

## On the Home Front

**I**N 1915 the ranks of the Inns of Court O.T.C. increased until the number billeted out was 2,500. In addition, by the end of the year many hundreds of recruits were detained in London by the absence of accommodation in Berkhamsted.

For the first eighteen months of the war the Corps enjoyed great freedom of action. Its recruiting machinery was particularly successful at the ports, where men returning from overseas were interviewed as soon as they landed.

### CADET SCHOOLS

But Britain needed many, many thousands of officers, and by 1916 the training facilities were inadequate. The War Office increasingly turned to staff officers, newly returned from France, who had a natural bias towards their own old Sandhurst training and an equally natural dislike of any exception to a uniform plan.

And so the organisation of the Inns of Court O.T.C. was overhauled and its recruiting programme had to be scrapped. An important development was the institution of the Berkhamsted Cadet Schools, four in number, afterwards incorporated in No. 14 Officers Cadet Battalion. This battalion remained in the town for two years until removal to Catterick, where the men poignantly realised that there were worse places than Berkhamsted.

### ROYAL VISIT

Almost half-way through the war, King George V expressed a wish to see the Inns of Court O.T.C. 'at its ordinary work'. The royal car arrived at Berkhamsted on the 1st August, 1916, and for an hour His Majesty saw sword exercise, bayonet fighting and drill in Kitchener's Field.

Later, the King was driven to the Common, where cadet companies were practising trench fighting and bombing. He next walked through Frithsden Beeches to watch two companies practising wood fighting. To the King's great amusement, attack and counter-attack always seemed to culminate just where he was standing.

In March, 1918, a special Officers' Training School (for the purpose of training officers as teachers of Cadet Battalions) was established at Shrublands, and a similar school for non-

commissioned officers was simultaneously opened at Barncroft.

A few months after the Armistice, a local War Memorial Committee was formed, and a booklet outlining its plans tells us that Berkhamsted still had many reminders that the war was not technically at an end. In March, 1919, 700 men of the Artists O.T.C. were transferred from Gidea Park to Berkhamsted. 'With some 1,100 members of the Inns of Court and Artists O.T.C. crowding out our homes in the last hours that herald the signature of peace,' claimed the committee, 'Berkhamsted feels that she has "done her bit" and done it well.'

### THE FALLEN

It is fitting to pay tribute to the thousands of men who trained in this district. But we must not forget the sons of Berkhamsted, whose deeds of heroism made stirring reading in the pages of the *Gazette*. Local men were among the first to fall in France and Flanders. As the war dragged on, the list of killed and wounded mounted tragically. The memorial in St. Peter's Church to 144 officers and men who fell in the Great War does not contain a complete list of names; the total number of killed and missing, with those who died of wounds after the war, was probably nearer 200. Of the many hundreds who returned home, a large number were maimed, shell-shocked or suffering from the effects of poison gas.

Gradually, khaki ceased to be the predominant colour in the streets of Berkhamsted, but it was a long, long time before widows and bereaved mothers discarded their mourning black.

### FOOD RATIONING

Throughout the war, hard work and an unflinching sense of patriotism were the best antidotes to worry and anxiety. As the men left for France, many of their womenfolk took over their jobs. Those eagerly and sometimes apprehensively awaited letters from the Front, as often as not, were delivered by postwomen: a remarkable occupation for a woman in 1914-18, though taken for granted by the time of the second World War. Women and girls who never expected to go out to work became nurses or donned engineers' overalls. In addition, voluntary work reached heights never before known in Berkhamsted. The

contribution made by women to the war effort was magnificent.

Keeping homes clean was not easy when billeted soldiers returned from night ops. covered with mud. To add to the trials of the housewife, food was increasingly scarce. Meatless days were a music-hall joke, but the joke wore thin when rationing was intensified to a degree unknown in 1939-45. Many a mother went hungry for the sake of the children. Those of us who were small children in 1914-18 remember calling at Cheeld's, the grocers, for cocoa-butter, or collecting soup and puddings (sold at nominal prices) at communal kitchens. One of these kitchens was in a shop opposite the Goat Inn.

### ZEPPELIN RAIDS

'Are we downhearted? No!' Only one thing mattered, and that was victory. If you couldn't serve in the Forces, you could at least try to help financially. The poorest family found a few coppers for the children to buy savings stamps at school. War Savings campaigns were aided by Tank Weeks and similar efforts, sometimes with aeroplanes scattering leaflets over the town, with a few free 15s. certificates to add to the excitement.

Happily, we never had an air raid in Berkhamsted. But the blackout was even stricter than in the second World War, and everybody dreaded the moan of the waterworks' hooter when it sounded an air raid warning.

### OVER THE TOWN

Several Zeppelins flew over the town and neighbourhood. On the night of 2nd-3rd September, 1916, fourteen German airships crossed the Norfolk coast with a view to approaching and encircling London from the north-west. One, the L32, was over Tring when the commander saw an intense glare in the sky. This was the SL11 falling in flames at Cuffley, Herts. The L32 turned abruptly to the east, passing just north of the town, probably over the Common, and dropped her bombs at Hertford and Ware.

On the night of 19th-20th October, 1917, several Zeppelins were in the neighbourhood. The L41 passed to the north of the town after dropping her bombs at Northampton. During the same night the L45 followed the railway line from Northampton to London, passing over Berkhamsted at 11 p.m. Her first bombs were dropped at Hendon another of her bombs fell in Piccadilly Circus outside Swan and Edgar's, killing seven and injuring 18 people.

'BEORCHAM.'

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