

and at u-boat attacks on passenger liners and more.

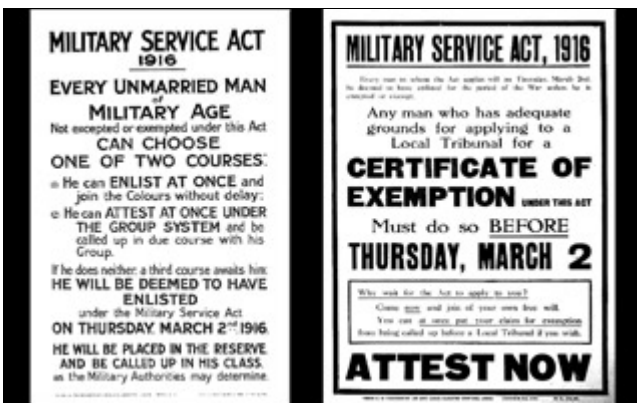


Part 2 will be more concerned with a brief look at some of what was happening on the Home Front ...

and the role of women in the war ...

both at home and abroad.

TRIBUNALS & RESERVED OCCUPATIONS



In January 1916, the Military Service Act came into effect although not enforced until March.

It was an attempt to push the fit and able, who were not already in uniform, into the armed forces.

However, men were given the opportunity to apply for exemption.



Local Military Tribunal Boards were set up to consider applications for exemption and interview the applicants.

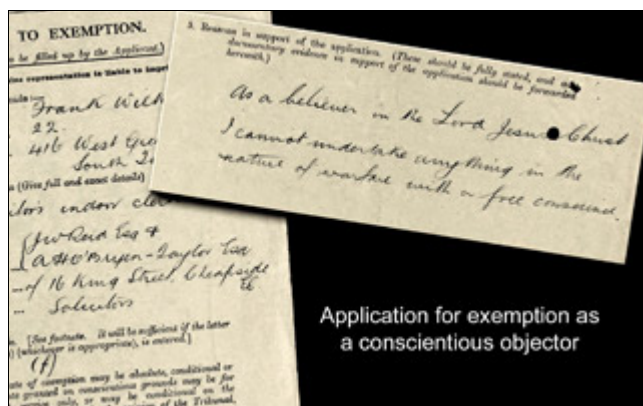
If the applicant was unhappy with the decision then they could appeal through County Appeal Tribunals.

Although there were many booklets and hundreds of pages of guidance were issued, with literally hundreds of possible examples for exemption.

A successful application often depended on the personal bias of the local board members, especially in the case of conscientious objectors.

There were 7 official 'grounds for Appeal' ... put simply, they were that :

- he is employed on work in the national Interest
- he SHOULD be, and could be, employed on work in the national Interest
- he is in education or training and it is in the national interest for him to continue doing so
- serious hardship would ensue for his family owing to business obligations or domestic responsibilities
- Ill health or infirmity
- conscientious objection to combatant service
- his principal occupation is on the list of certified exemptions

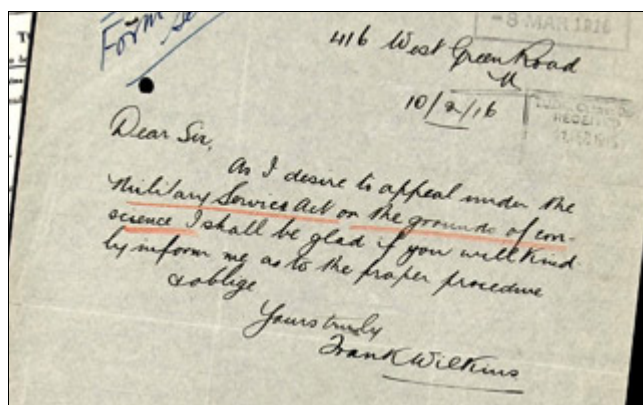


Conscientious objectors were only around 2% of the appeals and, of those, only a small number were granted exemption.

One such was a certain Frank Wilkins age 22, who was a solicitor's clerk in Tottenham.

His first application was rejected ... so he appealed.

and he was lucky ... his appeal was upheld, with exemption from, quote, 'combatant service only'.

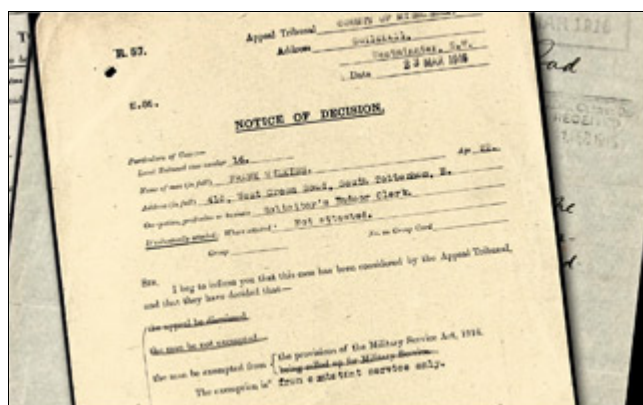


In what capacity he served in a non-combatant role, or what happened to him, we know not!

Most successful applicants, on conscientious grounds, were obliged to serve in non-combatant roles, often at or near the Front.

If they also refused to serve in this capacity then they faced court martial and possible execution.

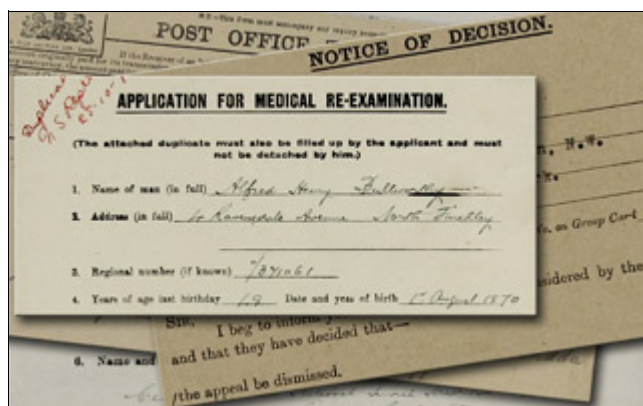
However, this was usually commuted to a long term of imprisonment.



Only a very tiny number of Conscientious Objectors were actually executed.

As a further punishment, in the 1918 Representation of the People Act, they were denied the right to vote in the General Election that year.

They were also denied that right for the 5 years following the the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.



In Oldham, there are reports in the Oldham Chronicle of Tribunals held at Crompton, Chadderton, Lees, Springhead, Limehurst, Royton, and Oldham itself.

The Reports are too numerous to mention them all but they usually record the names of the officials on the Tribunal Board, details of the applicants, their names and the many and varied grounds for their appeal.

They included appeals by firms on behalf of those employees deemed irreplaceable, for example, from

the Magnet Spinning Company at Manor Mill and W. Taylor Ltd., at Vale Mill.

The reports also give the decision and also, sometimes, the verbal exchanges are recorded in full, providing a sense of the feelings and opinions in the room.

There are a number of reports of conscientious objectors being arrested on the criminal charge of 'Failing to Comply with the Military Service Act.'

One such report was of 3 brothers, called Hubert, Stanley and Hayden Greaves and all of No.1, Leach Street, Royton. They had failed to attest, after having appealed more than once and each time been rejected.

When they appeared in court they were each fined 40/- (the minimum fine) and handed over to a military escort.

Everyone had an opinion and, in one letter, the Royton Tribunal was accused of being '*too lenient*' and, to quote :

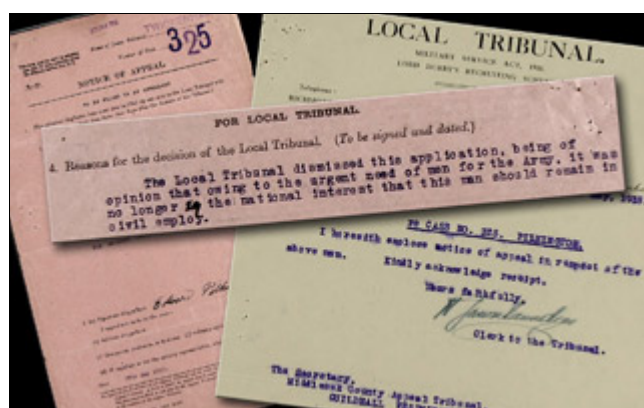
" ... if such tame handling were to be the general rule I am afraid our army would be numerically '*contemptible*', one of which the Kaiser spoke ..."

and it goes on to add :

" I am afraid that there is too much sentiment being shown by members of the tribunal ..."

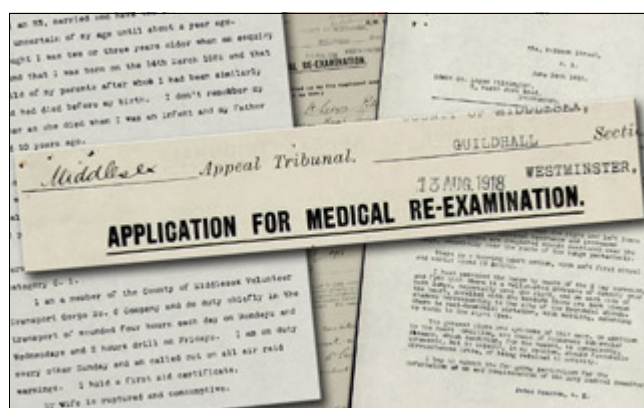
Apparently, according to the same writer, men were moving home, to live in Royton, so that their application for exemption would be looked at more sympathetically and it finishes with ...

