

Surrey in the Great War: A County Remembers



Spring 2016

Surrey in the Great War Update



The wedding of Harold Gibbons to Florence Young, 24 May 1915. Image courtesy of SGW contributor Pat Clack.

DID YOU KNOW...?

Several Cranleigh people, very varied in type, appeared before the Hambledon Appeals Tribunal in Guildford in March 1916, hoping to be exempted from compulsory military service.

George Wilson Selfe, 31, bank cashier, declared that his private doctor said that he was not fit to lift heavy things, 'and if he joined the Army, he would eventually be in hospital'. The tribunal was unimpressed and dismissed his appeal (courtesy of Joy Horn, researcher & contributor to SGW).

Dates for your Diary:

- SUNDAY 5 JUNE:
SHOWCASE DAY IN CATERHAM HIGH STREET, 1-6PM (BRING YOUR WWI FAMILY MEMORABILIA)
- SATURDAY 2 JULY:
BATTLE OF THE SOMME FILM SCREENING AT SURREY HISTORY CENTRE, 1.30-5.30PM (INCLUDES TALK & 70MINS SCREENING)

SEE THE BACK PAGE FOR DETAILS...

The SGW team has been very busy since the circulation of the last newsletter. The opening months of 2016 have been full of events, talks, and family history interviews.

We've welcomed many new project volunteers, who have taken roles as newspaper indexers, researchers and digitisers.

The project website is now LIVE! You can now read, upload and share your

Surrey WWI research. The stories you will read have been written and shared by project volunteers and local researchers and families. The website will continue to grow in content as more people contribute.

www.surreyinthewar.org.uk

We've been busy promoting the project around the county, and further afield: *Who Do You Think You Are?* Live (Birmingham), BBC Radio Surrey, and articles in local newspapers and magazines. Read more about what we've been up to in this newsletter...

Image Gallery



Spring 2016

Events Hosted and Attended

February:

The SGW team were judges for Spelthorne Borough Schools' WWI poetry competition

WWI Workshop with Yr 9s from St John the Baptist School, Woking

SGW Volunteer Coffee Morning (for volunteers in Woking/Guildford areas)

March:

Stall at Bourne History Society AGM

Attendance at the national conference

on conscientious objection

SGW Volunteer Coffee Morning (for volunteers in the Redhill, Reigate, Banstead and Lingfield areas)

April:

SGW Showcase Day, Farnham

Talk given at the national *Who Do You Think You Are?* Live event in Birmingham

10-min slot on BBC Radio Surrey, on

the weekend James Cannon Breakfast Show

Attendance at the Mount Felix Hospital Tapestry Open Day, Walton-on-Thames

May:

Stall at Farnham' Time to Remember, an event to commemorate the first 2 minutes' silence in 1916

DID YOU KNOW...?

ON 13 OCTOBER 1915, THE CROYDON AREA WAS BOMBED BY GERMAN ZEPPELINS.

VERA BRITAIN IN HER *LETTERS FROM A LOST GENERATION*, WRITING ON 16 OCTOBER 1915, REFERS TO A ZEPPELIN RAID THAT DEMOLISHED A LOT OF EAST CROYDON.



Surrey in the Great War

Canadians at Witley Camp

Text and research by Kianna Gnap, MA Public History Student at the University of Kingston

Canadians played an integral role alongside the British and the Allies during the Great War. Throughout 1914-1918, about 7 per cent of the Canadian population served in the Great War, not to mention the efforts and support of Canadians back home. The Canadian Army entered and fought in the war as part of the British Empire's Dominions and Colonies. As such, Canadians spent a significant amount of time in various areas of Britain, including Surrey, before heading to the front.

