



## THE HOME FRONT IN SURREY IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR A GUIDE TO SOURCES AT SURREY HISTORY CENTRE

### Introduction

This guide introduces some of the main archive sources for the study of the impact of World War I on Surrey. The focus of the guide is the home front and life and change within the county. It does not cover sources relating to the experiences of Surrey people who served in the armed forces or in auxiliary services overseas; nor does it relate to the history of the two Surrey-based regiments during the war. Almost all the sources are held by Surrey History Centre, although a few key sources held by other repositories are also included.

The survival of records relating to the home front in the First World War is surprisingly patchy. Several reasons for this can be suggested. In the interests of post-war rebuilding and social harmony, some record series relating to potentially contentious or sensitive areas, such as tribunal records relating to the application of conscription, were ordered to be destroyed by the government after the war; many records relating to the treatment of the wounded in war hospitals, given their deeply personal nature, may also have been deliberately discarded. Other records may have been lost through paper salvage campaigns at the end of World War I or during World War II. In addition many of the bodies that were established during the war, such as Emergency Committees, Food Control Committees and War Agricultural Committees drew their membership from a wide range of different local organisations. When these bodies were disbanded, responsibility for the records created would have been uncertain. It is noteworthy that the best surviving set of papers of a local War Agricultural Committee were not held by the district council but were among the records accumulated by a firm of solicitors, which had been involved on the committee. We know from a correspondence file relating to the establishment of Surrey Record Office by Surrey County Council that there was concern that when the Second World War broke out the same mistakes should not be repeated and that efforts should be made to preserve the records relating to this second global crisis better than had been the case with those of the first (**SHC ref CC792/1**).

The guide is not intended to be comprehensive: the formal minutes of almost any organisation which existed during the war will contain relevant material and some sources such as the minutes

of district and borough councils, school log books and governors' minutes and parish magazines have only been sampled to establish the sort of information that can be found.

For all the themes covered by this guide, local newspapers will almost certainly be a mine of information. Although a degree of censorship did apply during the war (eg. over the extent of damage caused by German bombing raids), much rich detail will be found in newspaper reports which is not found in any other source as well as indications in the letters pages of popular reaction to the war and the ebb and flow of morale and optimism.



*A nurse at Oaklands Red Cross Hospital, Cranleigh  
(SHC ref 6520/32)*