

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

Part 2. Agriculture, Food Supply and Rationing

The loss of much farm labour to the armed services and the disruption of imports because of attacks on shipping meant that great efforts were made to boost agricultural production and regulate the production and consumption of food.

Parish summaries of agricultural returns for Surrey, 1914-1918, are held at The National Archives (**TNA refs MAF 68/2655, 2712, 2769, 2826, 2883**)

A County War Agricultural Committee was established in November 1915, in response to the urging of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries. Detailed reports of this committee can be found in the indexed annual volumes of Surrey County Council reports (on open access in the searchroom), the first report appearing in March 1916 (p.343 in the volume for 1916). As an example, the committee's report in November 1917 (p.938) includes references to the ploughing up of golf courses, a very detailed report on employment of women in agriculture a report on the distribution of preserving sugar etc. The extremely useful appendices includes reports of the Executive Committee discussing, for example, actions under the Cultivation of Lands Order, 1917; the killing of pheasants and rabbits; the use of army labour to working the land; and the sale of horses. Appendices to the main report include the report of the Labour, Machinery and Supplies Sub-Committee and the Allotment and Garden Cultivation Sub-Committee.

The 5th Earl of Onslow, whose seat was at Clandon Park, was an important figure on the Committee, despite his concerns about its ignorance of agriculture, and his correspondence and papers include letters relating to the county committee and its initiatives such as the scheme to encourage the rearing of pigs and poultry (**SHC refs G173/77/148-151, G173/93/1-93, G173/94/1-11, 5337**).

For the committee's involvement in the distribution of seed potatoes see also the notice it issued in 1917 to small holders and allotment tenants (**SHC ref CC856/693**).

Local committees were also established in rural districts and some urban districts from 1917. Records of these have survived poorly, but a good set of papers of the Chertsey Rural District War Agricultural Committee, 1917-1921, including minutes and related papers and communications from the county committee are among the records of Paine and Brettell, solicitors (**SHC refs 6200/ADD/Boxes 29, 30, 31, 78**). Matters covered include exemptions of farmers and agricultural workers from military service, the extension of cultivated land, including through drainage, the organisation of horse teams and tractors, and the formation of a 'panel of Farmers willing to assist the Committee'.



Ministry of Food Control stickers against food waste (SHC ref 9175/1)

The same collection also includes minutes and papers of the Egham Rural District War Agriculture Committee, 1917-18 (**SHC ref 6200/ADD/box 31**).

The conversion of common land to cultivation is also referred to in correspondence of the Commons and Footpaths Preservation Society (**SHC ref 2572/44/1**) and the ploughing up of golf courses in correspondence of the Epsom Grandstand Association (**SHC ref 3434/20/3**).

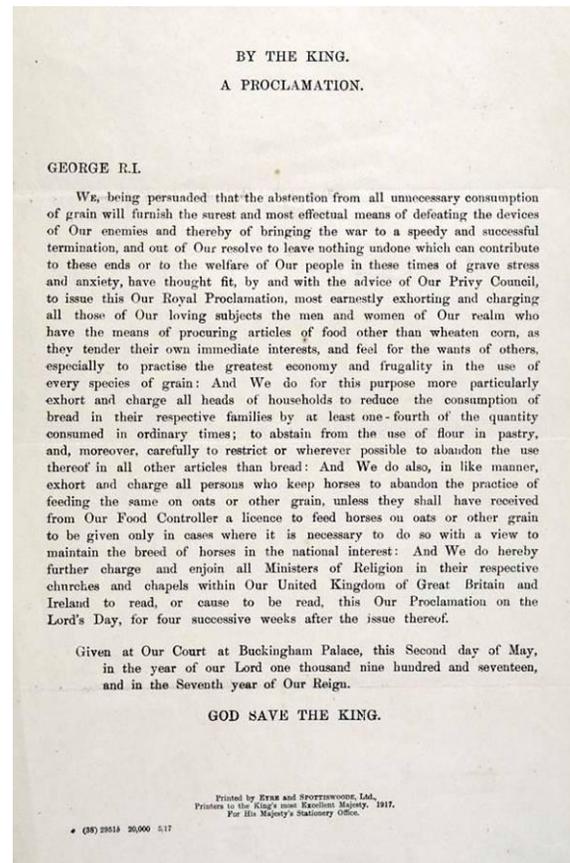
A diary of a Surrey farmer is that of John White, of Abinger and Horley for the years 1914-1916 (**SHC ref 6921/2/2-4**). His 1914 diary, for example, includes a record of the sale of produce; the guarding of railway lines by the military, the rise in prices and the taking of horses for the army.