The overseas Canadian force was called the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). Out of the 630 000 Canadians that enlisted, 424 000 journeyed overseas as the CEF. In Britain, the Canadian forces were put through basic military training at various camps across England. Two of the largest in Surrey, England were Bramshott and Witley. Witley Camp was built on the Witley Common in Surrey, which is located about 40 miles southwest of London. The Surrey countryside provided an ideal landscape for artillery training, with rolling hills, sandy soil, as well as good roads and beautiful scenery and villages. The camp provided the soldiers with housing, medical attention, recreation facilities, and shops, also known as 'Tin-Towns,' found on the edge of the camp.



Witley Camp and its surrounding area hold importance to the history of Canadians in the Great War. For example, it was the training site of the 13th Canadian Infantry Brigade that arrived in the autumn of 1916, and trained in the area for fifteen months. This brigade was eventually formed of the 128th Battalion from Saskatchewan, the 134th and 160th (Bruce) Battalions from Ontario, and the 202nd (Sportsmen's) Battalion from Alberta. Because the men were spending an unforeseeable amount of time away from home and in the harsh conditions of war, the camp became their community. The *Bruce in Khaki Magazine*, for example, reflects the way that training camps encouraged community atmosphere for the soldiers. The magazine includes stories, jokes, news, advertisements, and invitations to events at nearby camps. For example, in the November 9th, 1917 issue, readers are invited to a lecture at the Canadian Y.M.C.A. in Godalming, Surrey, not far from Witley. The activities and fraternity among soldiers stationed at military camps during the Great War are also depicted in an illustration by Dame Laura Knight. This illustration is titled "Canadians Boxing at Witley Camp." It may be posited that this activity was for training purposes, or possibly entertainment, as seen with a large crowd of soldiers gathered in the background cheering on the participants. Witley Camp's role in the war, and link to Canadian soldiers, also continues into the immediate post-war operations.

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Witley was among the several military bases in England that experienced riots and unrest from Canadian soldiers in the months after the war. A notable use of Witley Camp is its role during the demobilization and repatriation at the end of the war. Perhaps an often-overlooked aspect of war is the fate of the thousands of soldiers after the fighting has stopped. Many men in the CEF felt reluctant to obey military protocol after Armistice was announced. Thousands of soldiers now faced the process of repatriation and demobilization, which took up to a year, and was often very frustrating. For Canada, this included repatriating more than 250 000 men from the fighting areas in Europe. The CEF was repatriated in two waves: first, the major units of the Corps under their own officers, totalling 100 000 men, and second, the remainder placed into several drafts. Since Witley was one of the larger camps, it received these Canadian Corps units during the process of demobilization. To ease this process, the military promoted things like physical training programs, sports and recreation, entertainment, and even offered the opportunity for education with the Khaki University that was established in 1917. Unfortunately, the government was slow to repatriate the troops. This delay had to do with issues of overcrowding the ships, which in turn lead to a backlog on railway transport in Canada.

Canadians at Witley Camp

On Armistice Day of November 1918, February 1919, and June 1919, Canadian soldiers engaged in riots in Witley Camp, and the surrounding area. Most likely due to boredom, lack of information, rumours, confusion, and anger, there were as many as thirteen incidents of unrest at camps in England between 1918 and 1919. The Tin-Towns in Witley suffered major disturbances and damages. There are extensive records of legal correspondence relating to damage claims by local shopkeepers as a result of these riots. For example, a Mr. L. Brilliant was a victim of the February and June riots, claiming upwards of £500 as compensation for damage to stock, goods, fittings, and fixtures. C.T. Broadbent, Major Acting A.P.M. at Witley Camp attests to the riots by Canadian soldiers. He claims that their actions were a result of the unjust overcharging practiced by the shopkeepers towards the Canadian soldiers. The Canadians had to resort to asking English soldiers or civilians to make purchases for them to avoid this treatment. The situation was made worse by the fact that there was an influenza outbreak and a quarantine in Godalming and Guildford, meaning that the men were restricted to only shopping within the camp, to which the shopkeepers clearly took advantage. By June, the riots even escalated into the burning down of a large portion of the Tin-Towns at Witley. It is very likely that the frustratingly long process of repatriation and demobilisation, and post-war effects caused this anger among the Canadian troops.