"It certainly seems that, next to going into munitions, one's best way to escape service, is to live at Royton."



Appeals could drag on and, fortunately for one man in London, his appeal dating from May 1918 still hadn't been settled by armistice day ...

Edward St Leger Pilkington was a 35 year old boot repairer and the 24 pages in his file show that he had appealed on grounds of ill health.



The medical tests showed no sign of TB but details of severe breathing problems were recorded.

A further hearing was scheduled for 14th November!

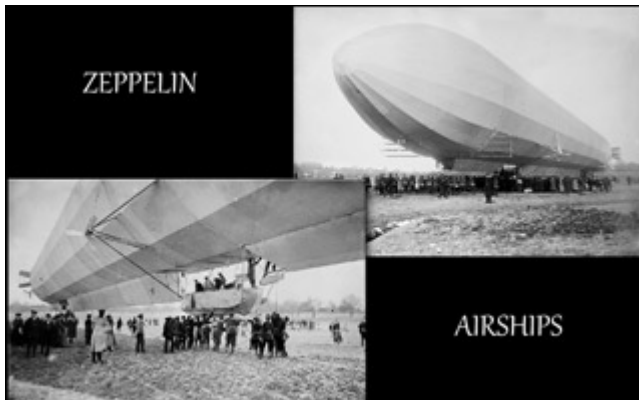
but the file doesn't tell us what happened next!

ATTACKS ON ENGLISH SOIL



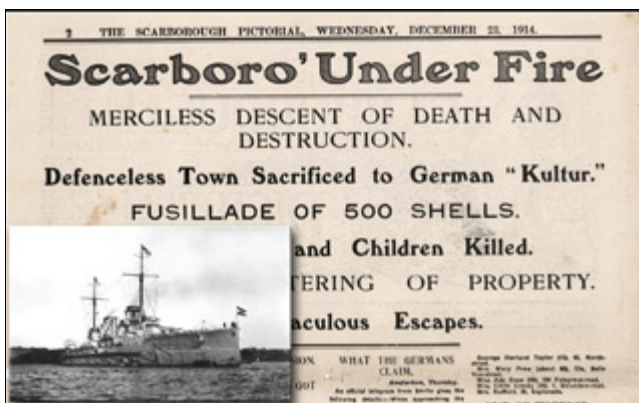
Over the centuries England had endured invasion, threat of invasion and civil war.

Folk of both town and country had suffered in the process but, what they were about to experience in their own homes, in the Great War, was unprecedented in this country.



Without warning, death came from above, with bombs dropped by Zeppelin airships flying high above the earth.

Often they were searching for targets of strategic importance, frequently without success, and often only destroying homes and families.



In Scarborough, it came whistling through the air; massive shells bringing death and destruction.

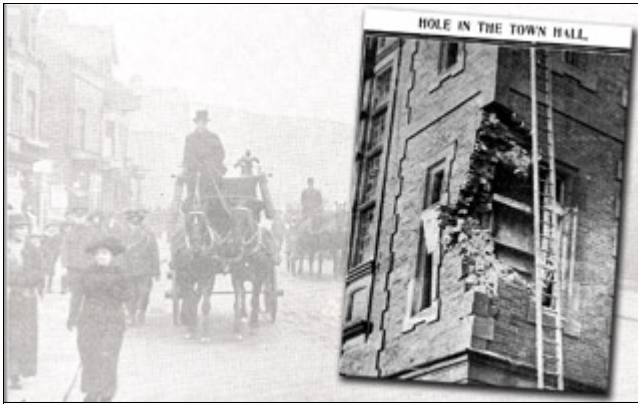
On the morning of 16th December, 1914, Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby were shelled by German Battleships cruising just off the east coast shore.

There were Oldhamers living in, or visiting the towns at the time and they sent home graphic reports to family, friends and the newspaper.



Mr W.T. Hirst, an employee of Hirst Bros, Wholesale jewellers, was in Scarborough on business and wrote that he was just getting up, in his hotel bedroom, when he heard the first sounds of firing.

The next thing he knew was that the building opposite had its roof blown off and, as he went to the door to see what was happening, another shell exploded up the street and knocked himself and others to the ground.



In Hartlepool, Mrs. Jane Whitehead, from Delph, lived at one of the hotels, with her family.

She wrote that, she'd already sent her daughter off to school and, when she heard the first sounds, assumed that it was gunners at the fort, practising.

Going out to investigate, she was told what was happening and that the gasworks was on fire. BUT, at that same moment, another shell exploded, and a woman nearby was killed by flying fragments, as were a number of children in a nearby street.



An Oldham man, working in Hartlepool, sent an account of events to the Oldham Chronicle.

In it, he mentions the gasworks blazing, the railway station damaged, the deaths of a woman and his friend's child.

He writes of people fleeing from the sea front streets, of the wounded being carried past on stretchers, of damage to homes and boats in the harbour, and to the shipyards.

He also comments on the gunners at the battery, who kept up an incessant bombardment, even when the ships were coming dangerously close inshore.



He ends his narrative with the words, *"...If this does not stimulate recruitment nothing will. It makes one able to picture - though very faintly - the dire distress of our Belgian comrades...."*

He was right ... 'Remember Scarborough' became a popular slogan in the recruitment campaign.

In all, 137 people were killed and 592 injured in the attack.



In 1915, an elderly Oldham couple, Mr and Mrs. Bradbury, were living in Broadstairs, Kent.

Richard Bradbury was a dental surgeon.

Before they went to live in Kent they had lived first on Lees Road then on Church Terrace, in the centre of Oldham, from which address Hannah ran her dressmaking business.



In 1915, she wrote to her friend, Elizabeth Jane Goodyear, in Failsworth telling her about the happenings in Broadstairs since the beginning of the war.

She wrote, "*August 1914, a telegram came for the military band that was here, requesting they re-join their regiment at once ...*"



The Royal Review of the Grand Fleet had taken place only days before war was declared and, further on in the letter, she writes about it :

"Battleships and destroyers were on either side of us ... 50 big battleships sailed gloriously past, like so many guardian angels. Then another lot of 19, with a Dreadnought in front, looking for all the world as if they were playing 'follow my leader'."



and further on she mentions Zeppelins appearing overhead :

" ... guns were firing, rockets shooting up and flash lights going."

A later letter from her refers to the wounded, and she writes :

"Isn't it wonderful how the boys keep up the spirits ... and yet what pitiful sights we see ... "



Later in this letter she mentions more attacks by the Zeppelins ... one bomb missing a hospital but hitting a girl's school, before being chased away by fighter planes.

and, just a couple of weeks later, she writes of a bomb being dropped and killing a group of children on their way to Sunday School.

On yet another page she writes of watching an aerial battle :

"It is a sight to see our airmen dashing through the air and looping. One's heart almost stands still when the planes are almost straight up and down ... "



"The searchlights are very beautiful. Think of them in numbers, searching all over the sky for the Zepps.

We can hear but not see, 'til all at once one is located and with the searchlights on it it looks like a huge piece of bright silver sailing steadily on ...

Then the big guns talk ... star shells burst all around ... you feel that it is awful, yes, and solemn too, for you do not know what is going to happen."

Even before 1914, the Germans had realised the potential of the airship in war. They were capable of a speed of 85 miles per hour and could carry 2 tons of bombs.

The first raid was on Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn, in January 1915.

Initially unprepared, the east coast was particularly vulnerable to attacks from the airships coming across the North Sea and considerable damage, with civilian casualties was suffered.



Oldham itself never actually suffered a bombing raid although Zeppelins passed overhead and bombs were dropped not so many miles away, as in Bolton.

However, a group of Oldham soldiers were killed in an airship attack on another town.

They were in the Regular Army's 3rd Battalion (Reserve) of the Manchester Regiment, which was one of the battalions sent to reinforce the Humber Defences on the East Coast. In March 1916 a number of the regiment was sent to Cleethorpes to

strengthen the defences in that locality. On arrival, and unaware that danger was already approaching through the air, the men unpacked their kit and settled down for the night in their billet in a church hall.



The approaching Zeppelins were intending to bomb London and East Anglia but one, finding it had engine trouble, decided to make the best of a bad job and bomb Grimsby.

Catastrophically, it mistook the seaside town of Cleethorpes, for the port of Grimsby.

Its first bombing run missed the target but on its second run, despite anti-aircraft gunfire, it dropped 3 more bombs.





This time, the result was devastating. Two bombs fell into local streets but the third fell directly onto the sleeping soldiers in their billet.

Of the 84 men in the building, 32 died and 48 were injured.

Just 4 men, playing a game of cards in the cellar, were unharmed.

13 of the dead were Oldham men.



There was a full military funeral ...

Two years later, this memorial to the men was unveiled in the local cemetery.

But airships, filled with inflammable gas, were themselves vulnerable and, by 1916, there were defensive measures against them in operation, with searchlights and guns capable of firing shells designed to explode in the gas filled airship.

