

Title: The Great War – small snippets from the home front

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Summary: This was my task go and look at local newspapers and see if you can find anything in them that might refer to military activity in the Secrets of the High Woods area during the Great War. Ok. So I was to be both sleuth and spy. I had never been either before. Archaeology and local historical research is a bit like detective work. You search and search, amassing details, finding a few little clues that might lead to something bigger. It's painstaking work. My successful snippets were certainly on the small side. But maybe, when put alongside other bits of information, such as the LiDAR imagery and other documentary sources from the archives, a clearer and bigger picture of a place in time might be revealed. Like I said. Exciting.

This article is published with the kind permission of the author. This article is the work and views of the author from research undertaken in the Record Offices by volunteers of the Secrets of the High Woods project. South Downs National Park Authority is very grateful to the volunteers for their work but these are not necessarily the views of the Authority.

The Great War – small snippets from the home front.

This was my task go and look at local newspapers and see if you can find anything in them that might refer to military activity in the Secrets of the High Woods area during the Great War. Ok. So I was to be both sleuth and spy. I had never been either before. Exciting.

In some of the newspapers I found articles relating to troop movements in the Goodwood area. One such was described in the Bognor Observer (15 July 1914), detailing the 1st Infantry Brigade from Aldershot spending time under canvas in Goodwood Park. Can you recognise tent positions in archaeology? I was doubtful. Not unless they had very big tent pegs. Of course they must have dug latrine pits. Some lucky archaeologists might be able to detect them.

The Brigade consisted of a battalion each of Coldstream Guards, Royal Munster Fusiliers, Black Watch and Scots Guards, together with the 116th and 117th Batteries of the Royal Field Artillery and the 15th Hussars. The Black Watch and Fusiliers were accompanied by brass bands, whereas the Highlanders and Scots Guards had their bagpipes and drums. It must have been quite musical at times. Well, noisy at least.

The total number of men in camp was about 3000. When the weather was unfavourable they returned to camp early. However, when it was sunny the men participated in tactical exercises in the neighbourhood of Lavant and Singleton. Would these exercises involve earth-moving? Did they dig zig-zag defensive trenches common on the Western Front? I? I thought I was on to something. And my new discovery told me that I was.

According to the Worthing Gazette (24-03-1915) the Downs were an excellent training ground for the new army. Soldiers were seen marching and manoeuvring, engaging in flag signalling, AND practising trench digging. Success! A small one perhaps, but success nevertheless. Early trenches were little more than foxholes or ditches intended to provide a measure of protection during short battles. The first major trench lines were completed in November 1914. Trenches were dug in a zig-zag pattern so that if an enemy entered the trench he could not fire straight down the line.

To help the war effort, a small workshop at West Dean was set up. The workshop was to take advantage of the existing electrical and other machinery at the West Dean House to manufacture small shell cases, as recorded by the West Sussex Gazette (2-12-1915). Perhaps elements of that could have survived? It was a long shot.

Another article in the Littlehampton Observer (7-7-1915) detailed a 'Sussex Volunteers' Field Day'. During the exercises dispatch riders had to cross areas held by opposing units (Slindon down to the sea) to deliver a message. This involved plenty of semaphore signalling from various points on the Downs. I was not an expert on semaphore signalling but I knew it involved waving two flags about in certain fixed positions to convey messages. It must have been very tiring on the arms. However, I doubted whether it would leave any archaeological trace.

In the Chichester Observer (4 October 1916) there is mention of the descent of two balloons – one in Chichester and the other near East Dean village. They were manned by the Royal Flying Corps and the journey from London had been made for test purposes. An aeroplane had also come down in Yarbrook, Lavant, and the pilot encountering a misty atmosphere. Now an aeroplane could leave some archaeological record, I knew that for a fact. But it depended on the severity of the crash. Some aircraft came down so heavily that they buried themselves, and their poor pilots, in their own crater.

The Worthing Gazette (2 May 1917) noted that the Sussex woodlands were being used to repair the damages of war. The county's trees were being felled to provide trench props, railway sleepers and other elements of construction work. Now this could leave some trace on the ground for our enthusiastic ground-truthing volunteers to find. An expert in forestry could tell us what buildings and equipment might have been required. I imagine quite a lot. All that sawing, cutting, splitting, stripping and hauling must have left some traces, surely? If my hunch proved correct we might recognise their vestiges on the ground through LiDAR.

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THE OBSERVER AND WEST SUSSEX RECORDER. WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12, 1914.

gates. Afterwards witness went into
house and saw defendant come into
l with a crowd, and put his arm through
dow from the outside. The glass was
d All over the bin and the floor.
examined: He did not see Mr. Harris-
ie man. There were about half-a-dozen
ut when the window was smashed. He
ot swear it was the defendant's hand
ke the window.
amined: He recognised defendant from

l Peachey, an errand boy, said he heard
bance and came to the passage door
ere he could see Napper near the win-
le heard a smash at the same time, and
pper came away. Defendant alone was
window. His hand was bleeding and
"Look what the—has done, he has
me through the window."
examined: He did not actually see
break the window.
ew pleaded that there was no evidence
that the defendant broke the window.
at was proved, this being a criminal case,
is nothing for him to answer.
uckwell replied, and the Bench decided
re was a case to answer.
er, giving evidence on his own behalf,
worked quite 20 hours from Friday to
y. He was paid at six o'clock for that,
plained it was hardly sufficient. When
ris returned he asked for 3s. extra,
or said "Come into the yard and I will
" He then struck him on the head,
defendant), sprawling on to the ground,
his hand into the window. Harris
ow you are paid. You have got your
he blood was trickling down on to the
and afterwards when he went into the
r blood ran all over the floor.
Buckwell: He was not the worse for
nd his memory was clear, yet he could
ember seeing the policeman or seeing



Photo by Donald Massey.

Commandeering Horses at Bognor for the War.

The Countess of March is
the Association for West
Treasurer and Hon. Secretary
of Ruahine, Hambrook. Th
the Divisions are:—
Arundel—Mrs. C. Fletcher,
del.
Bognor—The Viscountess
Lodge, Bognor.
Chichester—Mrs. Weller-Pel
Chichester.
Horsham—Mr. Clifton Br
Faygate, Horsham.
Midhurst—Mrs. Anthony H
ing, Fernhurst, Midhurst.
Petworth—Mrs. Osborn B
House, Billingshurst.
Stevington—Hon. Mrs. Fo
Morleys, Henfield, Sussex.
Worthing—Mrs. C. W. P
Liverpool Gardens, Worthing

Over 100 Aliens Registered in
Upwards of 100 aliens had c
order by registering their nam
with the police at Chichester
day), and additional names we
every hour.

The Red Cross Society.
The Chichester Division of
Society, of which Miss Hannah
ant, has been actively engaged
week in making preparations f
the call may come.
The Chichester Aid Society,
in conjunction with the Red
already doing a most useful
supervision of the Mayoress
as Hon. Secretary.
All materials for Red Cross
ages, etc., can be obtained fr
at "Ivy Bank," St. John's
articles are to be sent to Mrs.

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

NO MORE PANIC, PLEASE!

The panic of the first week of war is over, and
let us hope it will not return. At Chichester

THE WAR.

Continued from Page 3.

RELIEF FUND QUESTION AT

A local newspaper records the commandeering of horses in Bognor at the outbreak of WW1.