

HAYLING ISLAND

Life and Times 1914-1919

Researched and Written by Members of
Hayling Island University of the Third Age

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Foreword

The First World War had a profound effect on virtually every aspect of British Life. The appalling losses suffered on the battlefield were felt by almost every community, large and small, throughout the land, where people's lives were changed and, in many cases, devastated. The small community of Hayling Island with its population of just over 2,500 people was no exception. A surprising number of its young men had already joined up before the war had started, believing that their prospects in the Army and Navy were better than staying at home to work on the land or trying to make a living from the sea, which were about the only options available to them at that time. Many followed after the war had started, but none could have anticipated the horrors that they would encounter once it had got underway

The First World War was the first of the so-called, modern wars to take place in the 20th Century in which advances in weapon technology has far outstripped improvements in strategy, tactics and military equipment. This meant that the soldier and sailor were left with little protection on the battlefield. It was a case of men being pitted against bullet and shell and man, inevitably, came off second best.

Of all those men from Hayling Island who took part in this war, no less than one hundred and four failed to survive, a high proportion for such a small community. This excellent book names each one of them and also explains the circumstances in which they fell, whether in France, Gallipoli or at sea. In addition it tells us where they came from in Hayling Island, who their families were and where and what their occupations were before they left. It therefore enables us to identify with each one of them in a much more intimate way than has been possible until now.

The book also gives us an intriguing insight into what was going on in Hayling Island during these troubled times, and how the people who lived there coped with the privations and difficulties that were forced upon them as a consequence of the war. We hear about the school, the police, the coast guard, the voluntary training corps, the musketry school and other organizations that existed at that time, and how they set about raising funds in support of the war effort. All this is an excellent example of community spirit which, happily, still exists today.

There is no doubt that this book provides us with a very comprehensive, accurate and interesting record of a most significant chapter in the Island's history. It also ensures that all those men who gave their lives will never be forgotten, which is entirely appropriate at this time when the whole nation is commemorating the outbreak of this terrible conflict.

I want to congratulate all those who have contributed to this splendid book, for their diligent and accurate research, and for succeeding in bringing this tragic story to our attention in such an interesting way. They are all members of the Hayling Island University of the Third Age and they can all feel proud of producing something which will have a lasting value.

Colonel Keith Wilkins, OBE
Royal Marines

Early 20th Century Hayling Island

The censuses for 1911 and 1921 give a total population of 2,309 and 2,722 respectively. The Island contains 7,531 acres in size with a sea frontage of four and a half miles. The beaches were sandy and remarkably clear of excess seaweed. The Island was predominately made up of tree clad ditch lined lanes, woodland areas, apple orchards and fields of mixed farming. There are no obvious rivers; however there are underground streams that brought water from the south downs resulting in many springs, pools and small lakes. The majority of the properties had natural wells 4-6 feet from their back door and enough land to feed a family. Families made themselves as self-sufficient as possible; many had a pig and chickens as well as a productive vegetable patch, fruit bushes, plum and apple trees. The climate being balmy with a temperate climate meant that farm crops could be harvested in advance of the mainland.

The Island was divided into North and south Hayling. The north included Northney, Stoke and Tye. South Hayling included East Stoke, Fleet, Gable End, Mengham and West Town. In 1914 the north was made up of small family run farms and generally the population was economically very poor. The south was where the large mansions were built for the wealthy folk who had homes in London as well as on Hayling Island. The ladies took a great interest in the church and the school; it is said that they vied with the farmers, who were keen to keep their family members as cheap labour, whilst the gentry were always on the lookout for a strong, bright child that they could train and employ for domestic service. In 1911 North Hayling was predominately a farming community, with 232 male and 233 females residing in 68 properties; this averaged out with family sizes of six or seven per household.

South Hayling was more of a mixed population of farms, the brick works, shops and luxury residences; there were 785 males and 1059 females residing in 406 properties. This averaged out at approximately four to five persons per family. However this average is distorted as there were 38 female and 15 males residing at St. Andrews home for crippled children on the sea front. The south of the Island was where private schools were established, a police orphanage in Rails Lane, Meath House, Convalescent Home for ladies and Meath Cottages for epileptics. These institutional establishments could account for the number of

females in the ward. Indeed 26% of households had no males at the time of the 1911 census.

The census states that the increase in the population for 1921 is attributed mainly to the proximity of Portsmouth and Southsea and to Hayling's development as a seaside resort.

Havant Borough Council produced a book in 1911 advertising the virtues and delights of Hayling as a place to spend a long weekend or a week's holiday.

Hayling Island is a pleasant Island approached by a toll bridge about a mile and a half to the south of Havant. The Island is flat and about five miles long and four miles in breadth. It is divided into two parishes, North and South Hayling. — — South Hayling is a pleasant watering place, with a splendid sandy beach five miles long, commanding an uninterrupted view of the Isle of Wight and Spit Head. A common extends along the whole length of the south shore, just above the beach. It is extremely popular as a health resort. It is connected to the mainland by a railway worked by the London Brighton and South Coast Railway Company, joining the main line station at Havant; there is a convenient service connecting with all the fast trains. A Motor Ferry Boat runs from Sinah Point to Eastney, thus forming a short way to Southsea and Portsmouth.

There are several shops and two hotels and excellent accommodation for visitors. There is a first class eighteen-hole golf course within a few minutes' walk of the station, where many distinguished players, including Mr. Balfour, have played.