These counter measures were so successful that they eventually brought down or disabled about 70% of the German airships and the raids over England ended in 1917.

BELGIAN REFUGEES



Britain had many reasons, probably most to do with self-interest, for entering the war against Germany in August 1914.

However, the publicly stated reason was that Belgium's neutrality had been violated.

Defence of the underdog, the weak and innocent, was sure to find favour with the majority, and it did.

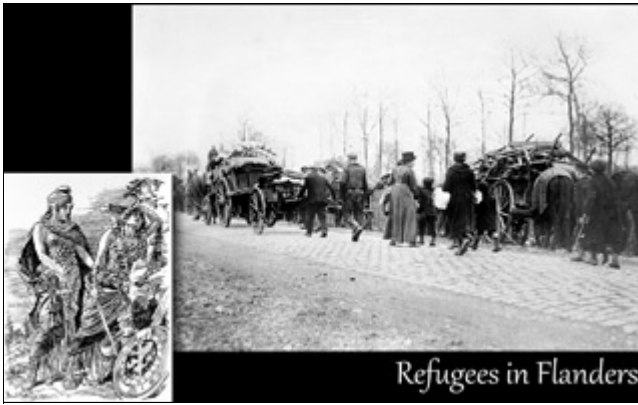


Belgium, which had been safeguarded for the past 75 years, by a treaty, was no match for the power of the German army, sweeping across her borders, looting and destroying, everything that stood in its path, as the townsfolk and villagers fled before the advance.

When the Belgian Government appealed for aid, Britain set up a War Refugees Committee and offered hospitality.

Temporary accommodation was provided, as the

refugees arrived in London and, as offers of homes and help poured in from people anxious to help, the refugees were moved to more permanent homes.



Local War Relief committees were asked to help, by setting up sub-committees, to organise the relief and find suitable homes in their own areas.

Before the end of the war, over 250,000 Belgian refugees would have arrived in Britain, finding shelter and support.

In Oldham, Mr Nadin, the Secretary of the Oldham Relief Committee, had already received several dozen offers of homes for individual children but the more urgent need was for families to be accommodated together.



In mid September, the Oldham Evening Chronicle published an article headlined, "*Belgian Refugees - an appeal to Oldham's Hospitality*"

Within weeks, offers of a number of houses, rent free were received including Royton Hall, Greenacres Lodge, Broomhurst, Chadderton House, 146, Coppice Street in Oldham, and 36 Oak Street, in Shaw.



A Belgian Relief Fund was formed and set about raising the money to pay for the furnishing and upkeep of the properties.

Offers of help flooded in ...

One was from the Oldham Gasworks which agreed to the installation of gas fires and cookers in the Belgian homes and promised that gas would be supplied at a discounted rate.



The Oldham Chronicle, in mid October, reported that hundreds of well-wishers had gathered, to welcome the Byl family, on their arrival in Royton where they were to be accommodated in 5 large rooms at Royton Hall.

The family had escaped from Ghent, having had to leave their home and possessions behind.

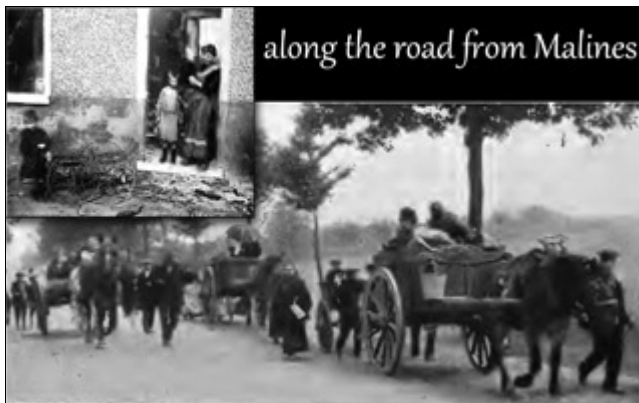


From a lengthy article, in the 'Saddleworth Historical Society Bulletin', from Autumn 2010, we know a considerable amount about what was happening in that locality, most of which was probably being replicated all over the country.

In Saddleworth, offers of help were immediately forthcoming, with both the Saddleworth Distress Committee and the Delph Independent Methodists being very active.

It was also suggested that the untenanted council houses should be made available for refugees.

Fund raising for initial expenses, such as furniture and basic necessities, was going to be a priority and was started immediately.



In the early months, there was a great deal of press enthusiasm with only a few voices of dissent or caution.

So great was this enthusiasm that, in some places, such as Saddleworth, the only shortage was of Belgian families to take up residence.

Offers were currently exceeding demand!

In November it was suggested at a meeting of the Saddleworth Distress Committee, that with 10 empty

houses offered and ready for occupation but with, as yet, no family to put in them, that 2 of them should be made available for the use of convalescent soldiers.

One, Oakdene, would later become the first Military Hospital in Saddleworth.

In December, the only refugees to have actually arrived were those of a family called Foreff, in Bleakhey Nook. The Foreff family had been discovered by a local businessman, Mr. Greenwood, whilst visiting Manchester. On hearing their sad story, he immediately offered them a cottage and settled them there at once.



By autumn 1914, another family had been installed in a house and was being supported by the Delph Independent Methodists.

This family, like the Foreffs, were originally from Malines which had been over-run by the German forces.

Perhaps, as yet, most people believed that these would only be temporary financial burdens, on both the individuals and the councils, and few were considering that this might be a commitment for an unknown and lengthy number of years.

In January 1915 the Distress Committee was supporting 45 refugees in Saddleworth.

In Saddleworth, to raise funds, they relied on illustrated lectures, band and choral concerts etc., together with cash donations.



In Oldham, the Orchestral Society staged a fund raising concert at the Empire Theatre, in December 1914.

Attended by civic dignitaries, and with evening dress worn in the dress circle, it was a gala occasion.

One of the songs was, 'It's a long way to Tipperary' penned in Stalybridge in 1912. After someone heard it in pantomime, it went to France, and was adopted as a popular marching song by the British Expeditionary Force.

In Saddleworth, as the months dragged on, the first, hesitant voices of criticism began to be heard, in early 1915, when the refugees didn't like the locally baked bread and, the Belgian diet was full of fish - cheap enough in Belgium - but much more expensive in villages such as Saddleworth.



A possible source of resentment, from 1916, was that Belgian men, in England, were exempt from conscription.

How well did they fit in with the English way of life...?

As the years went by, did the finances become a burden ... ?

or did most become self-supporting...?

Even today, many questions remain only partially answered.

At the end of the war, it's thought probable that most refugees were re-patriated but some did remain, to make their homes and new lives in England.

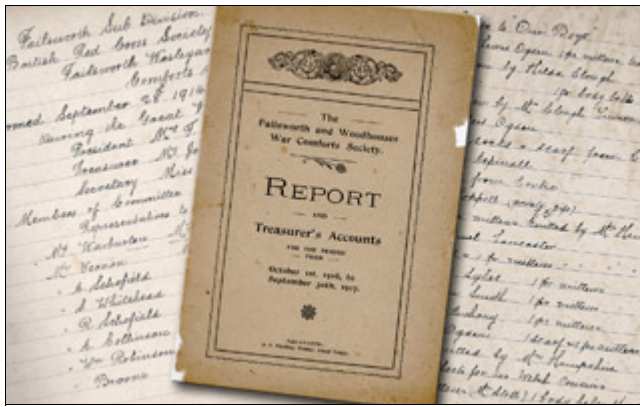
WOMEN ON THE HOME FRONT & NURSING



When their sons and brothers, husbands or lovers, marched off to war, the women left behind had a burning need to show their support, to offer help and comfort, in whatever ways they could.

It proved a vital link with home for those servicemen who would receive the many 'War comforts' that were sent by the ladies.

Groups had organised themselves, within weeks of the outbreak of war. to 'do their bit'.



Equally, there must have been hundreds, probably thousands, of other groups doing just the same work all over the borough, the adjoining towns and throughout the country.

Unfortunately, although we find passing references to their existence the detailed reports that still exist are thin on the ground.



Women had been organising themselves, in action groups, for the past 50 years, as they campaigned for women's rights in society and the workplace.

Not forgotten, but put to one side in the face of greater need, many of these organisations, especially the women's suffrage, now channeled their energies into support of war aid.

In London's desperately deprived East End anti-war campaigner and suffragette, Sylvia Pankhurst, turned her attention to supporting the families left destitute as the men enlisted.



Here in Oldham, the local suffrage society, with Marjory Lees as its president, agreed with the NUWSS policy that, quote, "*.... we must show ourselves worthy of citizenship whether our claim to it be recognised or not.*"

As in the past, Marjory Lees and her mother, Dame Sarah Lees, were swift to offer their personal aid.

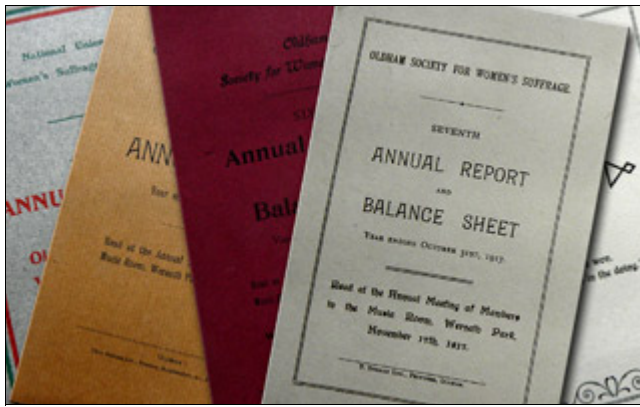
Marjory paid for free milk for expectant and nursing mothers in 454 families. In the first 3 months of the scheme, in 1914, this amounted to 1,594 pints each week.



