



LINGFIELD EMERGENCY COMMITTEE 1914 - 1919

Emergency Committees formed a link between Government and the local population. Directives and edicts were sent to them, discussed, local people informed and appropriate action taken. They dealt with matters regarding food supplies, economy, the supply of and saving of fuel, food rationing etc. Various sub-committees also provided support in the community, raised funds, provided entertainment, gave care and advice to the bereaved, gave temporary financial support where bureaucratic delay could cause hardship and ensured the care of a serviceman's family. A sub-committee dealt with recruitment until conscription started.

The following appeared in the Surrey Mirror – Friday, 21st August, 1914:-

“At a meeting summoned by the Lingfield Territorial Recruiting Committee on the 14th instant a large Emergency Committee was proposed, numbering about 100 Persons. All the chief residents, farmers and tradesmen, and also many members of the working class in the district, were invited to serve. The district consists of Lingfield, Dormansland, Horne, Crowhurst and part of Felbridge. This representative Committee met on Friday, the 14th instant at 8.30 p.m. at the Lingfield Institute, under the chairmanship of Mr P.de Clermont, and unanimously appointed an Executive Committee to deal with recruiting, relief, food supply, hospitals and any other urgent matters arising out of the war crisis. The Committee consists of the following: Mr P de Clermont (chairman), Colonel W. St Clair, Sir Lewis Dibdin, M. H. H. Koenig, Mr E Stanford, Mr Dives, Mr C. Edwards and Mr Weston (Hon. Secretary).”

The above announcement was the beginning.

Fortunately the Surrey History Centre holds various papers (lists of members, accounts etc.) and also the Minute Book. Unfortunately all the correspondence is missing which means we know of letters the Secretary was asked to write, when replies were received and when appropriate action was taken but in most cases there is no indication of subject matter.

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There was a problem at the start. It is clear that in many cases villagers felt the Committee members were interfering and were disinclined to co-operate but gradually everything seems to settle down. A great demand was made on members' time. More people were added to the various sub-committees and obviously during the period until closure in 1919 there were various retirements as well.

We have some background details for some of the members

The Dibdins lived at Nobles, Dormansland; **H. H. Koenig** at Ardenrun Place, Crowhurst; **Thomas Edwin Dives** at Berkeley Cottage, Church Approach; **Dr Neville Henry Austin** at Langston, Town Hill; the **St Clairs** at The Beacon, Dormansland.

Peter de Clermont was involved in local politics representing the Lingfield Division, succeeding **Captain Spender Clay** in 1913. He was in turn succeeded by **Captain Jederre Fisher** in 1914.

One of the most interesting members was **Miss Dorothy Oakley** who lived at Glebe Cottage, Vicarage Road, Lingfield. She was Chairman of the Hospital and Convalescence sub-committee and in January 1915 resigned. She gave up a comfortable life to go as a VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) to nurse in the horrors of Serbia.

Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Quin had served in the Indian Army and was a member of the Recruiting Committee, and a very successful one.

The following was printed in the Surrey Mirror on the 23rd August, 1915:

“The Roll of Honour this week by the Committee for the Lingfield and Dormansland area is a noble one. The response made by that part of the country to the call for men is one of which all may be proud. And I am sure there are many other places which can show an equally excellent record. The columns of the Surrey Mirror have from week to week proved that the spirit of patriotism is alive in our midst. I congratulate the Lingfield and Dormansland area on what has been accomplished for King and Country.”

Thomas Quin was also in command of the Lingfield Outpost of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Croydon, Surrey Voluntary Training Corps.

“In April 1915 at the request of the Lord Lieutenant, General Sir Josceline Wodehouse GCB became the overall Commander of the Surrey Corps. In communication with the Headquarters of the Central Association Volunteer Training Corps his duties were to visit the various Headquarters to satisfy himself on the following:

That the War Office orders in regard to the enlistment age are carried out.

That the War Office instructions in regard to enrolling are not contravened.

That suitable persons are put forward for the position of officer for the sanction of the Lord Lieutenant.

That suitable provision is made for the drilling and training of Battalions.

That the financial position of the Corps is on a satisfactory basis.

That the organisation of the Corps is being carried out in accordance with the instructions issued by the Lord Lieutenant.”

