

1914:
Life in Stamford
Vignette

Produced by the Stamford WW1 Commemoration Programme

When war was declared in August 1914, 300,000 men voluntarily joined the army with another 450,000 signing up in September across Britain.

A large proportion of the new combatants were young and opportunistic, looking forward to their 'great adventure'. The call to arms was accepted enthusiastically amidst nationwide patriotic fervour.



London recruiting office August 1914 ©IWM

Many men from Stamford enlisted in Lincoln and Peterborough initially (since there was no local recruiting officer), but a swift appeal by the Mayor brought Sergeant Blanchard to the town.

By the end of 1914, he had recruited 436 men for 'Kitchener's Army' and 264 for the Territorial Army, bringing the total number from Stamford and District in military service in 1914 to 1700 – approximately 11% of the local population. The first draft of the Territorials went off for training in Luton on August 28th.



Stamford Territorials , 28th August 1914 © ReprintUK.com

Kitchener's campaign to recruit soldiers raised the UK's largest volunteer army ever - almost 2.5 million men. The young men of Britain felt a moral and social obligation to serve King and country.

Advertisements were plastered onto walls and placed in newspapers to encourage men to join the army and also for civilians to help with the war in any way they could.

In November 1914 a recruitment leaflet was distributed in Stamford stating 'Young Men, Your Country Needs You!' In December, the local Guardian advertised "Don't forget the man behind the gun!" War savings certificates were also promoted locally, "'Go to the Post Office and lend your money to your country" and "Have you put your money into Khaki?"

When Germany invaded Belgium on August 4th, Britain entered the war. The military was immediately mobilised and despatched to Belgium's aid. The government offered "the hospitality of the British nation" to over 240,000 Belgian refugees, Stamford was one of the first towns to offer assistance. Little financial aid was available from the local government or the War Refugees Fund, so the relief effort was organised locally.

Originally, 20 refugees were accommodated, and what today would be nearly £25,000 was raised to cover their living costs. The first group arrived on September 22nd and stayed in Eversleigh House on the High Street St Martin's. The numbers there increased to 80 including wounded soldiers within the coming weeks. The



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gas company gave them free fuel, Lord Exeter loaned two properties on Broad Street to house them and the Mayor and other Stamfordians donated beds, blankets and furniture.

The Belgian refugees were welcomed warmly. A Christmas party was thrown for them at the Town Hall, which had been brightly decorated complete with a tree donated by Lady Exeter, and gifts were offered to each of them. The refugees continued to be cared for in Stamford until the end of the war in 1918.

As well as sending its own men to fight, Stamford also received nearly 3,000 billeted troops in 1914. Regiments from Essex and Suffolk were stationed in Stamford and nearby Barnack, turning the area into almost a garrison town, with troops frequently seen on parade in the town and at Burghley.



The park at Burghley was used as a parade ground

The Recreation Ground was also used by the 700 men billeted in Stamford from the Hertfordshire regiment. A Royal Field Artillery Column was stationed in Casterton.

Between 1914 and 1918, an estimated two million women replaced men at work in roles traditionally unavailable to them - Government departments, public transport, the post office, as clerks in business, as land workers and in factories, especially in the dangerous munitions factories, which were employing 950,000 women by 1918.

In Stamford, Blackstone's Rutland Iron Works became government-controlled and began manufacturing marine engines and spare parts for the navy and munitions - 6" and 18 pounder shells.

Stamford's women were recruited as machinists. The factory narrowly escaped a Zeppelin raid in 1916; warned of the advancing airship, the factory lights

were extinguished just in time and so the bomb fell in the field behind, breaking only a few windows in Ryhall Road.

Munitionettes produced 80% of the weapons and shells used by the British Army and daily risked their lives working with poisonous substances without adequate protective clothing or the required safety measures. The women working in factories began to play football during lunch-breaks and many local teams were formed. Stamford had a women's football team, matches often raised funds for the war effort.



Blackstone's munitions workers and the 18 pounder shells

The women of Stamford were just as quick to enlist as volunteers in the war effort. On August 22nd, the Mayoress of Stamford set up the Stamford branch of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild based at the Town Hall, to produce garments for the troops. Funds for the Guild's work were raised through Bridge and Whist drives (one such event on August 27th raised £46, which is roughly equivalent to £3,800 today) as well as garment exhibitions and concerts.