The members of the Oldham Suffrage Society organised the milk distribution through their 'visitors'.

These women also worked with the 'Oldham Committee for the Care of Women and Children', establishing clothing depots throughout the town, to provide warm clothing for those in need.

In addition, it was recorded that Marjory donated £1,000 to the Allies Relief Fund.



The annual report, in October 1915, for the Oldham Society states that :

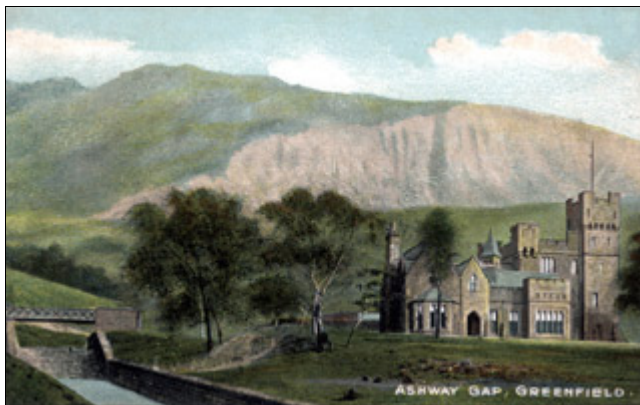
"While the Empire is losing thousands of its citizens on the battlefield it is incumbent upon us women to rescue from death through neglect, poverty, ignorance and disease the babies of whom the future state will stand in such urgent need."



One of the few jobs considered acceptable for a woman was that of nursing and, in 1914, many nurses volunteered to serve with the armed forces in military hospitals.

In September 1914 the Chronicle reported that :
" Nine nurses at the Oldham Royal Infirmary have volunteered for hospital work in connection with the war and two or three of them have already gone for this service...."

But, within a very short time, not all the nurses volunteering for war work were sent overseas as, very quickly, a desperate need developed for nursing staff in army hospitals at home.



It was very quickly obvious that there were just not enough existing military hospitals to cope with the casualties.

One solution was to requisition suitable buildings and convert them into temporary hospitals such as those at Ashway Gap House, in Greenfield ...

.. and another at Woodfield in Oldham.



Local hospitals also allocated a number of their own beds for the specific use of wounded servicemen.

In Oldham, in September 1914, the Chronicle reported that :

"... The governors of the infirmary have decided to place forty beds at the disposal of the military and naval authorities ..."

In 1914

Military :

Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC)

- * Doctors, orderlies etc., enlisted men with army rank
- * Provided medical care for casualties of war

Nurses :

Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service

- * (QAIMNS) established 1902
- * Provided nursing care, in support of RAMC, in military hospitals at home & overseas

To try and put the situation into context, in 1914 :

Medical care for the military was in the hands of the Royal Army Medical corps - the RAMC - who were service personnel with medical training, including doctors and surgeons.

They were supported, both in the field and in military hospitals, at home and overseas, by the 'Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service' (QAIMNS)

Voluntary Organisations

- * FANY - First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (women)
- * VADs - Voluntary Aid Detachment (men & women) originally part of Territorial force & drew volunteers from the Red Cross & St John Ambulance
- * The Red Cross
- * The St. John Ambulance Brigade

They in their turn were supplemented, and supported by, the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY); and the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VADs)

Originally part of the Territorial force, the VADs included both men and women.

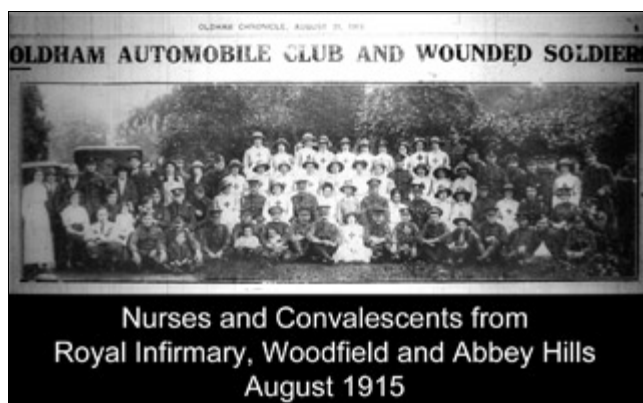
They were volunteers drawn from the Red Cross and St John Ambulance organisations and trained in First Aid and Nursing.



in July 1916, after the Battle of the Somme began, Boundary Park Hospital, part of the Workhouse complex of buildings, was also taken for the care of wounded soldiers.

There were also numerous small, privately set up hospitals such as the Stamford Military Hospital, at Dunham Massey House, near Altrincham

The few qualified nurses and doctors, were frequently supported by the the family members and VADs.



Keen to help with the rehabilitation of wounded servicemen, the members of the Oldham Automobile Club, in a convoy of cars, took nurses and convalescents from Woodfield, Abbey Hills hospital and Oldham Infirmary for a day's excursion, on several occasions.



Group of soldiers on outing, July 1915



Some of Nursing staff, outing July 1915:
Royal Infirmary, Woodfield and Abbey Hills

In July, the newspaper recorded that approx 100 nurses and patients went out for the day and had a picnic at Park Farm, Over Peover. Below are the men who took them out :



A group of the car owners, July 1915



The Owners of the Cars -
Back row :

Charles Fray
Oscar Heywood
Horace Marsland
Frank Rothwell
Herbert Holden
Capt. Wolfenden
Ralph Eglin
James D. Wood



The Owners of the Cars -
Middle row :

O. Clayton
Lees Hall
Herbert Wood
Frank Smith



The Owners of the Cars -
Front row :

Edwin Wilson
Firth Winterbottom
James E. Bailey
Arnold Bunting
Fred Rothwell



British base hospital
Basra, 1917



No. 4. Stationary Hospital
Arques

In theory, near the Front line, there were First Aid Posts which dealt with minor wounds and accidents.

The RAMC had a chain of action in place which was designed to get the wounded to the best place possible, for treatment, in the shortest possible time.

Of course, it didn't always work out and frequently the system was overwhelmed by the sheer number of casualties.

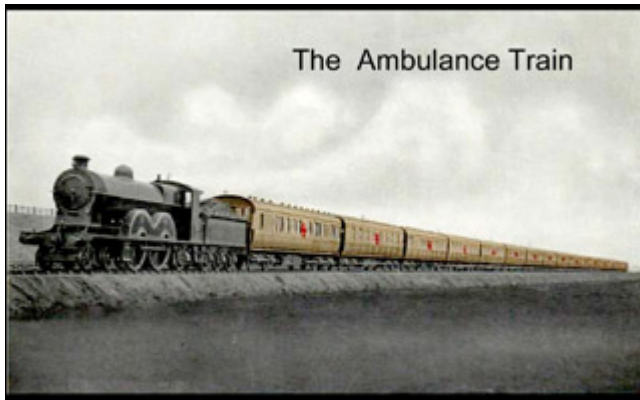
The procedure, when men were wounded, was

that they would (hopefully) be taken to a Casualty Clearing Station where they would have emergency care or surgery when necessary. Those deemed fit enough, after short term treatment, would return to their units and those needing longer term care would then be transferred to a base hospital, for example Etaples, for further treatment.



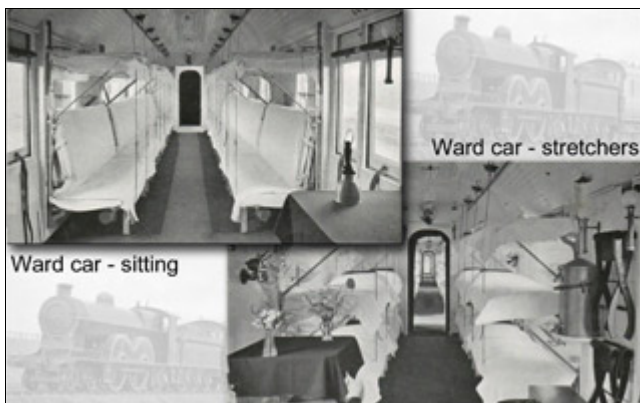
However, even the hospitals in Etaples, in 1918, could be dangerous places.

They were part of a vast military complex and became a target for German bombers, even when the hospital buildings had large crosses painted on their roofs.



The more seriously wounded soldiers, those who had suffered a 'blighty', would be nursed until considered strong enough to survive the rigours of the journey back to England.

The casualties would make the journey to the coast in specially equipped hospital trains or even aboard barges where appropriate and available.



Inside the train were separate carriages for different purposes.

Here, a ward car is shown for stretcher patients and another one for those able to travel sitting up.

At the coast they would be transferred to a hospital ship which would transport them across the channel to a hospital on home ground.



The channel trip home could be almost as dangerous as the battlefield.

Even hospital ships, clearly marked as such, became targets for German u-boats.

