

20th Century Sparks!

World War One

Life in Blighty

War brought poverty and hardship to those left at home. The rationing of food was brought in and women found themselves working outside the home, doing men's jobs to keep the country operating.

On this page and in Rationing, The Kitchener Indian Hospital and Prisoners of War you can explore memories of Brighton and Hove during World War One.

There was a large army camp at Shoreham during the First World War. There were huts, tents, field kitchens and troops by the thousands. Some of the children in Ellen Street used to be sent by their parents with a pillowcase to walk to Shoreham Camp and back again before school to collect bread, which the soldiers used to slip over the fence to them. I must admit this was something our family did not have to do, although bread was scarce.

Ernie Mason - A Working Man

The War really hit the women hardest, especially those with young children. With their husbands away in the forces they only received a small pittance as an allowance, which was not enough to live on.

They would have to wait for their husbands to return on leave to bring any extras into the home. Sometimes there simply was not enough money even to buy their children breakfast before they went to school, so they pawned their sheets and blankets (you could get 9d for a decent sheet), probably owning nothing of higher value, and then they would cross the road to the bakers and buy buns for their children.

I remember plenty of barefoot children in those days and we were told never to take children's shoes into pawn, but then these sorts of people probably couldn't have afforded to buy their children shoes in the first place.

When the men came home on leave from the War, so the family rows would begin. He would find that his suits had been pawned and he had nothing to wear except what he returned home wearing, and that probably was his uniform.

Many men left their rings and watches at home for safety when they joined the forces and these too would have been pawned. We would have angry men with handfuls of pawn tickets using much of their pay to redeem their belongings (which of course would be back again as soon as they went away).



A Pawnbroker shop
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World War One

Life in Blighty – continued

Many men demanded that we must not do business with their wives again and in future must not allow them into the shop.

Lillie Morgan - At the Pawnbrokers

My old Mum worked too hard and so did all Mums like her. I can remember a time when what they called a 'G.S. Waggon' would call at our house and a few others nearby. The wagon came from the local barracks and it contained dirty khaki fatigue uniforms.

Certain numbers of the uniforms were unloaded at the front door to be washed and ironed and the wagon would call again in a few days to collect. We kids loved to go through the pockets before Mum started on them. Once we found a full packet of Woodbines, five fags in a paper pack. Dad had those but we didn't find much else.

For years later I used to get a choking feeling just to think about it - on top of looking after us lot - on top of her own massive weekly wash - there was our old Mum scrubbing filthy khaki uniforms for a few extra shillings. She worked too hard - a lot of Mums worked too hard. There was nothing we could do about it but it wasn't fair was it?

Sid Manville - Our Small Corner

In the last winter of the war hardship amongst the Brighton poor led to a well organised demonstration which declared "The wives and children of our fighters shall not want for food."

Blighty Brighton



World War One

Rationing

Queuing for food

Rationing had started but there were no ration books like there were in World War Two, where everyone got a small amount of necessities per family. I remember queuing at the butcher's before going to school, until my mother could relieve me. Rumours of deliveries got round, and one day I joined a queue at a grocer's and came back triumphantly with a stone jar of treacle. When we opened it, the smell was so vile it had to be tipped down the drain!

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

Ration books and the National Kitchen

I recall during the latter part of the First World War the ration books we had. They were oblong in shape and had a sort of faint paisley pattern on the pages.

Rationing was not so good then, as the shops were not open all the time. When the word spread that Maypole had margarine, everyone would queue outside, for one portion per person. When all sold out the shop closed again. Police would stand by to see to law and order.

My mother would give two or three of us 6d. to buy it and we were told to space ourselves in the queue so as not appear to be together, or we might not get two lots. But with our sized family, it did not go far. There was also the plum and apple jam in tins when we would queue again.

Next to the Police Station in Preston Circus was the National Kitchen where one could have a meal or take food away. As you entered, your money was exchanged for a metal disc with a hole in the middle.

Every time I went it was always pease pudding and faggots which was put in the large dish I had taken and covered with a cloth to take home. Oh how I hated it!

Daisy Noakes - [The Town Beehive](#)

Shopkeepers problems of favouritism or social exclusion during rationing

The marginal shopkeeper could not afford to risk the loss of even one customer by showing any favouritism or social exclusiveness. Wartime rationing posed particular problems for such shopkeepers, who wished to reward faithful customers by supplying them with 'short goods', without appearing to be unfair to newer customers. Clearly shopkeepers were restricted in their social activities because of the high degree of competition in their business.

Neil Griffiths - [Shops Book](#)

Food was short and there was rationing of certain goods. It was rather haphazard and you snatched what you could, when you could, meat, sugar, butter and margarine were short and mother would send us down to the shops as soon as she knew that a consignment was in. We lived near the town so we were near Liptons, Pearkes and Home and Colonial.



World War One

Rationing - continued

I remember feeling hungry on occasions, but it wasn't because there wasn't good food around. Most people kept a few chickens and so there were fresh eggs and a lot of people had allotments so there was fresh vegetables.

Money was short and so mother took in visitors from London who came to escape from the 'Taubes' bombs and Zeppelins. My sister and I slept in my parents' bed and Mother slept in a single bed in the room. This left two rooms that she could let and we had visitors from London, who stayed for several weeks. I think they brought their ration books with them, and bought the food for mother to cook.