The Guild at work © ReprintUK.com

The organisation expanded as the war continued, becoming the Stamford and District Needlework Guild and Hospital Supplies Depot in 1915. By November 1915, 200 women were



A monthly consignment © ReprintUK.com

working at the Town Hall, producing some 4,000 items per order. Their efforts were acknowledged by the War Office; those that had served for three months received badges to recognise their participation as a Voluntary War Worker.

Stamford's involvement in the war was widespread, not only in terms of the number of people willing to contribute, but also in the way that all of society became involved. The Marquesses of Exeter, so prolific in raising funds for the general war effort and hosting the Belgian Refugees, allowed the Orangery of Burghley House to be transformed into a Red Cross Hospital. 450 injured soldiers were treated there during the war.



Soldiers in the Orangery at Burghley © Burghley
An exhibition, "The House at War", is currently open at Burghley

Lord Exeter served as Lieutenant Colonel for the 4th East Anglian Brigade during the conflict and left the House at the disposal of the war effort. A number of events was held there including fetes to raise money for the Red Cross and 'smoking concerts' to entertain troops stationed in the town.

From very early on in the war, children across Britain were taught that even they could do something to help win the war. In their lessons, Stamford boys would make relief models of France, Belgium, Palestine and Mesopotamia to understand better the landscapes on which the war was being fought.



The children of All Saints', St George's, St Michael's and St Martin's Girls Schools in Stamford knitted mittens and socks for the soldiers. Students at the Boy's School and St George's Infant School participated in the National Egg Collection, sending eggs (often with pictures painted onto them or words of encouragement) to wounded soldiers lying on hospital beds.

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Later in the war, local children aided munitions production by collecting conkers. Acetone from conkers was used to make cordite, an ingredient in shells and bullets. Conkers were sent by train to top-secret factories at King's Lynn in Norfolk and in Dorset - over 3,000 tonnes were collected by Britain's children.



© BBC

Many local youth organisations, notably the Scouts, also held fundraising events for the Red Cross.

Military authorities were concerned that a German invasion would land on the Lincolnshire coast. Many locations, Stamford included, were named as Special Military Districts where special defence mechanisms were organised.

Stamford was split into six defence districts each led by a civilian group leader, reporting to the Mayor as Special Constable Commander and Chairman of the Local Emergency Committee. Special Constables were deployed to report on any suspicious behaviour, keeping roads clear for military use - eventually 300 were sworn in locally. All types of transport had to be logged with the 'Specials' as well as wheelbarrows, spades and wire. In an invasion, the 'Specials' were responsible for assisting police to blow up premises and destroy tyres and fuel to hinder the German advance. The civilian population were to evacuate initially to Nottingham, which was later changed to Leicester.

Eventually, air raid defence measures were put in place: sirens sounded when Zeppelins - which could travel at 85mph carrying 2 tons of bombs - were spotted within 30 miles of Stamford. In total, the local 'Specials' were called to 15 raids during the war.



A German Zeppelin © National Archives

The Defence of the Realm Act (or D.O.R.A.) of 8th August 1914 gave the government wide ranging powers. D.O.R.A. issued many regulations, curtailing anything that was perceived to be detrimental to the war effort.

No one was allowed to talk publicly about military activity in case a German spy was listening, and any damage to important infrastructure (such as bridges, roads or railway tracks) incurred heavy sanctions. People were forbidden to loiter near bridges and tunnels or to light bonfires. Licensed premises also had their opening hours restricted and beer was watered down. Fines were issued for making white flour instead of wholewheat and for allowing rats to invade wheat stores.

WARNING.
Defence of the Realm

Discussion in Public of Naval and Military matters may convey information to the enemy.

BE ON YOUR GUARD.

J. Walker, Printer, Northallerton.

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In Stamford, blackouts were enforced. The places most affected by these measures were the schools, the railway station and churches. It also caused great inconvenience however, for motorists and pedestrians trying to navigate in the darkness and collisions were frequent. Doorsteps, kerbstones, lamp posts and pillar boxes were painted with white bands to be more visible and luminous badges were worn to try to avoid accidents.

