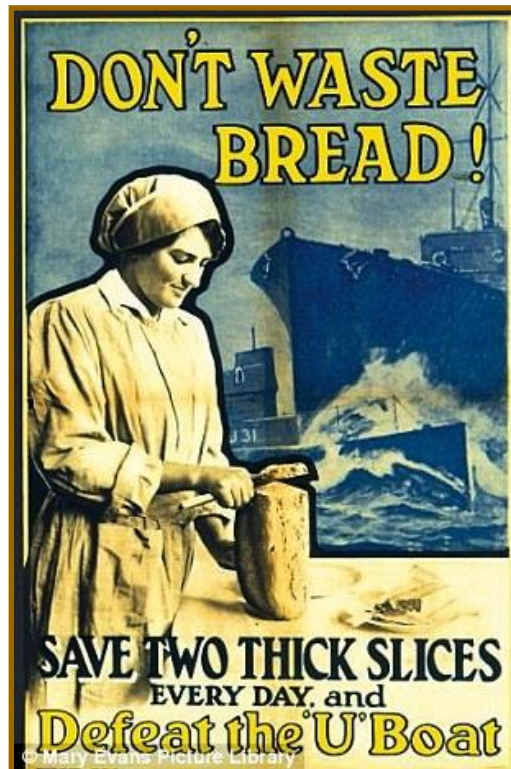


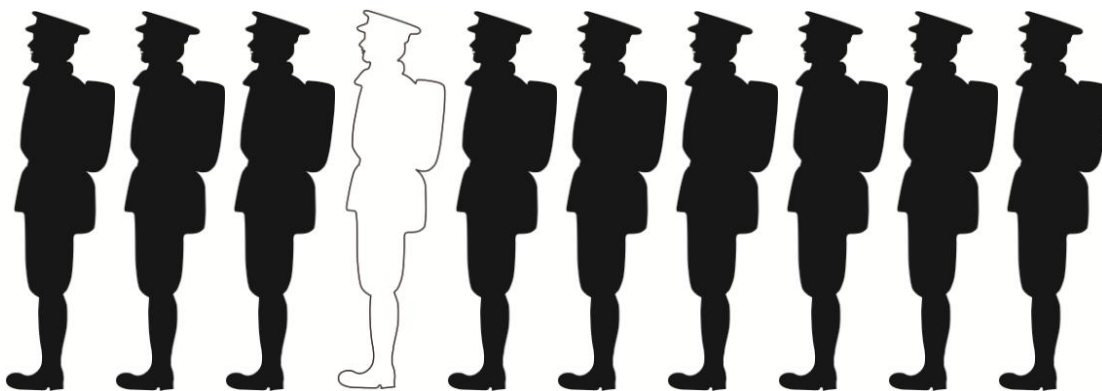
The Great War

Our Community Commemorated

Rationing During the War



Booklet 8: Lynda Kappes MBE



Holmes Chapel and District U3A Local History Group

This booklet, the eighth in a series about the effect of the First World War on Holmes Chapel, describes the effect of rationing on life in Holmes Chapel in the years during and after the war.

Photograph on Front Cover is a typical poster used to discourage waste.

Rationing During World War One

During World War One the British Isles were under attack which meant that the civilian population found themselves in some ways at the war front.

In February 1917 Kaiser Wilhelm declared “We will starve the British people who refused peace until they fall on their knees and plead for it” The Kaiser knew that the British imported two thirds of their food, approximately 600,000 tons per month. He calculated that by unleashing his U boats on merchant shipping it would take five months to starve them out. The main exporters of food to Britain were the USA and Canada with their ships having to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Up to 1916 merchant ships could travel across the Atlantic in relative safety but at the start of 1917 they were sunk with increasing frequency.

The U boats came very close to defeating the British and they caused devastation in the shipping lanes. Between February and March 1917 46,000 tons of meat and 85,000 tons of sugar were sent to the bottom of the sea.

The British government told the British people they had to grow more food or starve. This was not going to be an easy task as most of the men and horses were at the front fighting. As a result 84,000 disabled men, 30,000 German prisoners of war and a quarter million women were drafted in to work the land. This was hoped to produce a month’s extra food every year.

Every unoccupied piece of land was turned over to food production, some two and a half million acres turned over to farming by the end of

the war. Men experienced with traction engines were made exempt from military duty to enable them to work on farms.

