

20th Century Sparks!

World War One

After the war

The experience of World War One changed Britain profoundly. Many had seen a different reality from the class structured existence of 1914, and wanted change. This included rights for women, jobs and decent housing.

On this page and in [The Shoreham Mutiny](#) and [A Home for Heroes](#) memories of the local response to the end of War is explored.



Night time view of floodlit war memorial. Designed by Sir John Simpson and opened in October 1922 by Earl Beatty. It records the 2,597 men and 3 women from Brighton who died in the First World War. *Brighton and Hove in Pictures*

Mr. Lucas, seeing that the business was dropping, thought that he'd like to expand by opening a corner shop in Baker Street selling gramophone records, with me as his assistant. I had to refuse his offer because I had married my soldier boyfriend towards the end of the War, and had continued working whilst he was serving in the army. But when he was eventually demobbed I had to give up my job after working for 5 years in the pawnbrokers.

Like many women who had worked through the War, once the hostilities were over, we were expected to return to the home as it was not considered right for wives to go out to work if there was a man in the house capable of providing for them and the family.

Lillie Morgan - [At the Pawnbrokers](#)

The war ended in 1918 and by that time my father had been discharged from the army and given a full pension of ten shillings (50p) a week. The landlord of The Marquess of Exeter decided to leave and return to Scotland, so my father was offered the tenancy again. We moved back into the pub and soon got back into the old routine.

When the 'Great War of all Wars' was over, life was never the same. The emancipation of women had started and those who served with the forces came back with many new ideas. They would come into the pub and smoke quite openly and exchange experiences with other ex-service personnel.

Marjory Batchelor - [A Life Behind Bars](#)



World War One

After the war - continued

The husbands, Edgar and William, arrived home for good in 1918. They were very proud of all of their medals, William especially so as he had earned the Mons Star, which was a much coveted medal, and which Winifred still has among her most precious possessions.

Although there was much jubilation with street parties, and of course the families which were now complete again were very thankful, they were also very sad when they thought of so many of their comrades who had not returned.

Thus when the Cenotaph was built in London, the men were only too pleased to show their respect to the fallen by marching along Whitehall to place poppy wreaths on the Cenotaph and to observe the two minutes silence each following year on November 11th.
Ethel Howel - Little Ethel Smith

Further up the village is the War Memorial which stands in front of the church. Every Armistice Day we used to stand there for the service with our mother and father, Edith and William Whale. We were always accompanied by Mrs Gaston and her two sons, Harry and Arthur, as father went to the First World War with Mr Gaston who was killed and we kept this custom up for many years.

I can see all the men standing there with heads bared whatever the weather and the St Aubyns boys playing the last post. Brownies, Guides and Scouts, in fact anyone in uniform was there and I wonder if it is the same now as I am unable to get there and have to watch television, but my thoughts are always there with those ex-service men who stood together in their grief.

Margaret Ward - Memories of Rottingdean

.....ordinary people had to pick up the pieces: war widows, war spinsters and blighted lives; single parent families created by war, with the mother struggling to bring up children on an inadequate war pension. Families having to support a father or son unable to work, because many men came back blinded, lacking limbs, disfigured or ruined psychologically for the rest of their lives. Even the lucky ones came back suffering from "nerves". The war did not only change the lives of individuals, it changed attitudes and behaviour.

Blighty Brighton



World War One

The Shoreham Mutiny

SHOREHAM & SOUTHWICK MEN MARCH TO BRIGHTON

Mayor and Chief Constable Interviewed; MAYOR'S GOOD ADVICE

The most remarkable military demonstration ever witnessed in Sussex took place this morning, when 7,000 from the London Command Depot at Shoreham and the Royal Marine Engineering Works at Southwick marched to the Brighton Town Hall to protest against the delay in the demobilization of the troops.

Every man of the 7,000 has served overseas, and for some time past, it appears, they have been labouring under a sense of injustice at the inequality of the treatment they allege has been meted out to them. Throughout yesterday the leaders of the men were busy enlisting promises of the support of the troops to march out of Camp today, and at 7 o'clock this morning they took active steps towards carrying out their object. The General-in-Command, having been appraised of the men's intentions, addressed them from the flagstaff on the question of demobilization. He pointed out that thousands of troops could not be demobilized without some delay, and promised that if they had a genuine grievance he would forward it to the proper authorities. He offered to meet them again at 11 o'clock, but the leaders of the men decided at once to march into Brighton, and shortly afterwards the whole route from the camp was alive with masses of khaki-clad men. At Southwick they were joined by men of the RME, and on the way to Brighton every soldier in the streets was invited to join in the procession.

The Brighton Town Hall was reached shortly after 11 o'clock, and steps were at once taken to secure an interview with the Mayor through the offices of the Chief Constable. ... Meanwhile the troops formed up in Bartholomews, and, in thoroughly orderly fashion, whiled away the time in songs and a few speeches...

"We demand demobilization as soon as possible," said this man, who was wearing two wound stripes. "There is far too much messing about," he proceeded, "doing physical jerks, washing up pans and dishes, and generally doing women's work while we might be at home doing our own jobs. Why cannot we be discharged in khaki if they like and sent home, and if they want us they know where to find us. If we were home we could go and find a job, but we cannot do it while we are confined to Camp."