There also appeared in the Surrey Mirror weekly notices such as this one:

“Monday 18th. NCO's Technical Instruction Class at 8 pm. by Officer Commanding

Tuesday 19th. Parade for Drill at 8.30

Friday 22nd Parade for Drill at 8.30

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Section Commander Corporal H.H. Konig [without the “e” – the name is shown with either spelling] will provide orderlies for the week.

Resignations and Discharges – Pte F. Sugden has joined the Regular Forces.”

Then there is a notice about a concert being given to raise funds.

The training corps was a type of local Militia – something like the Home Guard. Some members of the Emergency Committee resigned to join the army. Peter de Clermont became the senior driving instructor for the ASC, Thomas Quin became a staff officer and a St Clair went to work at the War Office.

Reading through the Minutes (not always an easy task, some of the handwriting is difficult) it is interesting to see the range of subjects with which the Committee dealt.

The following give some idea of the range of problems.

Ensuring men who had been rejected for military service had a certificate.

Instructions from the County Council re checking local building trade’s conditions of employment.

Entertainment for Soldiers.

Demonstrations of war cooking by the Pudding Ladies (this resulted in a demand for classes)

Teas for wives and mothers of serving men.

Various slide shows on various subjects – The Reason for the War, the Necessity of Enlisting, The Need for Economy etc.

Report from the Agricultural Committee regarding potato spraying and slides demonstrating spray methods for combating diseases.

Decision as to whether the Committee should become involved in War Savings.

Belgian Refugees (see separate Fact Sheet)

The Committee discussed the Racecourse and regretted that racing should continue through the War but decided there was no action they could take.

In 1916 a circular had been received from the War Agricultural Service. As a result a sub-committee was formed to test the practicality of women’s work.

Sparrow Club. A letter was received from County War Agricultural Committee enclosing a circular from the Board of Trade stating that sparrows must be killed because they were eating the corn. It was decided to hand the work to the Scouts at the rate of 2d per dozen sparrows, with the Scouts reporting progress regularly. They set traps but unfortunately other small birds were also caught.

The following appeared in the Surrey Mirror of Friday, 3rd December, 1915:

“LINGFIELD. A PLEASING CEREMONY At a meeting of the Lingfield Recruiting Committee held at the Drill Hall on Wednesday evening, Mr Cobham proposed a vote of thanks to the Chairman, Sir Lewis Dibdin, and the secretary, Miss Lang. Mr Cobham remarked that before the war it was said that England had become decadent and was given up to pleasure, fashion and amusement, but the war had proved that at no period in the history of the nation had the people shown more patriotism and national spirit. From our wonderful voluntary Army with its fine spirit and courage, down through the Red Cross nurses to the ordinary citizen, the same patriotism and national spirit had been displayed

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and the traditions of the country had been well sustained. In their little corner of Lingfield, the same patriotism and national spirit had been shown by the Recruiting Committee and the recruiting canvassers who had responded to the call made upon them for their services with the greatest zeal and energy.

Mr Cobham then moved that a vote of thanks be given to Sir Lewis Dibdin for the courteous and energetic manner he had displayed throughout and also to Miss Lang for the able assistance she had rendered to the Chairman in the discharge of his duties. The resolution was seconded by Mr Konig and carried unanimously.”

When the Emergency Committee was wound down in 1919 a lot of people must have found they had time on their hands. For a couple of years things would be grim but hopefully they did find time to return to all that pleasure and amusement before having to start being grim again! It does seem a bit puritanical to associate pleasure and amusement with decadence. Makes one think of Sir Toby Belch speaking to Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* – *Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?*

As a matter of interest here are some more names of local people who served on the Committee:

Mr E.G Stanford, Mr E.T. Dean (Treasurer), Mr W. Abell, Rev. W.M. Arnold
Miss Austin, Major Ballantine, Rev. W.R.A Brown, Gen. Sir E.F. Chapman,
Mrs de Clermont, Miss M. Dibdin, Deaconess Ellen, Mr & Mrs Evan Evans
Lady Foote, Mr & Mrs Fowler, Messrs Gow, Gould & Groves, Rev. A.P. Gutch
Miss Hall, Mr H.J. Hardy, Miss Head, Rev. F. Joseph, Mr D. Longley, Misses
Mackinnon and Mansel, Col. A. Margary, Hon. Mark Napier, Mr A.E. Potter,
Rev. W. Robinson, Mrs Sturdy, Messrs P. Stone, R..J. Turner and T. Williams,
Miss Wilson, Mr. C. Wordsworth, Mrs R.G. Munn, Mrs R.A. Morshead

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Sources

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