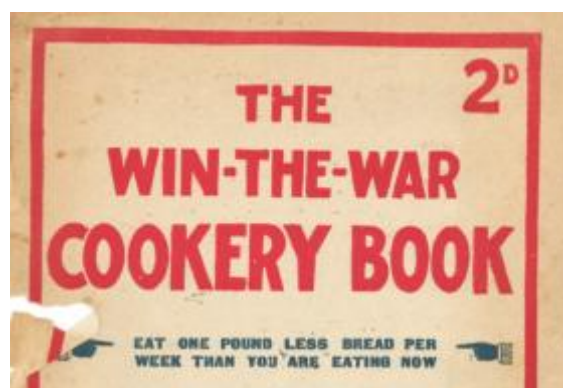
Civilians were also asked to help themselves by growing food such as vegetables on any available land. This action was labelled “Allotmentitis” by the press and by the end of the war over one and a half million allotments were producing food. Even the herbaceous border at Buckingham Palace was turned over to produce turnips on order of the King!



World War One Posters

The first annual meeting of the Holmes Chapel allotment scheme took place on November 30th 1917. Mr. Caldershank was in the chair with the president Mr. Reiss sending his apologies. It was noted that several successful vegetables had been grown particularly potatoes which had augmented food supplies. Amongst the people thanked were the Wallpaper Works for their generous offer of land adjoining the factory rent free for use as allotments. Also thanked were the Canon and the Reverend Armistead for allowing the members to become tenants on their land on Middlewich Road when no other land in the immediate neighbourhood was available.

The poor depended on bread as they were too poor to afford other foodstuffs but eight out of ten loaves were made from imported wheat which was in scarce supply. The better off were ordered to leave bread for the poor and eat other foods. A “Win the War” cookery book was published for the middle classes to enable them to produce meals using food other than bread. They were told that “The struggle was not taking place only on land and sea but in your larder, your kitchen and your dining room”

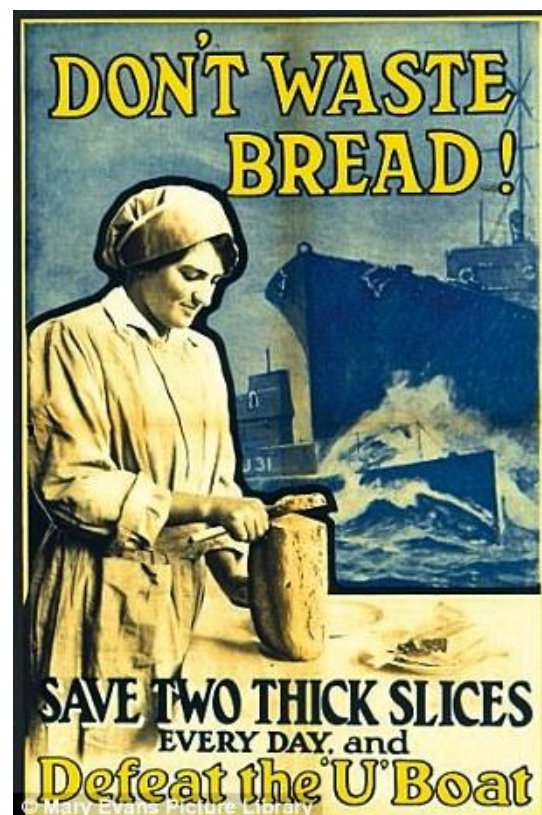


Win the War Cookery Book

By April and May of 1917 however there were only six weeks supply of wheat left and sugar was practically unobtainable. The British people were encouraged to eat a quarter less bread and avoid using flour in pastry.



World War One Posters



As the Autumn of 1917 approached the situation was getting worse as the U boat blockade bit in. Long queues began to form outside food shops and some people took to looting.

Food rationing was introduced in January 1918 and it did work as queues disappeared and starvation was kept at bay. Rations per week were introduced as follows;

15 ozs meat

5 ozs bacon

4 ozs margarine

8 ozs sugar

2 ozs butter

2 ozs tea

1 fresh egg

2 to 3 pints of milk

Other rations included;

Jam - 1 lb every two months

Dried eggs - one packet every four weeks

Sweets - 12 ozs every four weeks

Household milk - one packet every four weeks

Rationing cards were issued and everyone had to register with a butcher and a grocer.

