wish to be repatriated. Once an enemy alien, always one! The Dorns seemed to have continued to live in Wimborne, as Elizabeth died there in 1936 and her husband was living at 52A King Street in 1939.

The most pressing issue for the families of those deemed to be enemy aliens was how to survive once adult male aliens were interned. The poor law was empowered to provide assistance rates for the British born wives of interned aliens. In June 1915, the sums announced in the local press were 9s 3d a week for a wife and 1s 9d for each dependant child. These were sums that it would have been very hard to live on. When Wimborne and Cranborne Board of Guardians discussed the matter, they were advised by the Local Government Board to enquire into local cases because where people were able to work and earn money they were expected to do so. The Guardians were advised that the full allowance would not be required in every instance. Women who were not British-born could face deportation. Wimborne does not appear to have had cases like that of Henrietta Arendt, a German subject, who was charged with being in nearby Bournemouth between April and May 1915 in contravention of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA). The War Office asked for her to be detained until a deportation order arrived, although Arendt was bewildered at what she had done. She claimed she was French and asked to what country she would be deported. Anxieties about such cases would not have remained in Bournemouth. The press gave them considerable coverage. Moreover, Wimborne people may well have travelled into the Bournemouth Winter Gardens in May 1915 to hear a series of well-attended talks on 'The Spy Peril' by William Le Queux who entertained large audiences over two nights to his alarmist views. He called for the internment of all enemy aliens whether they were naturalised or not. However the rounding up of enemy aliens which was seen in other parts of the country in 1915 does not seem to have been necessary in East Dorset where there were no longstanding German or Austrian communities aside from those working in the hotels and restaurants of nearby Bournemouth.

As the war continued, the issue of strangers on the local home front was mostly drawn to the attention of residents in East Dorset by the number of local prosecutions for breaches of the Aliens Restriction Order. These were largely of landladies and lodging-house keepers who had failed to maintain full particulars for each lodger who was not British. Julia Richards of the Railway Temperance Hotel was fined 10s for this offence in relation to an American guest in 1916. Although Amy Johns swore that all her lodgers were 'Britishers' she was fined



for failing to get a signed statement from each one as to their nationality. Cases from local villages also came before the Wimborne magistrates such as for a couple who failed to register aliens in Tarrant Rushton.

Although almost all these East Dorset cases did not concern individuals who were actually 'enemy aliens', there were some examples in nearby Bournemouth particularly of foreign-born waiters during the period of the Lusitania panic in 1915. The local press had some discussion about who constituted an alien: for example, what was the status of widows of Germans or daughters of naturalised Germans? Nearer to the coast there were also concerns about aliens entering prohibited areas, such as Swanage. By the summer of 1915 all who were not British citizens had to have permission to travel into a prohibited area even if they were nationals from one of Britain's allies in the war. However towards the end of the war, Germans did start to become visible in East Dorset when groups of German POWs were deployed as agricultural workers. Karl Jeager had been working at Little Canford Farm, Wimborne when he accidentally drowned while bathing in the river Stour in May 1918. Yet mutual suspicions remained. In the summer of 1918, anti-alien feeling intensified across the country. East Dorset was not immune. In July Wimborne UDC passed a resolution, 'that all alien enemies, male and female, should at once be interned and deported on the declaration of peace'. It is not clear if they had any local people in mind or whether they were just responding to the hysteria that was being stirred up in other parts of the country, including demonstrations in London.

Another group who were treated with suspicion were the gypsies. The wartime press reveals a number of what were termed gypsy encampments in East Dorset. One was at Leigh Common. In January 1916 the local RDC heard a report from their Sanitary Inspector about a group of five families who lived in tents on the Common. Their living conditions did not meet local bye-laws as there were no proper receptacles for water and no sanitary arrangements of any description. Despite the 'constantly recurring nuisances arising from the presence of gypsies on the common', the Council felt it lacked the powers needed to deal with this. It sought to make use of the Commons Act (1899) to ensure that caravans and tents would only be allowed on the commons with the Council's consent. When the adjacent authority, Poole RDC, had what the local paper described as 'Gypsy Trouble Again' where an encampment at West Howe was reported to have 'heathenish and almost inhuman conditions', one councillor said that he thought that the camp was a nuisance and the gypsies should not be allowed to remain: 'They [had] got rid of them at Wimborne'. This does not actually seem to have been the case. In September 1917 a gypsy camp at Stapehill was found to have no sanitary arrangements. The owner of the land promised to rectify this as soon as possible. The authorities were also aware of local gypsies because some of them regularly appeared before Wimborne police court charged with damage or permitting horses to stray. George White (10) who lived at the Bourne Hill (Kinson) camp was charged with stealing a bicycle valued at £1 10s from outside a cinema. The magistrates thought the

young gypsy had told 'a tissue of lies' and ordered him to have four strokes of the birch. It seems that there may well have been something of a moral panic locally over gypsies whether in terms of their living conditions or their supposed propensity for crime. When Mrs Oldfield of Uddens House appealed to the Military Tribunal on behalf of her gardener, she argued that she could not manage without him because he was needed for protective purposes 'being practically the only man left on a large estate, infested by gipsies'.

The military authorities soon had these strangers on their radar. The introduction of conscription led to police raids on local gypsy camps. In April 1916 the police led a dawn raid on the camp at Kinson, arresting 'six members of the Roman persuasion' for failing to respond to the call to the Colours. The men were taken to Wimborne police court where four of them argued that although they were willing to serve, they had received no papers and thought they should have had notice of their call up. Despite their protests, they were handed over to the military. One of the other two was discharged unfit while the sixth was remanded for enquiries into his claim that he had already been medically rejected by the Army. Gypsies remained a local presence, for example there was a large encampment on nearby Alderney Common, near Poole, which in March 1916 was reported to house 130 people, including small children, in three dwelling vans and twenty tents. Twenty school-age children from the camp had been turned away by the local headmaster when they attempted to attend school. Some of the men were said to be working at Holton (presumably on war work). Although treated like strangers, gypsies were a part of the East Dorset home front throughout the war.

### **The people of the East Dorset home front**

This exploration of who lived and worked in East Dorset for all or part of the Great War shows that this particular local home front was more diverse than is often assumed. There were men and women, from babies to the elderly, including men of military age. They came from all the social classes from the poorest to the aristocracy. Some had lived in these districts for generations while others were newly arrived or lived for only a short time in wartime East Dorset. Together they contributed to the creation and maintenance of a new phenomenon – a home front. What that meant for this diverse group of people is explored in the following essay. It explores some of the challenges that the East Dorset home front faced and how it coped with them.