

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

Part 5. Surrey as Army Camp: Mobilisation, Recruitment, Conscription and Prison Camps

In 1914, two infantry regiments were based in Surrey, the Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment with its depot at Stoughton Barracks, Guildford, and the East Surrey Regiment with its depot in Kingston. Associated with these regiments were battalions of locally raised territorials, reorganised in recent years by Secretary of State for War, Richard Haldane, to form a volunteer home defence force.

The 4th Battalion of the Queen's drew its strength from the Croydon area and the 5th Battalion comprised volunteers from much of modern Surrey including Godalming, Haslemere, Woking, Farnham, Camberley, Reigate and Dorking as well as Guildford. Two Territorial Battalions of the London Regiment, were also linked to the Queen's, the 22nd (County of London) Battalion, the London Regiment (The Queen's), with a HQ in Bermondsey; and the 24th (County of London) Battalion (The Queen's), with a HQ in Kennington.

The 5th Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment included volunteers from Streatham, Sutton, Wimbledon and Epsom and the 6th Battalion volunteers from Esher, Richmond, Kingston, Chertsey, Egham. Again two battalions of the London Regiment were associated with the East Surrey: the 21st (County of London) Battalion (1st Surrey Rifles) with a HQ in Camberwell, and the 23rd (County of London) Battalion, with a HQ in Clapham.

The Surrey equivalent to the 'Pals' Battalions, raised at the beginning of the war to allow men from the same area or occupation to volunteer and serve together, were the 10th (Service) Battalion of the Queen's, raised by the mayor and borough of Battersea, the 11th (Service) Battalion, the Queen's, formed by the mayor and borough of Lambeth, and the 12th (Bermondsey) Battalion and 13th (Wandsworth) Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment.

Responsibility for housing and equipping the local units of the Territorial Force belonged to the County of Surrey Territorial Forces Association. The main minutes of the Association and of its General Purposes Committee (**SHC refs 608/1/2 & 608/2/3-4**) contain much information on the mobilisation and equipping of the Surrey territorial units in 1914 and on the raising of Home Service and additional reserve units to replace the units which had agreed to serve overseas. They also contain some information on Officer Training Corps in Surrey schools and the creation of the Surrey Volunteer Regiment later in the war.

For a Territorial embodiment card, giving notice to Private John Lewis to join his battalion, the 22nd Battalion, the London Regiment, dated 4th August 1914, see **SHC ref QRWS/30/LEWI/1**. For photographs of the mobilisation of the 4th Battalion, the Queen's, in Croydon, 5th August 1914, see **SHC refs QRWS/30/MERR/1/p13/5** and **QRWS/5/5/4/1**. For photographs of 5th



*Mobilisation of 4th Battalion, Queen's,
at Croydon 5 Aug 1914*

(SHC ref QRWS/30/MERR/1)

Battalion, the Queen's, marching through Reigate in August 1914, see **SHC ref PC/122/166-170** and **4551/1**.

With the dispatch of most of the standing army to support France at the start of the war and the removal of territorial battalions who volunteered to serve overseas, Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, initiated a national recruiting campaign to form new volunteer armies. For a postcard with a poem 'Shall Surrey Lead' by J.F.M. exhorting the men of Surrey to join up and fight for their country see **SHC ref PC/139/40**.



Digging practice trenches at Virginia Water (SHC ref ESR/25/ORR/3)

Registers of recruits raised in the 31st Regimental District (north east Surrey and the Surrey portions of inner London), of some extreme rarity as such records were supposed to be destroyed after the war, are held as **SHC ref 2496/1-43** (transcript available on FindmyPast and also available to purchase on CD) relate to, and the Borough of Croydon; **2496/44** relates to 2nd Regimental District in 1917-1918. For a 1915 recruiting list for the Bletchingley area, including a list of those rejected, see **SHC ref P20/27/1**. For postcards of Recruiting Day, Caterham, 14th April 1915, see SHC refs **PC/29/69, 72, 78** and **Z/542/1**. For a coloured certificate titled 'For King and Country: A soldier has left this house for active service in the Great War', see **SHC ref Z/429/2**.

With the passing of the Military Service Act in January 1916, conscription was introduced to Britain. In each district Military Service Local Tribunals were set up to hear appeals against conscription and a Surrey and Croydon Military Service Appeal Tribunal was also established which heard appeals against the decisions of the local tribunals, whether from those who argued that their occupation or personal circumstances should earn them an exemption, or from those who opposed the war as a matter of principle. Records of all these tribunals were supposed to be destroyed after the war, because of their sensitive content, but Surrey History Centre holds some records for the following local tribunals:



Snowball fight at Woldingham Camp (SHC ref PC161/17)

Dorking Rural District Tribunal: minute books and registers, 1916-1918 (**SHC ref LA4/23/297-301**). These have been transcribed and indexed and it is planned that online access will be provided.

Haslemere Local Tribunal: minute book, Dec 1915-Jul 1917, with details of all cases considered by the tribunal (**SHC ref Ac1363/1/86**). The contents have been transcribed and indexed and it is planned that online access will be provided.

of these camps. Best represented is the Woodcote Park camp of the Universities and Public Schools Brigade (18th-21st (Service) Battalions, Royal Fusiliers), formed in Epsom, September 1914, for which we have a contemporary album of cuttings, doggerel verse and photographs (SHC ref 6529/4) and other postcards (SHC ref PC/58/104-107).

Further images of Surrey camps are held as follows: for Frensham Camp (23rd Division), see SHC refs PC/66/37 and 6316/5979; for men of the 4th Public School Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers at Randall's Farm, Leatherhead, see SHC ref PC/94/45; for the camp associated with the Guards Depot at Caterham see SHC refs 4209/3/153/1 and 4209/3/156/3; for Woldingham Camp see SHC ref PC/161/18/7-22; for the Officer Training Corps Camp at Mytchett see SHC ref PC/68/25-35. Many letters from soldiers at Bordon Camp, just over the border in Hampshire, which housed the 20th (Light) Division, to Susan Lushington are in 7854.

Surrey did not just house camps for British troops. Witley Camp was used for units of the Canadian Expeditionary Force: for a postcard of the camp see SHC ref PC/159/77 and for magazines produced by the 160th (Bruce) Battalion while stationed at Witley in 1917 see SHC ref 8406/1-2. After the armistice, frustrated at delays in demobilisation and repatriation, Canadian troops rioted. For papers relating to the riots and subsequent legal actions see SHC refs CC28/332A-B and 333 and CC98/14/8.

At Frith Hill, Deepcut, a camp was established in 1914 for German civilian internees and prisoners of war; from 1915 it was reserved for military prisoners of war. For images of the camp see SHC refs 6719/1/16, PC/68/22/1, PC/68/23/1 and PC/68/24/1. Reports on the camp can also be found at The National Archives in FO 383/34, 162, 164 & 360.



German Prisoners of War marching to Frith Hill Camp (SHC ref PC68/23/1)

For the duration of the war, the National Rifle Association's Bisley Camp and its shooting ranges were placed at the disposal of the Army Council, and a School of Musketry, under Commandant Maj Gen Lord Cheylesmore was opened there, to train and provide instructors in musketry from those who had passed the age of military service. In March 1915, the School of Musketry undertook the calibration of telescopes for rifles, for the use of snipers. A Motor Machine Gun School was also established in January 1915 at Bisley, as a branch of the School of Musketry. The reports of the Association refer (SHC ref 6227/1/53-57).