

MERE AT WAR

Once the Great War had begun the Royal Artillery were stationed at Mere. A house next to the Talbot Garage in Salisbury Street was used as the guardroom. They trained on the downs and horses pulling guns was a common sight. The village blacksmiths taught the soldiers how to show their horses.

Local men and youths joined the Dorset Yeomanry under the command of Colonel Troyte-Bullock of Zeals House. The women and girls did their part for the war effort working at the foundry in Bourton making hand grenade casings.

The Grove Buildings were used by the Red Cross as a hospital tending the casualties direct from the fighting fronts. Mrs. M. B. White who was Hospital Commandant received an OBE for her work at Mere. Equipment was crude, Mrs. Gladys Matthews held a bicycle lamp during one of the first operations in Kitchener Ward. Eventually an operating theatre was equipped and a separate annex for TB patients was set up. Both of which no longer exist. The different church denominations took it in turns to provide pastoral care to the patients. There was a church service held every Sunday afternoon by one or the other churches.

A wooden commemorative plaque was erected in the Grove Buildings in recognition of those who worked at the hospital during the war years.

The plaque states that during the period of October 10th 1914 and 28th February 1919 the hospital had treated and cared for 1,272 sick and wounded soldiers as in-patients.

Below is a list of the names known to be on the plaque along with 72 other names of those who volunteered or worked at the hospital. If anyone can provide a list of the names or could provide a photograph of the plaque please contact Teresa Lewis the site administrator.

Members of the Voluntary Aid Detachment B. R. C. S. Dorset 16

SURNAME	GIVEN NAMES	OTHER	POSITION
White	M. B.	O. B. E.	Commandant
Troyte-Bullock	G. M.		Quartermaster
Chell	M. A.		Quartermaster
Davis	H.		Sister-in-charge
Lloyd	M. K.		Sister-in-charge
Trotman	F. E.	Reverend	Chaplain
Farnfield	W. W.		Medical Officer
Bartlett	B. Pope		Anaesthetist and Radiographer
Rutter	F. B.		Deputy M.O.
Ford	F.		Secretary

For recreation and entertainment of the soldiers the Lecture Hall was known as the Tipperary Club where the women of Mere volunteered to serve refreshments to the soldiers.

Many Mere girls married soldiers who made use of the facilities in Mere including many Australian soldiers based at Sutton Veny. This also was a common practice during WWII.

A war memorial was erected in the square at Mere after the First World War and the names of the fallen were also inscribed into a Book of Remembrance which is housed in St. Michaels Church.

The Second World War saw Mere once more home to the forces, The Royal Corps of Signals, Grenadier Guards, Coldsream Guards and Military Police all were camped within the vicinity as well as many American troops.

Once more the women of Mere rallied round and provided a canteen which was open for 12 hours a day until 10pm. This was housed in The Triangle (now demolished).

Many of the men of the village who did not see active service formed a band of the Home Guard and an A.R.P. Post was set up in what is now an annex to the Ship Hotel. Wardens were on duty day and night. The closest a bomb fell to Mere was in the Meads near South Lodge. A German plane was brought down at Huntingford.

The pilot, Sergeant McLoughlin, of a Hurricane bailed out before his plane crashed at Peasehill. He was taken to Shaftesbury Hospital where he recovered even though he suffered severe burns. The final air battle in the skies over Mere took place in September 1940.

Many volunteer schemes were set up in Mere during WWII, there was a shop to provide comforts to POWs, a knitting bee was held weekly, and collection points for metal to be used for military purposes were found in the village and outskirts. Many railings and even the water wheel at Lordsmead mill were recycled. The WVS made collections of food to be redistributed to those who needed it most.

Mere was awarded three plaques during the savings weeks in 1942 for Warship Week (Mere adopted H.M.S. Agate a minesweeper; in 1943 for Wings for Victory Week and in 1944 for Salute the Soldier Week.

Once more the Grove buildings were put to war time use as a rest centre for evacuees sent from Wimbledon during the Blitz.

The names of the WWII casualties were added to the war memorial and also to the Book of Remembrance.

In October 1945 Polish troops who had taken part in the battle for Monte Cassino and remained there until the early part of 1947. Some of the soldiers returned to Poland to help in its rebuild but others remained in England finding civilian work. A handful remained in Mere having married local girls.

It might not be known but the idea of a Women's Land Army had been in the thoughts of the government a long time before the outbreak of WWII so much so that at the outbreak of hostilities about 1000 volunteers some already trained were able to start work around Mere in September 1939.

A hostel was home to many of the girls at Southbrook in 1941. At times 30 girls of many different backgrounds were resident here several girls having no idea what farming was all about.

The girls were dropped off at their allocated farms by 7 am normally working in groups of 4. Their duties included threshing, hoeing, harvesting, haymaking, crop picking and planting and muck spreading depending on the time of year. Some were trained to drive tractors and take on the ploughing of fields and others were responsible for general farm duties such as egg collecting and care of the farm livestock. For this they earned £3 per week less board and lodging. Their work clothes were provided free of charge. The job of allocating the girls to their farms and billets and to oversee the girls welfare was that of Mrs. Troyte-Bullock the District Representative and Lady Katherine McNeil the County Secretary.