Previously uninvolved the housewives felt they now had a part to play. They had modest supplies of sugar and meat (the first two items to be rationed) to eke out.

The Defence of the Realm Act or DORA was used to ensure that food shortages never occurred. The idea of rationing food was to guarantee

supplies not reduce consumption. This was very successful and official figures showed that the intake of calories almost kept up with the pre-war levels. At the start of the war people had panic bought food and hoarded it at home. Some shops sold out of food in August 1914. However, after initial panic buying people settled down into a routine and food supply was not a problem until the end of 1916.

KEEP THIS CARD CAREFULLY

RATIONING ORDER, N. 86.
1918.
Food Office of Issue.

MONTO

To be filled up by Food Office before issue.

Holder's Surname } *Clair*
Christian Name } *Leonard*
Address } *3*

To register for MEAT, BUTTER and SUGAR, fill up the counterfoils A, B and C on lower half of card, and give them to any Retailers you choose. The Retailers must write or stamp their names in these spaces, and you will not be able to return to a retailer again without consent of the Food Office.

Name and Address of BUTCHER A	Name and Address of Retailer for..... D
Name and Address of BUTTER Retailer B	Name and Address of Retailer for..... E
Name and Address of SUGAR Retailer C	Name and Address of Retailer for..... F

SPARE. Signature and Address of Holder. Name and Address of Retailer for..... **D**

D

Keep this counterfoil and the top portion of the card, and read the accompanying leaflet of instructions.

World War One Ration Book

As rationing took hold neighbour began to spy on neighbour to make sure everyone was doing their bit and hoarding became a very serious crime. The weekly consumption of sugar fell from 1.49lb in 1914 to 0.93lb in 1918. Between July 1914 and June 1916 inflation rose by 59% and by spring 1917 bread was costing twice as much as it had done in 1914. Bread was the staple diet for many British people so the

Government intervened and lowered the price of 4lb of bread from 1s to 9d. From November 1917 a similar subsidy was introduced on potatoes.

On February 17th 1916 a stall was set up in Holmes Chapel which was organised and run by local ladies where people could leave eggs, fruit and vegetables for the benefit of the wounded soldiers at Somerford Hospital. This became a regular occurrence in the village every Thursday. At the St. Luke's Sunday School Anniversary Service the children also brought eggs for the hospital.

An urgent appeal for women to work on farms was launched on May 30th 1916. This was for educated women who would be prepared to undergo short training for general farm work. Food shortages were very grave in the county and if the right women did not come forward by the Autumn the whole of Cheshire would be facing serious difficulties.

An advertisement appeared in the local Chronicle newspaper on July 7th 1916 advising mothers to try Bengers food (which was of course latterly produced in the village) for themselves. This would especially benefit nursing mothers and their infants. The advert advocated taking the food between meals as an addition to their normal diet and suggested flavouring it with tea, coffee and chocolate to add some taste. The Bengers would promote a higher state of nutrition and would help mothers who were overtired or out of sorts.

An order of the Food controller came into force on March 12th 1917 to stop the misdealing of sugar. The sugar was only to be sold if goods to a certain value were purchased at the same time. It was reported that the allowance of $\frac{3}{4}$ lb of sugar per head was not being received by everyone as some retailers were hoarding it.

The Government introduced a scheme for the collection of chestnuts on August 24th 1917. This was to replace grain that was being used in the industrial munitions process. Every ton of conkers collected would release ½ ton of grain for food. People in the village were urged to form committees and to set local children to the task of collecting the conkers.

On August 31st 1917 Cheshire was allocated 50 tons of sugar for their fruit growers and 4 tons of this was sent to the Congleton district. One grocer in each district was nominated to sell the sugar at 7d per lb and received 3s 4d for organising these sales.

The process of sugar rationing was changed on September 7th 1917. People were instructed to apply for new rationing cards and leave it with a nominated retailer who would be given a supply for each customer. Retailers were now not allowed to impose conditions about the purchasing of other goods along with the sugar.

Food shortages were reported in the local area on January 18th 1918 especially of meat, bacon, butter and margarine. In March the local Food Control Committee began to control the distribution of butter, margarine, bacon, ham, lard, cheese, tinned and potted meat, tea, jam and milk. These foodstuffs were all included on one ration card per household and the new regulations began on March 1st. Every person was given four 5d meat coupons per week. The application forms for the new cards were distributed in the post but were to be returned to schools and the local head teachers were to issue the cards.