Despite these efforts, consumers were confronted with shortages which grew increasingly severe as the war dragged on. For a photograph of girls from Florence Hyatt's school in South Norwood demonstrating about shortages of milk for babies, with a banner 'Save the British Babies' see **SHC ref 8653/2/1**. Under the Ministry of Food (in existence Dec 1916-Mar 1921) and Divisional Food Commissioners, elected Food Control Committees supervised the pricing and distribution of food in the urban and rural districts.

Again records of these committees seem to have survived very poorly, although occasional references to their composition and activities can be found in the main series of District Council minutes (for example the minutes of the Chertsey Urban District Sanitary Committee, **SHC ref 2544/1/14**). By far the best set of records are those of the Weybridge Urban District Food Control Committee, 1917-1921, include minutes and an account book (**SHC refs Ac1229/2/31, Ac734/39**). The minutes cover such matters as sugar rationing, the setting of prices for meat and milk and the registering of retailers). A leaflet on 'The Best Foods to Buy During the War', with recipes on the back page, issued by Weybridge UDC, is contained in **SHC ref 1321/7/3**.

We also hold an account book for the Dorking Urban District Food Control Committee (**SHC ref Ac1358/8/1**) and a pass book of the Chertsey Urban Food Control Committee (**SHC ref 4043/1**).

Initially it was hoped that exhortation and persuasion would be enough to get people to consume less. For stickers issued by the Ministry of Food Control against food waste and showing the German U-boat blockade of the Atlantic see **SHC ref 9175** and for a proclamation urging economy in grain consumption, May 1917, see **SHC ref 2337/15/2**. A notice to the congregation

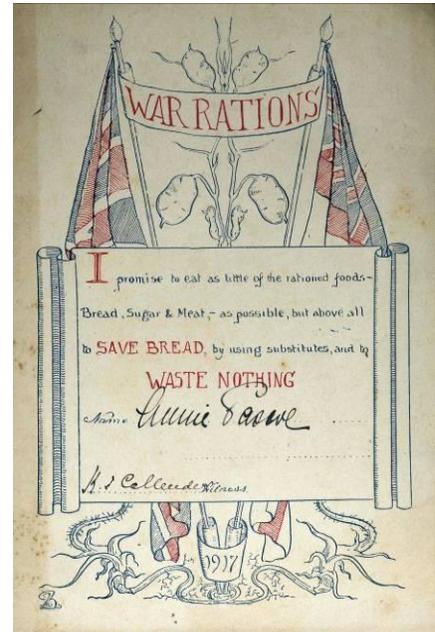


Royal Proclamation urging grain economy, 1917 (SHC ref 2337/15/2)

of Holy Trinity, Guildford, to limit bread consumption to 4lb per person per week, and so avoid compulsory rationing, is in GUHT/57/7/1. In her voluntary rationing certificate, Annie Pascoe promises to 'eat as little of the rationed foods – Bread, Sugar & Meat - as possible, but above all to save bread, by using substitutes, and to waste nothing' (SHC ref 6932/7/3/11)

However in February 1918 compulsory rationing was introduced. For a Ministry of Food National Ration Book of Sydney Alice Wethered, stamped by Reigate Rural District Council as the Food Office of Issue, see SHC ref 4201/2, which retains unused coupons for meat, lard, sugar and spare items. Further war rationing leaflets and ration cards and held in Volume 16 of the Warlingham Parish history (SHC ref 7700/16). Lucy Broadwood's diary of 1917-1918 (SHC ref 6782/29) includes a loose page describing the meat diet of the family in the Spring of 1918 (comprising sheep's head and scrag).