Evening Argus 6 January 1919

Blighty Brighton



World War One

Home for Heroes

In the aftermath of the war there was a great gap between the ideal and reality. The ideal was symbolised by the war memorials put up all over Britain, in every city, town and village.

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of each year there would be two minutes silence and powerful ceremonies to remember the war dead, not cynical ceremonies and symbols foisted on the British by their rulers, they were accepted by a people that needed to come to terms with the Great War, a token of a promise "that they had not died in vain", jobs and "homes fit for heroes" for the returning survivors.

Reality was to be different; there was a Ministry of Reconstruction in 1918, and plans for advances in education and housing, but by 1922 most of these plans were in ruins. A short term post-war boom soon collapsed, followed by long years of inter-war unemployment. It was once again "Business as usual" and "Back to 1914".

Blighty Brighton

The Squatters

The Garden Estates

Peacehaven



World War One

The Squatters

Immediately after the First World War there was an acute housing shortage in Brighton. Harry was compelled to do something after he saw an article in the local paper about a family forced to move to institutions in Brighton due to over-crowding and the lack of affordable housing.

In 1921 he heard about an ex-serviceman called Hodson who was sleeping with his family on Brighton's racecourse: 'Harry come up and saw the predicament I was in. He said, 'Hodson, this won't do, we'll have to see into this.' I said, 'I don't know what to do Harry.' So one night he come up, he says, 'Hodson, I've got a house for you. Will you have it?' I says, 'Yes, I'll have it.'

We went down to Cheltenham Place and he showed me the place - number 14 it is. I said 'Well we've got to get in Harry, haven't we.' He says, 'Yes.' So we both threw our weights on the door and busted the door open. Got our stuff in, what we had, left the bell tent in the garden.

And about two weeks after the owner come up and he said, 'We're not going to put up with this, you know, you'll have to get out of this.' I says, 'Oh, who's gonna shift me? Don't forget I'm not alone, I've got a few more behind me. Now I'll tell you straight,' I says, 'I'm willing to pay the rent, whatever you like to charge, but you're not going to put me out because I'll fight you, I'll fight you right to the bitter end.'

Who was Harry Cowley?

Harry Cowley first appropriated houses in 1920 for returning servicemen, but also extended his assistance to civilians. Again in the 1920s, with a fake bomb in each hand he threatened to blow up an estate agent who tried to evict an elderly lady squatter.

With a group of ex-servicemen searching for food and work he expropriated sheep off the Sussex Downs as well as houses. He broke up a Lord Mayor's banquet and forced the mayor to release an unemployed man from jail and threatened to "Strangle the Board of Guardians with my own hands" if local rates of unemployment were not increased.

Later in the 1930s he formed an anti-fascist group and had his home damaged and his leg broken by a gang of fascists who descended from London.

Of course it was the Press that was blowing it up. As a rule you would expect they'd have been shouting against the vigilantes. I think the secret is that the people were so strong that the Press were afraid to report it from the opposite angle.

It was pushed up quite a lot by the London papers, and there were people from London on holiday. They were witnessing the very thing they had been reading about in the papers. That made them much more enthusiastic about the movement.



World War One

The Squatters - continued

Harry Cowley would announce "We're the vigilantes, we're helping the people. We're going to ask you to send some money down". We all stood there and it came down in showers. Propaganda was on his side, the Press itself, otherwise I don't think we'd have ever collected money like that.

Squatting on a large scale died out by late 1946 when the squatters, with the encouragement of the Ministry of Information, were increasingly portrayed by the Press as queue jumpers in the search for housing, pushing aside those more patient and law-abiding citizens who were unwilling to resort to the "illegal" methods of the vigilantes.

Les Moss - Live and Learn



World War One

The Garden Estates

Brighton & Hove Herald 29 June 1918

Brighton is to have a model garden suburb - but not, of course, until after the war. Definite progress, however, is being made with the scheme to build 1,000 houses near Brighton, and it is possible that something more may be heard of the project at the next meeting of the Town Council.

The proposal, as far as can be gathered at present, is to build about ten houses to the acre. It is the intention of the Corporation to engage the highest expert advice they can get in order to ensure that the estate on which the houses are to be built shall be laid out on the most attractive lines. There is to be no dead uniformity of what might be called "modern prettiness" about the modern garden suburb.

All the houses are to be of an individual character. All are to be fitted with electric light and baths and are to have a reasonable amount of garden. What is most important of all, they are to be let at a rent which makes them self-supporting. But at the prices to which building materials are soaring - and no one anticipates that house prices will fall for many years to come - it does not seem clear how the rent can be a moderate one.

Blighty Brighton

The Bishop of Chichester wrote in 1939 in the preface to a pamphlet Rents in Moulsecoomb, "Everybody who goes along the Lewes Road must admire the appearance of the three Moulsecoomb housing estates; the layout and the style of building. Externally they do credit to Brighton Corporation and to the architects, surveyors and builders who brought it into being." In the same pamphlet Marion Fitzgerald wrote of the "Pleasing aspect and sound construction of the houses."