An increase in the prices of beer, tobacco, matches and sugar was reported in the local press on April 23rd 1918.

From an article in the parish magazine of May 1918 it would appear people in the area of Holmes Chapel and Cranage were becoming accustomed to the rationing of “butcher’s meat and bacon” and that the rationing scheme was working very well in the district.

There appeared to be some misunderstanding of those people entitled to receive additional rations of bacon! These included, “all persons engaged in manual labour” and “all boys between the ages of 18 and 19” being entitled to two additional coupons per week for the purchase of bacon. This was done obviously to keep the labour force as healthy as possible so they were strong enough to carry on working.

All children reaching the age of six were entitled to a full meat ration and parents were encouraged to apply to the Food Office for an adult ration card.

The U boat attacks began to lose their effectiveness in early October 1918 but the Ministry of Food was still advocating the strictest economy with food consumption even though the rationing system appeared to be working well.

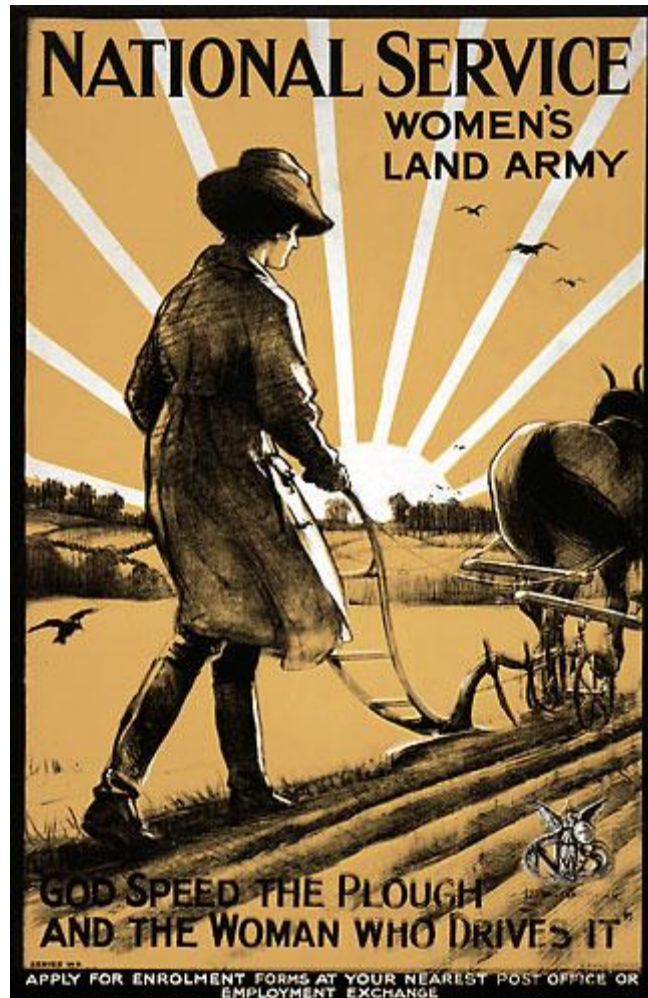
To ensure this a new ration book was introduced on November 1st 1918 enabling people to obtain meat, bacon, butter, margarine, lard, sugar, tea and jam. After November 3rd every holder of a ration card had to register their ration book with a nominated retailer. Except for tea and jam no counterfoil was necessary but each retailer had to write their name and address on the back cover of the ration book. People had to take their old book with them when registering for the new one and sign the counterfoil before they handed it over.

The Board of Agriculture in May 1918 were encouraging everyone to plant additional acreages of potatoes and appealed to farmers, small holders, allotment holders and cottage gardeners to do so. Everyone was called on to “do their bit” with regard to potato planting. Everyone who could was asked to plant more potatoes. The Board of Agriculture was being pressed to send additional supplies of seed potatoes “at once” to Holmes Chapel. Anyone wanting extra seed was to apply to Mr. Charles Ellison who would provide information regarding price etc.

With so many men away fighting the labour force available at home was becoming depleted. This was causing problems for local farmers but plans were being put in place to try to alleviate this. In January 1917 the parish magazine reminded local farmers that arrangements for the employment of soldiers in ordinary agricultural work still remained in place. If a farmer wanted labour at short notice for a period not exceeding six days they were to apply to the Commanding Officer of the man they required. In all other cases they were to apply to the local employment exchange at the Board of Trade.