The legacy of Witley Camp remains as its role in both World Wars as a training base and living quarters. It is still remembered among the Canadian community. For example, last year a Canadian rugby team visited the site of Witley Camp to learn about the history of the Canadians in the Great War. The camp was eventually rebuilt for the Second World War on the Rodborough Common in Surrey. Today Witley Camp is the site of archaeological digs, where exciting finds are revealing more about the life of soldiers during the war.

Website

www.surreyinthewar.org.uk

The *Surrey in the Great War* website is now live! It acts as a hub for all Surrey WW1-related content, showcasing and celebrating existing research and encouraging everyone else to get involved and share their story.

Have a browse through the stories about individuals, towns, civilians, nurses, industry, Zeppelin raids, life at

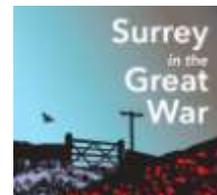
home, the Surrey Regiments...and much, much more.

Can't find what you're looking for? Why not research it, and add it?

Are you knowledgeable about a certain aspect of Surrey life during the war? We're looking for people like you to share your expertise!



DID YOU KNOW...?
The villages of Shere and Gomshall were alarmed on Wednesday evening by a 'spy scare'. The affair took place near the railway arch at Gomshall, where the report of a gun close to the road was heard. The story that there was a spy in the vicinity spread, and a thorough search of the line and the neighbourhood was made. Eventually it was discovered that the shot had been fired by Mr Muzzlebrook, who was rabbit shooting on his own property (*Surrey Advertiser*, 31 August 1914)



SURREY IN THE GREAT WAR

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We're on the hunt for Surrey WWI stories! Our Surrey 'person' criteria is broad:

Born in Surrey . Lived in Surrey during the war . Moved to Surrey because of the war .

Died in Surrey . Memorialised and/or buried in Surrey . Served in a Surrey regiment or worked

in a Surrey war-time organisation . A Surrey person who served in another regiment .

. People can be male or female, military or civilian, young or old—we want to hear about

everyone and their wartime experience .

- *If you have information about someone who fits these criteria, please share it with us on our website. Register as a user via this address: <http://www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk/register>*
- *If you don't have information yourself but would like to be involved, please let us know—we have lots of individuals awaiting investigation.*

Visit our website! www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk



German POWs at Frith Hill. Image reproduced thanks to Surrey History Centre. Ref: PC 68/21/1



Clandon Park as a war hospital. Image reproduced thanks to Surrey History Centre. Ref: PC/41/17

Future Events

Here are a list of future events, both project-organised and external, to add to your diary.

Sunday 5 June: SGW Showcase - held as part of the Caterham Festival Street Party, 1-6pm, in the High Street of Caterham. Bring your WWI Surrey memorabilia, photos or documents to show to our experts. Admission free.

Friday 1 July: Over The Top— This football event is being organised by the local Regiment (The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment), the Army Benevolent Fund and the South East Reserve

Forces' and Cadets' Association. 20 teams, military and civilian, male and female, adults and youth, will play each other and remember the sacrifices made by local men from the south-east of England. To be held at Surrey Sports Park, University of Surrey, Guildford, 10am start, admission free. See www.soldierscharity.org/events/over-the-top/ for more information.

Saturday 2 July: Screening of the film *The Battle of the Somme*—The Imperial War Museum has remastered the famous film of the Battle that was shown in cinemas

across the UK in 1916. This FREE event will feature a talk about the film by Dr Emma Hanna of the University of Kent, a showing of the 75min film, and footage of Surrey during the Great War. Click [here](#) to book online or call 01483 518737. Places are limited: if you find when you try to book that the event is full, please contact us using the details above to register your interest. If there is sufficient interest, we will hold a second screening.