Blighty Brighton

Because of his age, Jack had a late call-up for Army Service in 1916. The years following the War were a distressing time, and he had his share of problems to face. He returned to Civvy Street in 1919, to find a noisy and violent family billeted on his wife, and poor prospects of work in the town. After being forced to take his wife and two children to Reading temporarily, in order to find work, he finally secured a job with the Southern Publishing Company in Robert Street, Brighton in 1920, as a master printer.

I was born in the following February. Mum already had two daughters, Irene (10) and Kathleen (6), and needed room for her expanding family. Dad, in desperation, went to the Housing Department, to see if anything could be done about re-housing the unruly family upstairs.

We were then living near Five Ways, in Stanmer Park Road. My parents were told that nothing could be done for them, since the father, although an ex-soldier, was out of work and had no references. They were then asked by the Housing Manager if they had heard anything about the new "Garden Suburb", which was being built out on the road to Lewes. Would they perhaps consider renting one of those new houses themselves?



World War One

The Garden Estates - continued

Dad thought it was worth investigating and Mum liked what she saw. The semi-detached houses were set in a valley, looking more like country cottages. Mum was a countrywoman at heart, having spent her childhood in a village. Dad thought the rent was very high, but there were three nice bedrooms, and a big garden, and lighting and cooking was by electricity, which was the very latest fashion. So Mum tried a little persuasion, offering to help with expenses by earning money at home, if he would agree to take them away from the terrible family upstairs. Their name was added to the waiting list, and they moved into 8 The Avenue in the summer of 1922.

Ruby Dunn - Mouslecoomb Memories



World War One

Peacehaven

It was at this time that father decided mother should not return to Wing's Place, and with Granny's help purchased a piece of land and an ex-army hut. This was in 1922.

The land was purchased from the Dumbrell Estate, and was a turning off the Lewes Road, down a track known as Shady Lane. There was a white field gate at the road end with a heave stile near the eastern side of Lexden House, and another gate and heave stile at the bottom end of the lane.

The army hut was bought as the army was selling off its surplus stock. With the aid of two friends and one of the Grainger boys, they went to Seaford with a horse and waggon and brought it back in sections to our own plot of land.

The excitement was great. We children were brought home to see the last piece erected, and to see it divided into a kitchen, scullery, sitting-room and three bedrooms - one for mother and father, one for Rex and one for us three girls.

Doris Hall - Growing up in Ditchling

Many men who had been told they were fighting and dying for an England which was at its very best in the countryside, naturally wanted something better on their return from the war than the life many of them had left behind in the urban slums.

The end of the war, and the failure of Governments' 'Homes for Heroes' campaign was the impetus for many of those who could afford it to buy a stake in the land they had been fighting for. It is not surprising that many of them rejected the controlled tenancy of small holdings, and chose instead to purchase a stake in the land which was most accessible to them; the plotland developments.

Although to its inhabitants Peacehaven may have seemed the rural idyll they had been searching for, to its attackers it was one of the worst developments of the modern age, encroaching on a part of rural England which was central to ideas of Englishness, and symbolising the lack of social control and breakdown of order which seemed to typify the post-war age.

In a competition to choose a name for the new estate, "New Anzac-on-Sea" was chosen as the winner; but as a result of representations that Anzac was almost a sacred word, following the tragic events of Gallipoli, it was not a name which could suitably be used to advertise a new seaside place, so this was later changed to Peacehaven.

In the original plan, dated 1916, for Anzac-on-Sea many of the streets were named after first World War battles: Louvain, Marne, Mons, Loos, Festubert, Salonica and Ypres Avenues. These were later changed to: Gladys, Sunview, Vernon, Southdown, Seaview and Friars Avenues.

It was obviously not possible to sell plots of land on avenues bearing names which reminded people of the tragedies of these First World War battles.



World War One

Peacehaven - continued

...two main strands [run] through the ... promotion of Peacehaven: the health giving properties of life on the South Downs, and the freedom which ownership of a plot of land gave to the plotholder... the healthiness of life on the Downs was a major selling point... and life in Peacehaven was often compared favourably to life in the towns; a cartoon published in 1921 showed "types of people not found in healthy Peacehaven", whilst a comparison with the nearest large town stated that in "Brighton, they are always saying good health, up here we are always having it." (Peacehaven Post October 1921).

However, this very egalitarianism of Peacehaven could be a drawback as well as selling point. Many of the plotholders could afford to buy plots of land but could not afford to build on them ... this resulted in many of the plots remaining vacant, eventually leaving the development with a scattered, haphazard appearance.

Many plotholders who could afford to build could do so only with the cheapest materials, creating a landscape of caravans, wooden shacks and half-finished bungalows, interspaced with the grander villas which wealthier plotholders had been able to build.

This shanty-town appearance was further enhanced by Neville's policy of selling plots without services, which left the town with one made-up road and the distressing lack of a sewerage system. All this was a very far cry from the 'Garden City by the Sea' which Neville had intended to build, and which he continued to advertise Peacehaven as.

Blighty Brighton