The Board of Agriculture then began to organise the Women’s Land Army starting activities in 1915. With three million men away fighting Britain was struggling for labour. The government wanted women to get more involved in the production of food and do their bit to support the war effort. They wanted to maximise the output from the land to feed the nation and counteract the effect of the U boats. By the end of 1917 260,000 women were working as farm labourers. However many traditional farmers were against the Women’s Land Army so the Board of Trade sent agricultural organisers to speak to the farmers to encourage them to accept women’s work on the farms. In testimony to

their work the wheat harvest of 1917 was the best in the country's history!



Land Army Poster

The board also sent out an edict reminding women that although they were doing men's work they still had to keep their femininity.

“You are doing a man's work and so you are dressed rather like a man but remember that because you wear a smock and trousers you should take care to behave like an English girl who expects chivalry and respect from everyone she meets”

On November 13 1916 training for ladies in dairy work and the handling of cattle was arranged at Holmes Chapel Agricultural College by

Mrs.Lynn Banks of Heaton Moor. One of the ladies receiving training is pictured below.



Land Girl at Saltersford Agricultural College (IWM)

In January 1914 applications were encouraged for a number of scholarships for females for instruction in dairy work. All those interested were asked to contact the Director of Education, City of Chester for application forms.

In January 1916 a batch of disabled soldiers and sailors began training at Holmes Chapel Agricultural College to fit them for agricultural work. 14 men were in residence at the college learning the “practical operations of the farm”. All the men were disabled for future fighting but not so disabled as to prevent them becoming useful men in farming to help with the production of food and boost the labour force on the land.

In July 1916 at the request of the Cheshire War Agricultural Committee both headmasters in Holmes Chapel, Mr.H.Hodgkinson and Mr A Oakes, consented to act as registrars of the Voluntary Labour Bureaux for the district. All persons having spare time to help in the harvesting of crops were asked on patriotic grounds to volunteer for this work. They were to inform Mr Hodgkinson and Mr Oakes of the services they were able to offer. On application from the farmer the registrars would then be able to put them in communication with those who were ready to help with the harvest.

By November 1919 there had been a 98% rise in the cost of living since June 1914. The standard weekly expenditure for a family had gone up from 24s 11d to 47s 3d, a 90% rise. Unemployment had disappeared but the strain of overtime and Sunday work meant more food was needed. The Government still advised people to be economical with the use of coal and the meat ration remained the same. Sugar and butter remained on ration until 1920.

It is interesting to note that comparatively few civilians died as a result of being directly affected by the fighting unlike in the Second World War. In 1914 to 1918 more civilians died because hunger made them more susceptible to disease. The Spanish Flu, which hit Europe at the

end of the war, would claim millions of victims among civilians and soldiers already weakened by hunger. However life expectancy and the standard of living actually rose during the war especially for the working class.

Sources;

Holmes Chapel Parish Magazines

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Crewe "Chronicle" and "Guardian" newspapers

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Google images

Booklets in this series produced by the Holmes Chapel U3A Local History Group:

1. Holmes Chapel before the War
2. Village People 1914 – 1918
3. The Men Who Went to War
4. Refugees come to the village
5. Beating the Drum – Recruitment and Communication
6. The Community Response
7. Feeding the People
8. Rationing During the War
9. Rules and Regulations
10. Education
11. Life Goes On
12. Holmes Chapel at the End of the War

For copies of booklets see web site
www.holmeschapelhistory.co.uk

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WW1 and Holmes Chapel & District U3A

In 2011 the Holmes Chapel & District University of the Third Age (U3A) was set up in the village and one of the activities under its umbrella was a local history group. This attracted people who had been involved in research in the past as well as some new volunteers eager to learn more. After an initial period of encouragement and training for the newcomers it was decided that the group would work together on a topic - The Story of Holmes Chapel and district during the First World War.

This is one in a series of booklets describing different aspects of life in Holmes Chapel and district before and during the First World War. A full list of the booklets is given on the inside of this back cover.

Research Group Members: Bill Barber, Cath Cameron, Rod Cameron, John Clowes, Peter Cotton, John Cowburn, Stella Freer, Gwen Hayhurst, Barbara Jackson, Lynda Kappes, Val White, Janet Yarwood.



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