The Island makes a most convenient spot for the headquarters of yachting or fishing holiday. At the east end is Mengham or Cockle Rythe, running into Chichester harbour, affording a safe and comfortable anchorage for yachts of medium tonnage. There is splendid fishing within a mile of this creek, lasting through the summer up till the middle of November. At the west end of the Island will be found Sinah Creek, also affording shelter for small yachts, while those of larger tonnage can lay in perfect safety inside Langstone Harbour. There is also splendid bass fishing near here; good mackerel and other fishing can also be had from boats off the beach in front of the Royal Hotel.

At the start of the twentieth century Hayling was developing as an ideal holiday location, the country was seeing the emergence of the new middle classes who could afford a short holiday exploring the English coastline. Workers in general were granted the right to a week's paid holiday leave, the factory workers in the north of England were granted 15 days holiday a year including bank holidays. The factories closed down for one week of the year in the summer and the workers made for the coast and the country to enjoy fresh clean air away from the smoke and grime around their places of work. The railway network enabled folk to travel

longer distances than those taken by the previous generation. Hayling offered a balance of country lanes and seaside beaches to attract the visitor.

The census for North Hayling tells us there was a blacksmiths forge, a shop, a shoe maker, a laundry, a post office, a tramcar space, Hayling Halt station as well as st. Peter's Church, that supported the rural north of the Island. south Hayling was more populated with easy access for residents from the north so here we see in south stoke the two public houses, The Yew Tree and The Maypole. Travelling south we pass the Water Pumping station, st. Peter's Institute, and the Railway Hotel before we reach the school at Gable Head and Mengham where there was a boot maker, 16 shops, a Blacksmith forge, st. Mary's Church, Elm Road Chapel and the Congregational Church. There was a ferry to take visitors to Eastney and a long walk to Southsea as remembered by Marjorie Green.

Along the seafront there was The Grand Hotel which used to be the home of the Sandeman's family of port wine fame. The Library, the Bath House and Twine the butchers' shop was opposite the Royal Hotel Tap House.

In West Town there was The West Town Hotel, The station Hotel, shops, stables and smithy, a Post Office, the Telephone Exchange, the Barley Mow pub, as well as the Gas Works. The public house in Mengham was The Rose in June. The Olive Leaf and the Life Boat Inn were to be found at East stoke along with a post office and general store. At the far west of the Island was The Ferry Boat Inn with a waiting room and a Tram-car rest.

There was some street lighting in south Hayling. Gas light would have given a soft glow to the lanes enabling the population to travel to meetings or the local pub. The last lamp lighter was Mr Mansell. Lamplighters were considered to be very trustworthy men and often acted as nightwatchmen.

There was one doctor, dr May, and a nurse to care for the community. The Hants County Nursing Association set up a scheme, in 1913, to help mothers with the expense if a doctor was needed during their confinement. Women could insure themselves for 2 shillings (10p), this to be paid 4 months before the confinement. If the midwife required a doctor during the confinement the Hampshire Nursing Association would pay the fee up to one guinea (£1.05p).

This bucolic Island was, however, marred by the evidence of letters published in

the Hampshire Telegraph in September and October 1914 when Major S. A. Cooke, a newcomer to Hayling, brought the reader's attention to the sanitary shortcomings of the Island. *"An early morning bicycle ride round many of the charming roads and lanes will nasally reveal the fact that there is something wrong in more quarters than one."* The problem the Major was referring to was the fact that each cottager had dug his own cesspit, often not watertight and too small for a large family's needs. These cesspits were pumped out at irregular intervals and carted in an evil smelling cart along public roads to be dumped on the nearby mudflats at the top of West Lane. There was only one sanitary carter on the Island. The last cesspit cart emptier was Mr Banes, who emptied the contents of his cart on his land in West Lane. Thus if any epidemic broke out the germs could easily spread. Noel Pycroft recalls proper sanitary drainage being brought to the Island in 1924. The demands on the water supply and the sanitation during the war years was further stretched with the increase in population at the Voluntary Aid detachment Hospital, the school of Musketry and the return of women and their children, originally from Hayling, to their kin folk when their husbands went to the front.

Religion played an important role in the rhythm of people's lives. The Church magazine for St. Mary's and St. Peter's revealed that the attendance at church services at the 2 main churches plus services held at St. Peter's Institute and Meath House totalled more than 400 each week. To this number can be added worshippers at The Congregational chapels at Mengham and Stoke, the members at Elm Road Evangelical church and The Plymouth Brethren. The Roman Catholics must have travelled to Havant for their worship. In May 1914 the local paper reported on plans to convert the old school in Manor Road into a Roman Catholic Chapel. The Plymouth Brethren, who formally met in the old school moved out and had their meetings at Mrs King's home, Faringdon House, whilst they built a new hut in Higworth Lane. Thus it can be concluded more than 50% of the population attended some form of worship each week. The young people had Sunday schools, Band of Hope outings, The Kings Messengers movement, and the scouts. At school there was an emphasis on examining the children's Bible knowledge, guiding them as God fearing individuals, learning the virtue of kindness to their fellow man.

Employment on Hayling Island, included farming, fishing, brickmaking, and a wide variety of artisans and shop keepers. Holiday tourism was emerging during the summer months.

The community kept them-selves entertained at clubs for cricket, football, tennis, golf, and shooting. There was also a Choral society, a ladies sewing group and the Mother's Union. Numerous concerts, lantern slide talks, rummage sales and whist drives were held in the church halls and the Victoria Hall. There were, exercise classes, drill practice and amateur entertainments held at The Victoria Hall along with silent films. The Gentlemen's Club had regular speakers who spoke on the issues of the day. Thus we have a picture of a close community busy with day-to-day life, striving to keep their families clean and fed as well as being well entertained outside the home.

References

Hampshire Telegraph and Post

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