WOMEN NURSING IN WAR ZONES

In 1914, the few professionally qualified women, including those in medicine, were still finding it almost impossible to gain acceptance and employment in the male dominated institutions.



Many of those early pioneering women, such as Dr. Elsie Inglis, had opened their own practices or small hospitals, often with the emphasis on maternal and child care.

However, when war broke out, they were amongst the first to volunteer their services.

Female Doctors offered their services to the Military and to the British Red Cross ... and were famously refused!

They then offered their expertise to foreign organisations and were welcomed with open arms.

Doctors Offering to Work Overseas

- * Drs. Louisa Garrett Anderson & Flora Murray :
Founded the 'Women's Hospital Corps'
With French Red Cross
set up hospitals near Calais, then Paris.
So successful - asked to open Military Hospital in London
- * Dr. Elsie Inglis :
Founded the 'Scottish Women's Hospitals'
With the support of the 'Scottish',
and 'National Union of', 'Women's Suffrage Societies'
Founded hospitals in several countries and raised £449,000

Drs. Louisa Garrett Anderson & Flora Murray immediately founded the Women's Hospital Corps and, with the French Red Cross, set up hospitals firstly near Calais and then in Paris.

Their care and treatment of the wounded was so successful that they were asked to open and run a Military Hospital in London, with female staff - which they did.

Dr. Elsie Inglis turned to the Scottish Suffrage Society for financial aid and founded the Scottish Women's Hospitals, with the support of the NUWSS (National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies).

The first of the Scottish Women's Hospitals was established, by Dr. Inglis, in the Abbey of Royaumont, and was in operation by January 1915. It would care for 11,000 casualties before it closed in March 1919.

In total, the 'Scottish Women's Hospitals' established 14 units in some of the worst conditions imaginable, in different theatres of war, and raised £449,000 in fundraising for them.

Other Background

- * Independent organisers of Field Hospitals for eg :
Mrs. Mabel St. Clair Stobart
Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland
- * Red Cross & St. John Ambulance :
Amalgamated for purposes of war relief
Within days was sending medical aid to France & Belgium
- * Field ambulance - a mobile hospital unit, not a vehicle.
- * Overlap of relief organisations in same areas of conflict

There were other voluntary organisations operating, wherever there was fighting, and included:

Independent organisers of field hospitals such as:

Mrs. Mabel Anne St. Clair Stobart and
Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland

The Red Cross & St John's Ambulance

amalgamated for purposes of war relief.

Within days of war starting medical aid was on its way to France and Belgium.

In the independent organisations there was frequently a situation of giving treatment to the suffering civilian population and refugees alongside their primary objective, which was the care of sick & wounded soldiers.

References to a **Field Ambulance** mean that it is a mobile hospital unit, not a vehicle.

There was, of course, overlap between the different organisations and they frequently found themselves serving in the same areas of conflict.

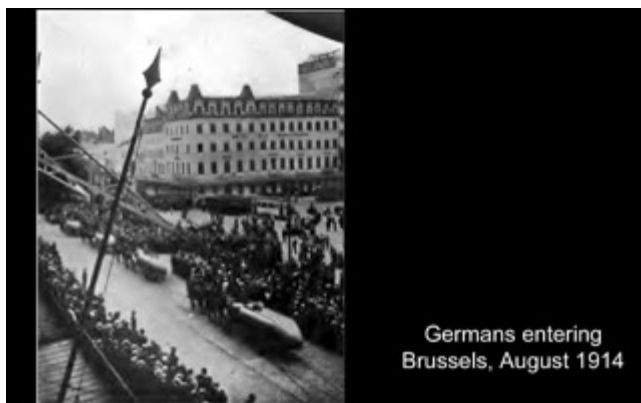


One of the ways in which the NUWSS raised funds was to ask donors and suffrage societies to 'name a bed' and donate the funds for its maintenance.

We can see, from the Oldham Suffrage Society's annual reports, that they were in full support of this initiative.

The 1915 report tells us that, the Society had named a bed at Royaumont and named it the 'Oldham Society for Women's Suffrage' and their President, Marjorie Lees, had sponsored one in Serbia.

Over their next reports, the annual accounts show that up to 4 beds were maintained in the name of the society and that the costs were covered mainly by donations from Marjorie Lees and her mother, Sarah. Two of the beds were at Royaumont and two in Ajaccio in Corsica.



One nurse, who felt impelled to volunteer, was Mrs. Hallam, the widow of John Hallam, an Oldham Estate Agent.

We know, from a newspaper account in October 1915, that she went out to Brussels in early August, along with 99 other volunteers.

It was only a matter of days later, on the 20th of August, that Brussels was over-run by the Germans. As the enemy army approached the various hospital units had 20,000 casualties in their care all of whom had to be evacuated.

When the Germans marched in, of the wounded still to be evacuated, there were just 100 remaining in the YMCA and 130 in the convent.

It was the 6th of October before the nurses were allowed to leave and they were escorted into neutral Denmark from where they made their way back to Britain.

Apparently undeterred, Mrs. Hallam returned to France in early 1915, and worked in the military hospital at Lisieux.



Impatient with the War Office's refusal to send women doctors to the battle zones, Mrs. St Clair Stobart, who had already organised a hospital and staff for both the French and Belgian Red Cross, responded to a plea for help from the Serbian authorities.



Serbia, having suffered in the fierce fighting in the Balkan Wars of 1912 & 1913 was in desperate straits.

With thousands of men dead or wounded, including doctors, the country was also in the throes of a typhus epidemic, and desperately in need of medical help.

Four of the doctors who joined Mrs. Stobart's unit, going to Serbia, had worked at Oldham Infirmary.



Dr. Catherine Payne had come to Oldham in 1910 to take up a post firstly at the Infirmary and then as Medical Officer with the Poor Law Union.

The minutes of the Board of the Poor Law Union in March 1915 record her resignation. A motion, proposed by Miss Lees [Marjorie] placed on record their regard for and appreciation of Dr. Payne's services ... and wished her well in Serbia.

Also joining the unit going to Serbia was :Dr. Edith Maude Marsden who had been born in Rochdale

and had worked at Oldham Infirmary for a short time, as had two sisters, Dr. King-May and Dr. King-May Atkinson, both of whom also joined the group. heading for Serbia.



The volunteer staff for the unit, comprised almost of women, was gathered together.

We can see, starting from the left, with a yellow ring, Dr King-May, Dr. Payne, Dr. Marsden, Mrs. Stobart and Dr. King-May Atkinson.

Money was raised through the Serbian Relief Fund for the 60 tents and equipment needed for the Field Hospital.

The Admiralty arranged for their passage to Salonica.

On April 1st 1915, 19 members of the 45 strong unit sailed from Liverpool for Salonica, where they would meet up with the others.

The four Oldham Doctors were amongst those sailing with Mrs Stobart.

We know it was not the most enjoyable experience as Monica Stanley, a VAD wrote that :
"it was a horrid boat, not at all clean and the sanitary arrangements were terrible."



and, to make matters worse, the weather became stormy and they were all given tickets for the lifeboats in case of attack from submarines!

Two weeks later they landed at Salonica



Pitching a tent

... and found that the final destination, for our Oldham Doctors and Mrs. Stobart, was to be Kragujevatz, about 60 miles south east of Belgrade.

By April 23rd they had reached Kragujevatz, had found a suitable site for their tented hospital, and had pitched their tents and installed their equipment.

They were ready for business ... and the wounded started to arrive .

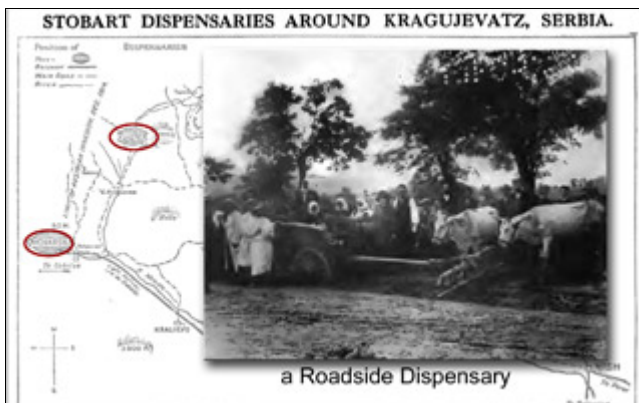


A waggon drawn by oxen at Kragujevatz

Child being treated outside the Operating Theatre.

By the beginning of May, although their primary objective was the treatment of wounded soldiers it was realised that a Dispensary, for the civilian population, was also needed desperately.

Many of the Serbian doctors had either died in the typhus epidemic or were serving with the army



a Roadside Dispensary

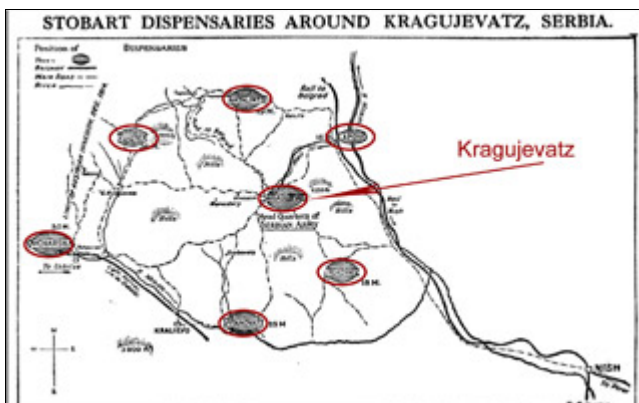
Mrs Stobart wrote :

"We immediately pitched a bell tent at the outer edge of the hospital encampment, on the roadside, improvised a notice board from an old packing case and, with the help of an interpreter, wrote, in Serbian, words to the effect that, if folks would bring their own bottles medicine and medical advice would be given gratis.

