



## LOCAL EMOTIONS RUNNING HIGH IN WORLD WAR ONE

Understandably in wartime, strong feelings were held about those against whom war was being waged. The population was in little doubt that Germany was entirely to blame for the War and guilty of atrocities. New forms of warfare would cause outrage. And there was inevitably anger and fear directed towards 'aliens' living in the country.

A piece of wood displayed beside this panel was found in 'Doggets', a house in Dormansland, during renovation. It is dated November 1915 and states "Gott Strafe [punish] Germany. Zeppelings [sic] are Buggers." This sentiment appears to have been recorded, author unknown, shortly after the appearance on 13th/14th October 1915 of a Zeppelin heading for London. (One of a group of five which set out to bomb London) It passed by the Colony, Dormans Station, Felcourt and Newchapel, prompting this heartfelt response.

Another property in Dormansland, shows the lengths some would go to record for posterity their feelings. It has weathervane but with the traditional N, S, E, W directions replaced with G, D, T, Q standing for God Damn The Qaiser [sic]. It is still there.

Again in 1915, we read that Reigate Town Council refused a licence to British Petroleum to store petroleum at Redhill on the interesting grounds that it was a German concern. The licence would not be granted until power had been given under the Trading with Enemy Amendment Act to prevent profits being paid to German shareholders.

As we know, there was concern about men who were thought to be dodging the action at the front. On 21 December 1916, a letter in the Observer from "Fair Play" reads:

"As a frequent visitor to Dormansland and district I notice with no small amount of surprise what I understand to be the only fit single man in the village... and upon making inquiries I find he is totally exempted...

Now I don't blame him if he feels he doesn't want to fight but I can't forget the pre-War days when he was very much to the front, not the trenches but on the election platform holding up Germany as the ideal which England should follow. I think he would be far better wearing khaki and fighting against our common enemy as well as he fought those bloodless battles on the political platform."

Whether the two are in any way connected, we do not know but here is a letter published on 12 May 1917:

“A correspondent writes suggesting that the individual who is posting round white feathers to certain people should make sure of the facts of each case before doing so. One particular recipient is quite willing to join the Army but owing to heart trouble has only been passed C3 and the Military will, at present, have nothing to do with him.”

In Lingfield the strength of emotion manifested itself as late in the war as July 1918 when a meeting was planned to discuss "The Alien Peril". The Observer reported:

"Local people are determined not to rest until they have aroused the Government to strong action in reference to the uninterned alien. Some well known speakers are expected to visit the village this Saturday evening and address a public meeting to be held in the open air near the pond at 8pm. There are many who still view with concern the continuance of German penetration and who think that no step too drastic can possibly be taken to eradicate the influence of the detestable Hun wherever it is known to exist. A pretty strong resolution is likely to be submitted to the meeting."

The story is carried without explanation of the source of these concerns or evidence for them. The blood-curdling language sits oddly, though, with the news that only a "pretty strong resolution" is to be put forward.

Even after the close of the War, strong feelings were being expressed, in language that, today, many of us would find uncomfortable. In June and July 1919, Mr Clark, of the White Cottage, Lingfield, writes to the Observer to say:

"...having business relations with a nation is a different thing to admitting members of that nation to friendship...the race that has caused such utter devastation and has committed untold brutalities.... I contend that we do not want the friendship of members of this impossible race.

"I leave to Mr Campling all the friendship of such a race as, personally, I want none of it until they show that they are ashamed of themselves and that the punishment inflicted by the Allies has been fully deserved by them."

In the ferocity of these sentiments we might see reflected the desire to humiliate Germany that has been argued to have created the basis for Hitler to develop his popular support in later years.

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Sources:  
East Grinstead Observer archives  
Shelagh Gray