It was not only food that had to be rationed. Coal and petrol were also in short supply. For a notice from the Board of Trade, Coal Mines Department, concerning coal rationing, Sep 1918 (see SHC ref 6520/28).



Annie Pascoe's voluntary rationing certificate (SHC ref 6932/7/3/11)

The Government is safeguarding Food Supplies, and excessive prices will not be permitted, but

The women of the United Kingdom can help their country by spending Every Penny wisely, and to the best advantage.

Foods may be regarded generally as being of three kinds. Some of each should be included in the daily supply.

The three kinds are:-

- (1) **Starchy and sugar food**; such, in the main, are potatoes and sugar.
- (2) **Fatty foods**, such as dripping or butter.
- (3) **Body building foods**. The body building substances are present in large proportions in all lean meat, in fish, in eggs, in many kinds of beans and peas and nuts, and in Cheese. Rice and flour also contain a considerable proportion of body building substances mixed with much starchy food.

The first two kinds of food are of great value in helping the body to carry on its work, but some of the third kind of food is essential for the growth and repair of the body.

In addition to the three kinds of food forming the bulk of the diet, certain salts and substances that are in vegetables and fruit are necessary if the body is to be kept healthy.

A sufficient quantity of water must of course be taken.

Fresh milk is a remarkable food, as it contains every necessary kind of food substance.

It is important to remember that food must not only contain the right amount of the necessary substances, but these substances must be in such a form that they can be digested in the body and then absorbed in the blood.

The real (strength giving) value of ordinary food materials by no means corresponds with their cost. By sensible buying and good cooking it is easy to prepare a meal which is pleasing and palatable and of high food value at a much smaller cost than if no care and intelligence were exercised in choosing.

HERE ARE SOME FACTS ABOUT FOODS.

A mixed vegetable and-meat diet suits most people best.

VEGETABLE FOODS.

DRIED PEAS, HARCOT BEANS and LENTILS contain as much flesh-forming material as MEAT, and are very much cheaper.

BREAD and BAKERY made from "SECONDS" FLOUR, although less attractive in appearance than that made from white flour, is more nourishing.

OATMEAL is a very rich food, but requires thorough boiling to make it digestible.

POTATOES are best value when cooked in their skins, or steamed.

ONIONS, BEETROOT and CARROTS are more nutritious than CABBAGES, but greens and fruit are valuable as they keep the blood in good condition.

BANANAS, RAISINS and DRIED CURRANTS are cheap and nourishing.

SUGAR and TREACLE are useful foods, but Jam is not nearly such good value as Margarine or Dripping.

ANIMAL FOODS.

HERRINGS, BLOATERS and KIPPERS are most nourishing.

CHEAPER CUTS of Butcher's Meat contain as much nourishment as the best meat; excellent steaks may be made from them with cheap vegetables.

FRESH FOODS are better than canned foods.

DRIPPING and MARGARINE contain as much food value as the best butter; dripping is well worth buying. It is an extremely valuable food for children, who will take it readily with bread or toast, or as dripping pudding. SWEET PUDDING should be given to children who dislike fat meat.

CHEESE is one of the cheapest and best of foods, and is rich in nourishment.

WHAT TO DRINK.

COCOA when taken with milk and sugar is a food, and is more beneficial than tea or coffee.

BEER and SPIRITS have small food value and, at the best, are expensive beverages for anyone in hard times, except under doctor's orders. Intemperance in time of War cannot be too severely condemned.

SKIMMED MILK is a good drink for children; provided some dripping is given as well to supply the fat taken from the milk.

Food guidance issued by Weybridge Urban District Council
(SHC ref Ac1321/7/3)