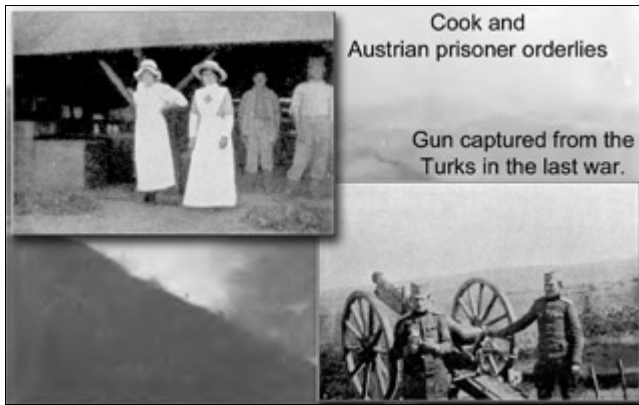
A doctor, a nurse, and an interpreter took charge of the tent dispensary and we waited with eager curiosity to see what happened.

The result was that, within a few weeks, 12,000 people, men, women, and children, came to this roadside dispensary either in ox-wagons or walking from distances of fifty, sixty, even seventy miles ... ill with typhus, diphtheria, typhoid, smallpox, tuberculosis, and every conceivable and inconceivable form of disease."

So successful was it, that it was decided to establish a ring of the dispensaries within a 30 mile radius.



Money was again raised by the Serbian relief fund and extra staff and equipment were sent out to Kragujevatz. A total of 6 dispensaries was set up. organised.



Cook and
Austrian prisoner orderlies

Gun captured from the
Turks in the last war.

There were very few men at the hospital except for about 40 Austrian POWs who did the heavy work around the unit.

As autumn arrived, the threat of enemy action grew greater, rumours about the enemy armies massing on the frontiers were rife ... and the Serbian army was also mobilising.



Flying Field Hospital
leaving Kragujevatz
on a train
for the Front

Mrs. Stobart was asked to take a part of the hospital unit to the Bulgarian front as a flying field hospital.

Oldham's Dr. Payne was selected as one of the doctors to go with her.

The rest of the unit remained in Kragujevatz and a few months later were evacuated safely and returned to England.

Meanwhile, on the 1st of October, Mrs. Stobart's flying field hospital, packed into 6 motor ambulances and over 30 ox wagons, was ready for loading onto the train.

Their destination was Pirot ... on the Bulgarian border.



Field Hospital

By the 4th of October they'd arrived, and the hospital tents were pitched and operational.

Within days the Serbian army was overwhelmed by the enemy ...

Then the order came to move yet again. Tents were struck all packed back into the wagons.

The retreat had begun from Austrians & Germans advancing from the north, and from the Bulgarians advancing from the East.



Leading the column
over the
Mountains

it was to be a long trek that would last 3 months, enduring the most horrific conditions.

The sound of gunfire was never far behind them and there was the constant stream of sick refugees and wounded soldiers to care for.

It's impossible to tell the full story of the retreat in a few short sentences or convey any idea of the conditions that had to be endured as winter closed in.



Burying the dead
by the roadside

The hospital unit retreated, as part of the military convoy, through mountains and along rocky roads that were choked with refugees fleeing from the advancing enemy armies.

Day by day they waited for orders, whether to pitch camp; whether to move to the next destination

all the time treating the sick and wounded along the way.

The dead and dying, both human and animal, were on all sides.

Added to the horrors was the constant need to find food for themselves and for the horses and oxen.

Along the roadside were broken carts, and wagons, discarded possessions too difficult to transport any further.

Winter came to add to their miseries with snow, frostbite and soaking rain.

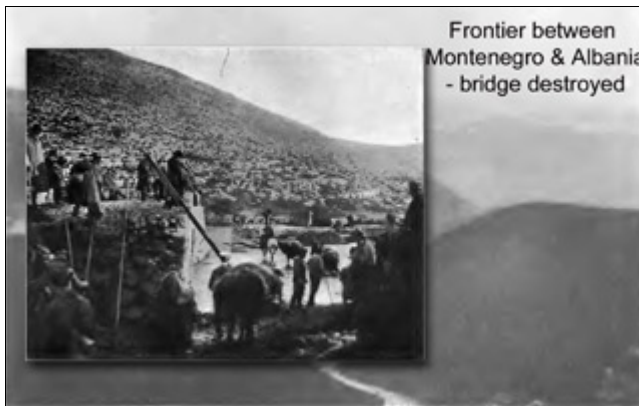


Converting
4-wheeled wagons
into
2-wheeled carts

Finally, they reached the coast at Scutari and, eventually, but with great difficulty they found a boat to take them to Brindisi, in Italy. From there it was a train to Paris ... and then home in London by New Year, 1916.

Dr. Payne returned to Oldham but, sadly, within months she was diagnosed with TB. She, like the other staff at the Field Hospital was awarded a Serbian Bravery Award but, by that time, she was too ill to know of it.

She died on February 4th 1918 and is buried in Chadderton Cemetery.



Frontier between
Montenegro & Albania
- bridge destroyed

WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE



As we've already seen, the outbreak of war saw a turning point in the battle for women's rights.

In the years before 1914, not only were many professions and occupations virtually closed to women but women still had no right to vote in a general election although they had been campaigning for suffrage incessantly for almost 50 years.

However, in the workplace, women had begun to make their voices heard as they came together in unions.



From 1914, as the demand for men, materials and armaments grew ever more urgent ... and more and more men enlisted or were conscripted ... the only people left to fill the gaps were WOMEN.

It was the opportunity they needed to prove that they could do any job that a man could do.

They stepped forward in their hundreds of thousands, to do just that!



Even when indispensable, women weren't welcomed with open arms when they entered the previously male dominated spheres of industry or service.

Many men maintained that women weren't physically or mentally capable of the work but women proved the critics wrong!

They weren't just given the jobs behind counters or in offices. Women were employed in dirty jobs, in difficult jobs, in physically dangerous or exhausting jobs.



The 1915 National Registration Act had identified the numbers of men and women who could be 'used' most effectively for the war effort; either men as soldiers or women replacing the men in the workplace.

Putting it into practice, in September 1916, the government published a handbook entitled, "Women's War Work".

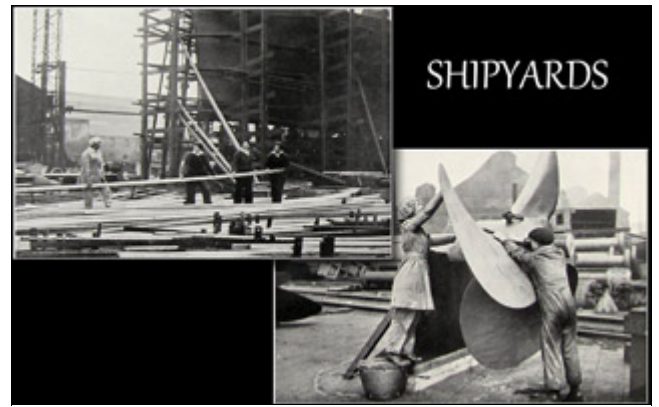
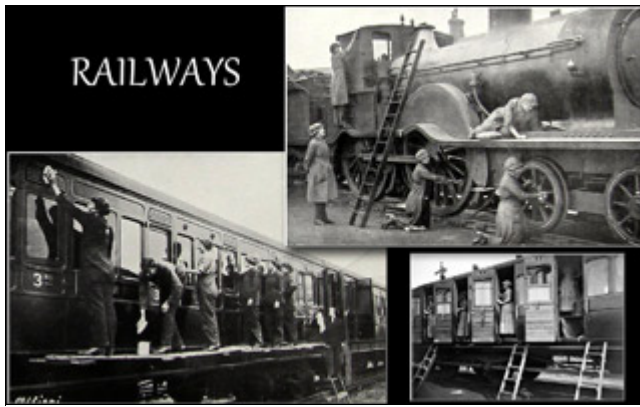


In the booklet, "Women's War Work", there were 28 pages indexing trades in which women could be employed and the specific processes involved.

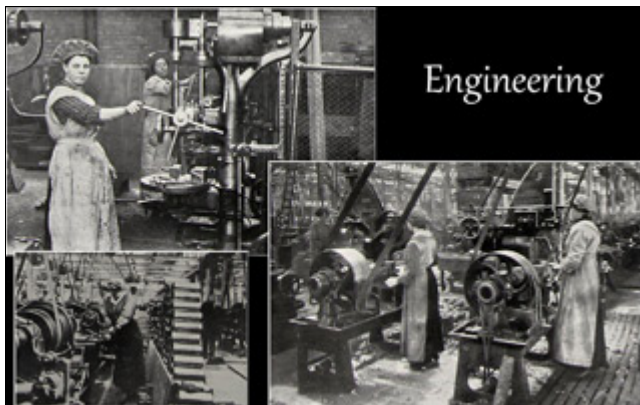
There were 70 photographs of women actually employed in those jobs.