We knitted socks for the troops and mittens for the milk ladies who took over the delivery of milk when the men left. Women also worked on the trams and at Allen West on munitions and many did nursing.

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The Kitchener Indian Hospital

When Britain declared war on Germany in 1914 there were only some 7,000 hospital beds available in the United Kingdom, insufficient for nursing the casualties expected from the Western Front.

Many Poor Law institutions were taken over for use as military hospitals and the Brighton Workhouse (now Brighton General Hospital) was rapidly transformed into the Kitchener Hospital.

More unexpectedly, when the jewel in Brighton's crown, the Royal Pavilion, was offered by the Corporation to the King, this too was designated by him as a military hospital, specifically for Indian soldiers wounded in France.

He felt, it is said, that they would appreciate the Indian surroundings, although in fact the interior of the Pavilion reflected Chinese rather than Indian styles of decoration. There are stories of men, recovering consciousness amid these unexpected splendours, who believed that they had awoken in paradise.

The first Indian expeditionary force (there were to be three others, sent to different theatres of war) began landing at Marseilles in September 1914, and eventually numbered 70,000 in France.

Some five and a half thousand of these would be killed, and well over sixteen thousand wounded. On arrival the men were rapidly moved up to the Front, and immediately deployed in the generally water-logged trenches, hastily dug across the British sector, which was defending part of northern France and Flanders.

The incessant rain and bitter cold of an early winter resulted in many cases of frostbite, trench foot and gangrene, to add to the many more injuries resulting from machine gun fire and high explosive. By November 1914 the Indians had already suffered over 1800 casualties.



India's fighting men in the grounds of the Royal Pavilion. During the First World War the Royal Pavilion Estate was used as a military hospital for wounded Indian soldiers. 4306 patients were admitted between 1 December 1914 and 15 February 1916. From 20 April 1916 to 21 July 1919 the estate became the Pavilion General Hospital which catered for limbless men.

Brighton & Hove in Pictures



Indian patients queue to receive rations in the grounds of Kitchener Hospital 1915.

Brighton and Hove in Pictures

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The Kitchener Indian Hospital - continued

The Indian wounded evacuated to England were nursed in special military hospitals, mainly in Brockenhurst and Brighton. The Pavilion, together with the Dome and Corn Exchange, provided 724 beds, and the Kitchener, initially intended for 1,500 Indian patients, later could accommodate 2,000. A third Indian hospital was established in York Place.

Very careful preparations were made to ensure that the ritual requirements of the different religions, practised by the various communities among the Indian soldiers, could be met.

The largest single group within the Indian Army was composed of Sikhs, who were mainly from the Punjab. The Gurkhas from Nepal, and the Dogras and Garhwalis from neighbouring areas in the Western Himalayas were all Hindus, as were the Jats who came, like the Sikhs, from the Punjab. There were also Punjabi Mohammedans, as well as Mohammedans from Madras and the Deccan, while the Pathans and the Afridis from the North West Frontier region and the neighbouring Baluchis were also adherents of the Muslim faith.



Royal Pavilion South Gate , c. 1930. Royal Pavilion South Gate, built in 1921. Designed by Thomas Tyrwhitt in Gujerati style, with a simple dome resting on 4 stone pillars. It is inscribed "This gateway is the gift of India in commemoration of her sons who, stricken in the Great War, were tended in the Pavilion in 1914 and 1915." Dedicated for the people of Brighton by the Maharajah of Patiala on 26 October 1921.

Brighton and Hove in Pictures

Separate arrangements were made for the different caste, religious and linguistic groups. The Sikhs at the Pavilion worshipped in their Gurdwara on the lawns, and the Mohammedans prayed, five times a day, as enjoined by their religion, and facing Mecca, on the grass plot in front of the Dome. All notices were printed in Urdu, Hindi and Gurmukhi. Two water taps were provided in each ward, one for Hindus and the other for Muslims.

There were separate bathing houses and latrines, and separate mortuaries. Hindus and Sikhs who died were cremated on the Downs near Patcham, on the site now occupied by the Chattri, an Indian memorial to the dead; their ashes were scattered on the sea. In fact there were only 32 deaths in the Pavilion hospital, but it has to be remembered that many of the more seriously wounded did not survive the agonising journey to England.

Blighty Brighton



World War One

Prisoners of War

An added attraction during the war was the arrival of German prisoners, and we felt very daring watching them working on the land. They wore grey uniforms and round caps with a red band and were chained together. There were several guards around so we were quite safe!

Marjory Batchelor - *A Life Behind Bars*

World War One was in progress when we moved, and prisoners would walk through on their way back to Lewes, via London Road Station, about a dozen of them with two warders, each one carrying a small cloth tied bundle in his hand.

Daisy Noakes - *The Town Beehive*

In this High Street I have seen prisoners hand-cuffed to warders being transferred after their sentence carrying pathetic little bundles containing their belongings.

George Noakes - *To be a Farmer's Boy*

When older men were being mobilised in the first world war, younger children could leave school to do farm work. There were prisoners of war working on our farm. Two were billeted with us. I got on fine with them.

George Noakes - *To be a Farmer's Boy*