

THE WESTERN DOWNLAND CONTRIBUTION

ORIGINS

The villages of Damerham, Martin and Rockbourne are listed in the Domesday Book as being within The Hundred of Fordingbridge, and have maintained their close association with the town ever since. Whitsbury is not mentioned in that survey, but having resided with the kings of England and the local monastery, the manor was sold in the 1600s to Sir John Cooper of Rockbourne.



The villages were transferred from the county of Wiltshire to Hampshire in 1895, where they now remain, but their four churches still lie within the Diocese of Salisbury, in a grouping known as 'The Western Downland Benefice'.

In 1914, these villages were populated by a few thousand people, who lived and worked in close, rural harmony, surrounded by gentle downlands, woods and the antiquities left by thousands of years of varied occupancy (see Photograph 1¹). Their lives centred on a number of farms, the various aspects of farming, and on the supporting trades necessary to



sustain these relatively autonomous communities: blacksmiths; carters; shopkeepers; traders; gamekeepers and school teachers.

Whilst many were somewhat comfortably off, the villagers lived simple lives and in some cases, endured a poor hand-to-mouth existence. Lives had changed little for hundreds of

years, but the advent of agricultural machines to replace manual labour was already having an impact on farms in the early 1900s (see Photograph 2²).

Between Damerham and Rockbourne, the West Park estate, home of the Coote family, was a focal point and provided much employment (see Photograph 3³). The church and the schools supplied both leadership and a community nucleus. Though there were exceptions, people, in general, did not travel far, had only a partial knowledge of international affairs and mostly, led simple, neighbourhood lives.

¹ Photograph from the collection of Angela Mcallister, with kind permission.

² Ibid.

³ By kind permission of: www.lostheritage.org.uk.

In this bygone world, several large families had emerged, intermarried and divided into separate strands within our four villages. These family strains were enriched by brides and grooms from such places as Cranborne, Sandleheath and Fordingbridge, and occasionally husbands and wives were found from those who came to work in the area, often from distant counties. The business of racehorse training was established in Whitsbury in the 1800s and this attracted workers from as far afield as Ireland.



These close-knit families formed the heart of our communities one hundred years ago, and when their country asked them to provide their husbands and sons to fight in the cataclysmic wars that dominated the 20th Century, they did so willingly and patriotically, though the cost was, ultimately, high.

WORLD WAR 1

In 1914, some of our men were already serving worldwide as sailors and soldiers, the latter in the 247,500-strong 'Regular Army'. After the war started, the regulars were reinforced by reserves and units of the 'Territorial Army', formed to defend our shores but then required to go overseas. As these numbers were insufficient, a 'Second' or 'New Army' of volunteers was formed.

Once these resources were exhausted, national conscription was introduced and men up to the age of 40 were called up to form the 'Third Army'. Our servicemen and women⁴ served in them all and in many of the areas of operation in Europe and Asia.

to The Great War changed Great Britain, the British Empire⁵ and the world for ever. Some 8.7 million men and women from the Empire served, of whom about 956,700 died in the war, 2.29 million were wounded and many more suffered lifetime physical and mental effects from their experiences⁶. The majority of these casualties occurred in France and Flanders. By the war's conclusion, it is estimated that about 450 men and women from our four villages had served in the war. Of these, 40 had fallen, or died of wounds or disease, on land on the Western Front, at Gallipoli, in Mesopotamia and Salonika, and at sea and at home. Three of them were siblings.

⁴ Though not generally employed as soldiers, women served in the medical services at home and abroad, and in many supporting charitable institutions.

⁵ In those days, the British Empire, that contained about one-fifth of the world's landmass, was viewed as a part of the British 'home'. Troops from many of these dominions and colonies served in the war on many fronts.

⁶ Statistics derived from the website of 'The Long, Long Trail' at: www.longlongtrail.co.uk/ (Accessed 01/12/15).

WORLD WAR 2

In 1939, at the outbreak of World War 2, Britain again had only a small professional Army, backed by the Territorial Army, a 200,000-strong Royal Navy and an emerging Royal Air Force.

Great Britain mobilised some 5,896,000 men and women in World War 2. By 1945, nearly 3,000,000 men and women were serving in the Army alone. One statement of British service casualties states that 329,208 died in service and 348,403 were wounded⁷. Nine members of our communities were killed or died, along with six men who had come to live here during the war, and whom we also commemorate.



Introduction

Notes

Roll of Honour Names

World War 1

The Western Front Campaign

The Gallipoli Campaign

The Salonika Campaign

The Mesopotamia Campaign

World War 2

Acknowledgements

⁷ CNN at: edition.cnn.com/2013/07/09/world/world-war-ii-fast-facts/index.html.