And, just so there were no missed opportunities, it included the addresses of the labour exchanges where women could, 'do their duty'.

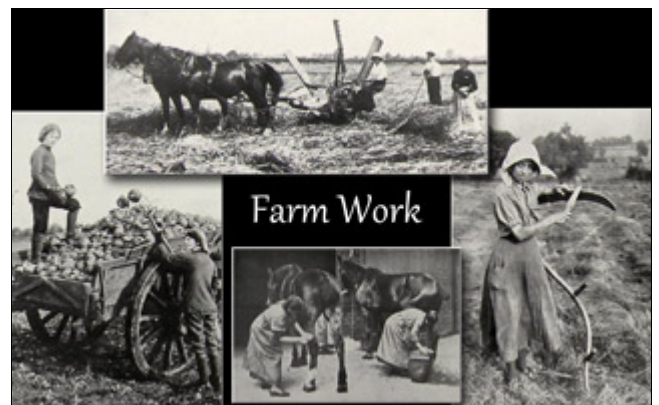
There was work on the Railways, in the chemical, clothing and food trades. Women were employed in the shipyards, textile manufacture, woodworking, and numerous other industries such as leather, pottery, brickmaking, and glass manufacture.



Women were employed to labour in engineering works. In the photograph, below we can see Oldham women working in an engineering works.



There were also 'non-industrial' occupations such as window cleaning, clerical, the post office, driving and street cleaning etc. And, of course there was farm work, with the Land Army producing the nation's food and looking after the animals.



Last, but definitely not least, was the giant munitions industry, feeding the war effort. In this Oldham newspaper photo, above, from January 1916, we are shown a group of local munition workers.

From left to right on the Back row we see the Misses M Turner, M Haynes, J Holmes, J Coine, E Parkinson and A Borrows and on the Front row are, the Misses N Farrington, A French, L Wood, D Cocker, and D Humphries'



The official photos usually show us the smiling faces of women glad to 'do their bit' but the reality was frequently so different.

The hours in the workplace were long and hard.

There was often a danger to health, from contact with poisonous substances or fumes, and there was the ever present fear of accidents.



In Ashton, on July 13th 1917, there was an explosion in the munitions works that was manufacturing TNT for bombs, at Hooley Hill.

It was reported in newspapers, as far away as Australia.

More than forty people lost their lives. including a number of children in nearby streets and on their way home from school. Hundreds more were injured and hundreds of families lost their homes when they were destroyed in the blast.

ACTIVITIES AT HOME & FUND RAISING



As we look back we can see that the war was happening overseas.

Industry was geared up to supply the needs of a nation at war ...

and people left at home turned to any activity which would support and comfort the servicemen in the theatres of war.

However, only time and labour were truly 'free' so virtually everything that was done carried a cost and, consequently, much of the work at home was the often thankless task of fund-raising.

Some of these were for the provision of motor ambulances and wheeled stretchers for use in front-line areas (see photos below). The mobile X-ray unit was privately donated and used at Verdun.

Transport at the Front

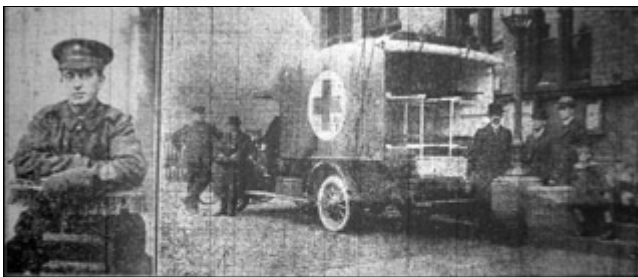


Motor X-Ray Car ...privately donated & used on Verdun Front



By August 1915, Failsworth & Woodhouses War Comforts Society had organised a collection amounting to £860. It was enough to buy not only an ambulance but also 10 'Field, Hand Ambulances'.

This must have been a daunting sum of money for any group to raise, but raise it they did.



Shaw & Crompton ambulance with Driver H. Coupe, from Shaw.

The money for this ambulance was raised by donations in Shaw and Crompton.

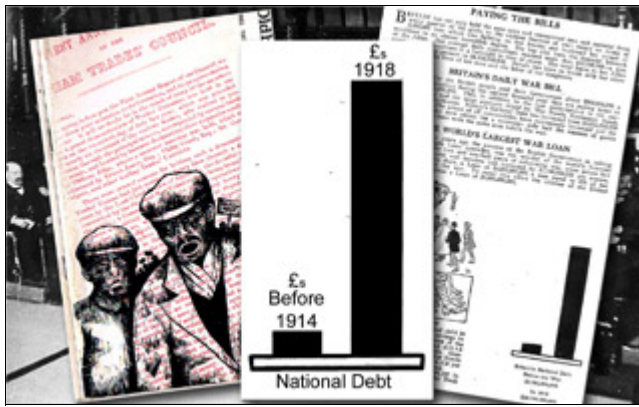
The wish was expressed that it should be driven by a local man, Driver H. Coupe, and be used in the area of Dunkirk.



Dame Sarah Lees presented the Oldham Branch of the St. John Ambulance Society with a fully equipped ambulance which she named, 'The Oldham Suffragist' It's seen here, on the left, before setting off for France in December 1915.



The ambulance on the right, presented in January 1916, was bought with funds raised by Oldham & District Trades and Labour Council.



At home there was an ever growing realisation that manufacturers and large investors were making fortunes from the war ...

whilst, after the war was over, the working man would bear the financial burden, of higher taxation, to pay off what would become a massive National Debt.

One of the immediate concerns was that food prices had increased and the purchasing power of the pound was dropping.

Purchasing Power of the £

1900	20/-	(20 shillings)
1914	17/5	(17 shillings & 5d)
1915	14/2	(14 shillings & 2d)
1920	7/-	(7 shillings)

In 1900 it had a value of 20/-
in 1914 it had dropped to 17s. 5d.
and by 1915 to 14s. 2d.

by 1920 it would have dropped to just 7/-
Another serious issue was the increase in rent charges.

Consequently, the Rent Restriction Act was brought in, in 1916.

A later ammendment to it froze rents, at their 1914 level, if they were below 10/- and allowed for rebates to be claimed.



DORA was the acronym by which the Defence of the Realm Act was known.

It was introduced on the 8th August, 1914, and new restrictions were added as and when the need was recognised.

The Act was designed to give the government far ranging powers enabling it to subordinate all activities to the needs of War.

Government was given the right to requisition buildings or land and the output of factories needed for war work.

It imposed censorship to keep morale at home higher and it was also intended that it should prevent sensitive information from falling into enemy hands.

... and it also had the effect of 'gagging' social rights activists ... preventing them from voicing their demands and criticisms more publicly.

Soldiers' letters home were strictly censored ...

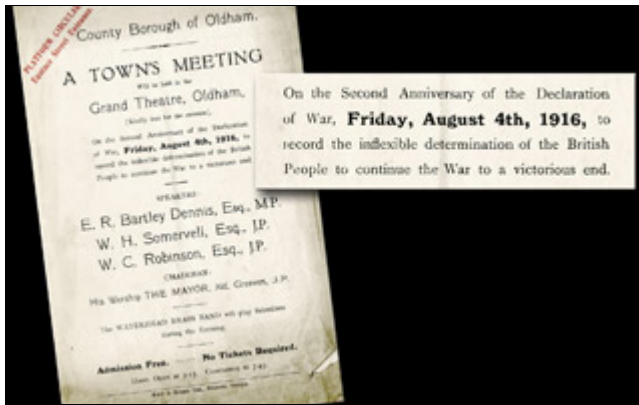
and anything too detailed ... or 'unpleasant' ... would be blocked out.

Beer was watered down ... customers in pubs were not allowed to buy a round of drinks ...

and the opening hours were cut ...

these restrictions were designed to prevent thousands of working hours being lost ... after people had too much to drink.

And British summertime was introduced in May 1916 ... giving a longer working day...



By August 1916, and 2 years of conflict, a war weary population had to be kept on-side.

There could be no wavering ...

This Anniversary meeting, on the 4th August, with speakers and a concert by the Waterhead Brass Band, was promoted as ...

an "... opportunity to record the inflexible determination of the British People to continue the War to a victorious end."



By September 1916, the tank, up to until recently a closely guarded secret, had put in an appearance on the battlefields of the Somme...



.. and, in February 1918, Oldham found itself with a tank, called 'Egbert', on Yorkshire Street, near the Town Hall.

'Egbert' had been in the Battle of Cambrai, in November 1917 and it became part of a national investment campaign, raising money to pay for the war, by urging people to buy War Bonds and War Savings Certificates.



There was a grand opening of the Oldham 'Tank Bank', on the 9th February, by the mayor who ceremoniously invested £100,000 for the council.

The target investment for the town was £1,000,000!

