

Wareham in the First World War 1914-1918

No 2 Wareham Town



Royal Engineers and the pontoon bridge they built over the River Frome as a training exercise.

With so many soldiers based at the camp, the town had to provide facilities for them when they were off duty. The pubs did a roaring trade! There were problems with drunkenness, so pub closing time was set at 9pm. Three sets of public toilets were built, including one in Howard's Lane, a site still in use.

Church halls became reading and writing rooms, and the Corn Exchange became a post office. The Oddfellows Hall (now The Rex Cinema) became a club for non-commissioned officers. Some Wareham residents accommodated servicemen in their homes. It was reported in 1915 that there was a rise in pregnancies among unmarried women who lived near army camps!



A "Cyclists' Company" was formed in 1915, from 280 men from various regiments at Wareham Camp. They are seen here in West Street.



A Mark V tank on display at West Walls, possibly at a Peace Celebration in 1919.



A military funeral procession passing the Black Bear Hotel in South Street. The deceased was sergeant Charles Stevens of the 10th West Yorkshire regiment who died on 7 March 1915.



AF Joy survived... he was a corporal in the Dorset Regiment and in 1926 established the men's outfitters in North Street which is still trading today.



Northover's bakery had a contract to supply Wareham Camp with bread. When troops left unexpectedly on 2nd August 1914, Northover offered 1,000 loaves, free, to the people of Wareham. His van is seen here outside the Corn Exchange.



A column of soldiers marching in West Street.



Sidney Allingham died.... He was a private in the Devonshire Regiment. He was from Ridge. He died at the front in France in 1918, aged 18.

Many of the town's young men went off to fight, and 72 of them died. They are commemorated on the war memorial near St Martin's Church. Those who did return had a broader outlook on life than when they left, as a result of their experiences and having mixed with men from other parts of the country, and, indeed, the world. The Wareham people in general were more outward-looking as a result of the war, having had men from far and wide on their doorstep, at Wareham Camp.

The war provided new employment opportunities for women. Women filled many of the jobs left vacant by men who had joined the army. There was also a major new employer, created as a direct result of the war, the Royal Naval Cordite Factory at Holton Heath.

Servicemen who died while based at Wareham Camp, or who died of war wounds in the hospital, were buried in the churchyard of Lady St Mary Church in Wareham. A few died as a result of accidents while off duty; for example, an Australian who died of head injuries after falling down West Walls while returning to the camp at night. Others died after the war was over, during the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918-19. The cemetery contains 49 graves from the First World War, and 27 from the Second.



Graves of servicemen who died at Wareham Camp during the war, in the churchyard of Lady St Mary Church. (photo: Ben Buxton)