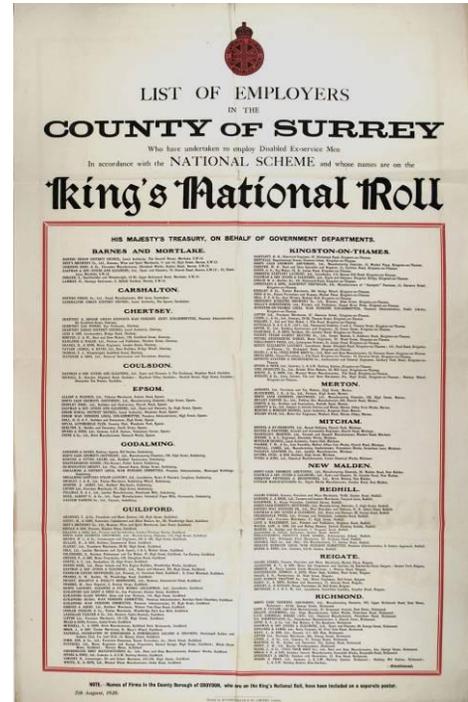


## THE HOME FRONT IN SURREY IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR A GUIDE TO SOURCES AT SURREY HISTORY CENTRE

### Part 9. War Pensions and Postwar Relief for Veterans

As the war progressed and huge numbers of servicemen began to return with life-changing physical or psychological damage, the authorities realised that existing arrangements for the payment of military pensions had to be overhauled. In November 1915, the Naval and Military War Pensions Act was passed by which responsibility for pensions for disabled men and their dependants, formerly shared between the Admiralty, Chelsea Hospital and the Army Council, passed to a Statutory Committee of the Royal Patriotic Fund. To assist the work of the Statutory Committee, Local Committees were set up in each county, with Special Sub-Committees at district level. Boroughs and Urban Districts could apply to establish their own Local Committees and ultimately Wimbledon, Richmond, Guildford, Barnes and Mortlake and Sutton all obtained these powers. The 25 members of Surrey's Local Committee, set up in 1916, included representatives from the County Council, employers, labour, servicemen, the Surrey Territorial Forces Association, Surrey Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association and the Surrey Soldiers' and Sailors' Help Society. At least three members were to be women. The duties of the County Local War Pensions Committee and the District Sub Committees were to supplement, in cases of need, pensions and allowances made from public funds to wives and dependants of servicemen, make grants to widows, make interim payments and so on. They also arranged for the care and the subsequent employment of disabled servicemen and collected public contributions.



*Poster for national scheme for employment of disabled men (SHC ref 8996/2/1)*

The system was further changed when a Ministry of Pensions was created by Act of Parliament of December 1916. Following this, the Statutory Committee was dissolved as from September 1917, though the Surrey Local Committee continued in existence until, under the War Pensions Act 1921, its functions were transferred to five new district committees appointed by the Minister of Pensions; the new committees took over from December 1922. The five Surrey districts were Aldershot, Farnham and District; Croydon, Godstone and District; Guildford, Reigate and District; Surbiton, Richmond, Chertsey and District; and Wimbledon, Epsom and District.

Pensions could be awarded 'where the disablement... is due to, or aggravated by, military service'. Awards were no longer to be based on an assessment of a veteran's ability to earn a living wage but were granted according to a standardised schedule. The loss of two or more limbs, for example, entitled a man to a 100% pension, whereas amputation of a leg above the knee was assessed at 60% and below the knee at 50%. Pension Boards also endeavoured to distinguish between mental disorders entirely due to war service (termed 'attributed') and those

which had merely been exacerbated ('aggravated'). Attributed pensions could be paid for life, but aggravated awards were usually short lived and might be terminated when the direct effect of the war might be expected to have passed.