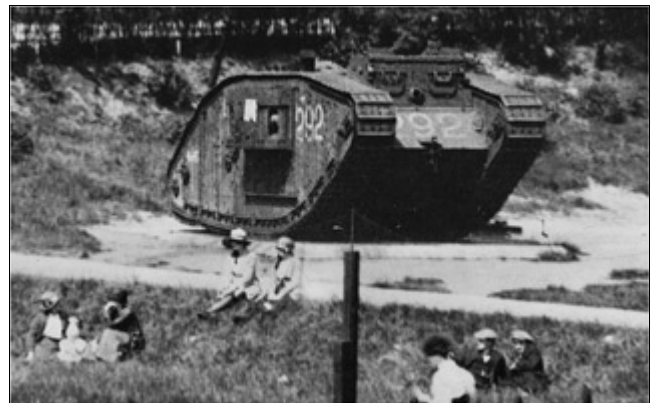
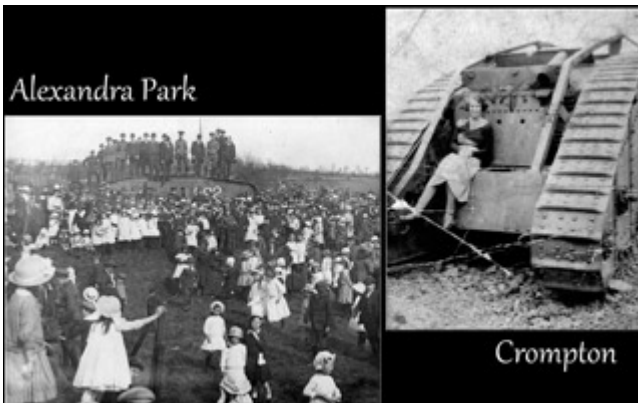
That target had been reached within a week, after 6 days of virtually non-stop activities.

Bands were playing; there were medal presentations, a procession led by an illuminated tram, and 4,000 children were brought from their classrooms to view it and then write an essay.



A final tour of Oldham, Shaw, Royton and Lees by the tram, on the 15th, had brought the investment figure up to its target £1,000,000.

Altogether, Oldham and the townships invested over one and a half million pounds in that week!



'Egbert' moved on to other towns but, at the end of the war, both Crompton and Oldham were given tanks of their own and Oldham's found a home in Alexandra Park.



In November 1914, Vesta Tilley, the famous music hall male impersonator, had visited Oldham and gave a performance at the Palace Theatre.

Many of her acts included performances where, dressed as a soldier, she sang songs encouraging the men in her audience to go out and 'sign up'

The soldier songs were amongst her most popular, for example, '*There's Tommy, Tommy Atkins*', and one about a new recruit called, '*I joined the army yesterday so the army's alright today.*'

So persuasive was she, at doing this, that she was nick-named, 'Britain's Best Recruiting Sergeant'

Although the servicemen were never far from the thoughts of family and friends they'd left, the men, in their turn thought constantly of home.

Letters and cards were precious to everyone.





In France, particularly, there was a thriving 'cottage industry' in souvenirs made from exploded shell casings and the like.

For instance, letter openers, ash trays and similar souvenirs were all offered for sale and sent home.

Even 'souvenir' bullets, removed from a wound in hospital, would be sent home with pride.

All would be treasured by family and passed down the generations.

At home, there was no let-up in fund raising.

The list of events is almost endless : concerts, dances, whist drives and garden parties, bazaars, sales of garden flowers, decorated cards and hand made craft items.

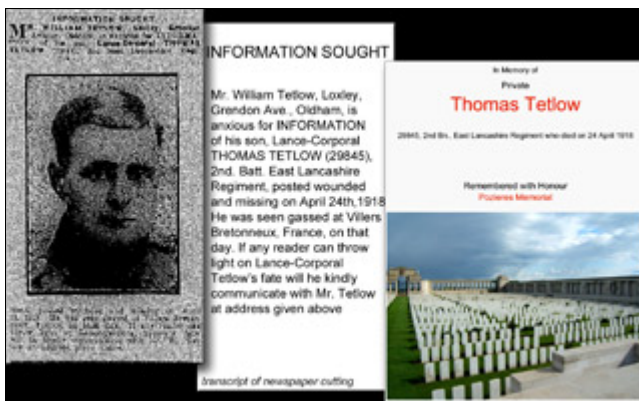
There were Gift Auctions with donated items ranging from expensive jewellery to half a dozen cups and saucers. No moment was considered too trivial to add to the 'pot'.



But, for many families, every day would bring heartache, a death confirmed or the anguish of a loved one 'missing in action'.

One such was this notice, in the newspaper, pleading for news of a missing son. William Tetlow of Grendon Avenue was reported missing on April 24th, 1918 and was known to have been gassed.

The family's hopes would be crushed; on the Commonwealth War Graves commission website can be found the record of his death in that month and on that date.



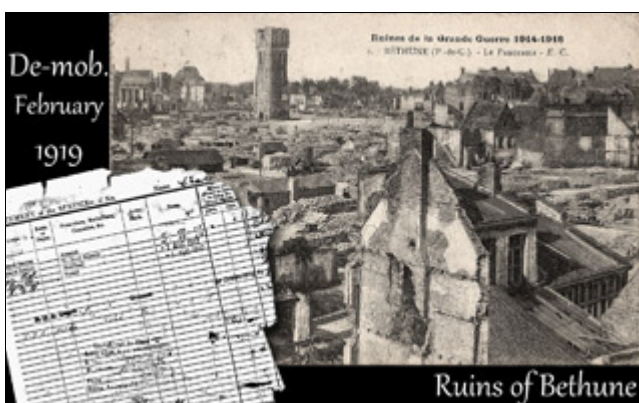
MEMORIALS & AFTERMATH

After over 4 long years of war, the armistice was signed with Germany on the 11th November 1918.

The hardest part now, was for the families waiting for their men to come home.

It was as hard for the servicemen, wanting nothing more than to get home, and get on with their lives.

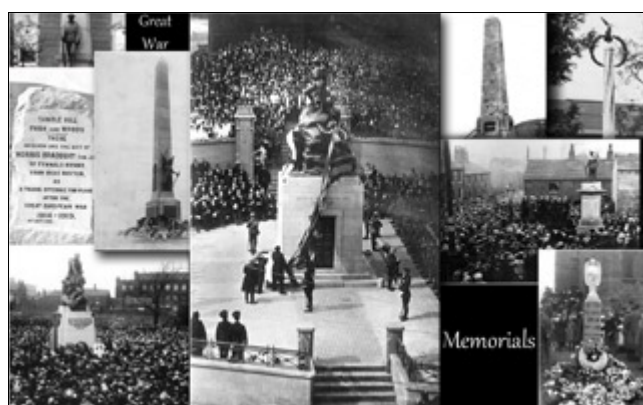
For the majority, this would drag on, well into 1919.





In the 1920s visits to the war cemeteries began to be organised offering a chance for relatives to visit graves and see memorials such as the Menin Gate.

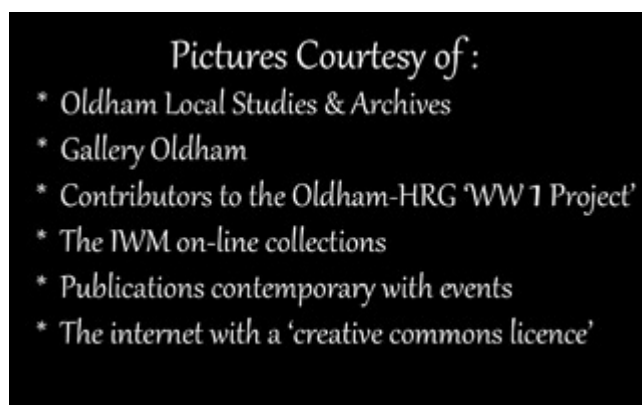
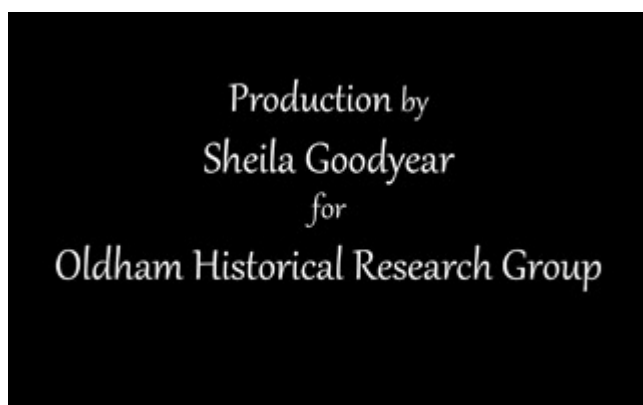
But time moved on and, in the years that followed, virtually every town and village raised money for public war memorials. Thousands of churches, schools, institutions, factories and offices all installed their own memorial boards, books, and scrolls.



In 1914, when being urged to enlist, the men were promised that their sacrifices would never be forgotten.

In 2014 ... the number of people whose memory reached back to those years ... could hardly be counted on the fingers of one hand. Now, in 2020 it is hard to believe there is anyone left.

It was our task, in the centenary years, to remind ourselves of the horrors that touched virtually every family in the land and to try and keep faith with that early promise.



Sheila Goodyear, 2020

Transcript of a talk given at Oldham Historical Research Group, September 2014.

Larger copies of the images can be seen on the Oldham HRG website [HERE](#)