Local Committees could arrange for servicemen discharged through disability to receive further treatment at civil or military hospitals or specialist units. They also set up training schemes, which had to be approved by the Ministry of Pensions, in subjects such as motor engineering, electrical work, telegraphy, boot repairing, tailoring, commercial subjects, masonry, caretaking and basket making. The technical institutes at Woking, Kingston, Wimbledon and Reigate led the way in providing classes but other offers were taken up: for example, the Countess of Lovelace agreed that training carpentry, gardening and barrel hoop making would be provided on the Ockham estate and Messrs Cann and Taylor's factory in East Sheen offered training in golf club making.

The **printed reports of Surrey County Council** include reports of the Surrey Local War Pensions Committee, established under the 1915 Act, between 1916 and 1918; the reports between July 1917 and July 1918 include appendices summarising treatment and training delivered and numbers of those employed subsequent to completing their training. For a file relating to the establishment of the committee and creation of district sub-committees, 1915-1922, see **SHC ref CC7/2/1-4**. A map showing sub-committee districts and independent authorities under the Act, 1915, is held as **SHC ref 603/6/5** (the independent authorities being Guildford, Reigate, Richmond and Wimbledon Boroughs and Barnes, Sutton and Woking Urban Districts).

For financial records of the Dorking Sub-Committee of the Surrey War Pensions Committee see **SHC ref 898/3/1-37**. The minutes of the Chertsey Rural District Sub-Committee, 1917-1919, include discussion of individual cases (see **SHC ref 6200/50**). Papers relating to the application of the Act in Guildford Borough, including an account book, 1916-1917, are held as **SHC refs BR/BT/10** and **BR/T/199/1-5**.

The employment of discharged servicemen, particularly the disabled, in the post war years was a contentious issue. For 'Notes on Civil Employment for Ex-Service Men', published by the Ministry of Labour and 'To Disabled Sailors and Soldiers' published by the Ministry of Pensions, c.1918, see **SHC ref QRWS/30/REED/3**. For posters listing employers in the County of Surrey who undertook to employ disabled ex-Service men, under the National Scheme for Disabled Men 'and whose names are on the King's National Roll', see **SHC ref 8996/2/1** and for a certificate awarded to Epsom Rural District Council under the same scheme, c.1920, see **SHC ref 6070/4/44**.

Campaigning groups fought for the rights of the disabled and kept their cause in the public eye. The Ex-Services Welfare Society focussed on the enduring needs of those suffering from mental problems and in 1927 it set up the Thermega electric blanket factory in Leatherhead to provide employment and retraining for neurasthenic veterans. Ashtead Pottery Ltd was founded by Sir Lawrence Weaver and Lady Kathleen Weaver to provide permanent employment for disabled ex-servicemen. A lease was taken on Victoria Works, Ashtead, housing provided for the employees; and pottery and tiles made until the closure of the works in 1935. A small quantity of papers including correspondence between the chairman Sir Richard Stafford Cripps, the future

Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Cecil Harmsworth concerning support for the business, and a brief history by the manager A T Moore, are held as **SHC ref 8480/1-7**.

Records of the smallholdings scheme, initiated by the government in 1919 to settle demobilised soldiers, and administered in Surrey by the Agricultural Committee, are held as **SHC ref CC592**. The system was not a total success and by the Agriculture Act 1947 the objective was altered so that provision of the smallholdings 'should be determined primarily by agricultural considerations rather than, in the past, by social considerations'.

Ex-servicemen also found practical support and comradeship through organisations such as the Comrades of the Great War and the Royal British Legion. For correspondence of the Earl of Onslow, 1917-1922, relating to the formation of the Comrades, including a Women's Section, see **SHC refs G173/108/1-140, G173/109/1-30, G173/77/152, 1320/516 and 5337/9/31**.

Records of the Ockham Branch of the Comrades are held as **SHC ref OCK/1/8/3-4**; records of the Epsom, Bletchingley, Nutfield and Esher Branches of the British Legion are held as **SHC refs 6310, 7776, 9029 and 9161** respectively.



*Honourable discharge certificate issued to Private Frank Trimmer, Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment, 1918 (SHC ref QRWS/30/TRIM)*