

# SWAFFHAM IN THE GREAT WAR



THE TOWN



# Overview

The years leading up to World War 1 had been difficult. Many of the men were labourers either on the roads, farms or around the town.

It is noticeable from the records that so many of the young men born around the 1880s to 1900s were in the town in 1901 and then disappeared to other places before 1911. Even those who stayed until enlisting often didn't return when they were demobbed.

Money was short, food was basic, transport was by bike, horse, train or on foot.

Housing in many cases was either sparse or of poor quality.

Labour was short on the fields and a hotly discussed issue over the war years was whether boys over 13 should stay at school or work on the land. Some boys joined the navy at age 12 but most of the young lads became errand boys for grocers' businesses when they left school.

The population of Swaffham was over 3000 in 1911 and the number of men serving in the war runs at around 600, so most families would have had a close relative in the military forces. There were families who lost several sons; those whose sons remained unscathed in World War I and then fell in World War II. Families where fathers and sons enlisted; those whose sons and husbands returned wounded. Very often the women were left to manage the businesses their husbands left or had been compelled to go to war. There are many instances of exemption appeals, many of which were disallowed.

The vicar, Rev Keeling Scott, said that the population declined from 3350 to 2913 and that of the 600 people he had confirmed here [over 20 years] only 184 still here.

Three women are recorded on the Roll of Honour – all serving in one of the medical associations. All served abroad and all returned safely.

The town was very busy during the war. VADs provided medical care for wounded soldiers in the town, the scouts, the Voluntary Training Corps, flag days, concerts, lectures, dances – always something to collect funds for, and many, many committees.

And the Petty Court sessions reports show some interesting cases of theft, marital and other relations, captured prisoners of war, capture of absent soldiers and – most of all – vehicle light crime.



# Recruiting

Now that the harvest has been finished a large number of men are joining the army and it is said that all the eligible men from two neighbouring villages have joined and no young men are left. *Lynn News 4 Sept 1914*

The Assembly Rooms were packed on the occasion of a patriotic meeting in support of Lord Kitchener's appeal, chaired by Mr Lee Warner. The MP, Sir Richard Winfrey, said that the country was looking to East Anglia, which in the past had produced the ironsides and Lord Nelson. The vicar of Swaffham said that Col Thomas and 82% of the Territorials had volunteered for foreign service and 90% of the Yeomanry had also volunteered.

*Lynn News 11 Sept 1914*

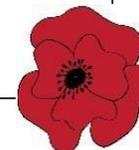
Speaking at Watton, Sir Richard Winfrey, MP gave the numbers of recruited men.

	population	recruitment
...		
Thetford	4770	381
Swaffham	3240	218
Downham Market	2490	180
Watton	1400	55

Recruitment was making a great drain on the labour required for working on the land. Sir Richard knew that many farmers had parted with their men with very mixed feelings, and they were wondering what they were going to do for labour during the next few months. But all must be prepared to make sacrifices and so he appealed to his farmer friends to do so, for between now and the harvest time some measures must be devised for the population in the towns to help with the gathering of the harvest. *Lynn News. 13 Feb 1915*

**The King's Pledge.** A telegram was sent to His Majesty by the Rev F Keeling Scott and Mr T A Gould. 120 loyal subjects in Swaffham Norfolk who have today taken the King's Pledge.

*Lynn News 19 June 1915*



# Volunteer Training Corps

A meeting was held at the Shirehall to consider forming a Volunteer Training Corps for all men above 38 years and those under that age pronounced unfit or active military service.

Mr T B Matthews presided and it was proposed that the Corps should be under the control of the Emergency Committee.

The men would be used for guarding the railway lines and other work. Badges would be issued by the Government but not arms, ammunition, clothing or financial assistance. It was hoped that a certain amount of arms would be provided by the Emergency Committee.

The proposal was carried and Colonel A W Thomas chosen as commandant. He commented that as a middle-aged Englishman, he wished to be in a legitimate position to be able to at least shoot one German... People should be able to take arms in defence of their country. In Germany boys and old men were being brought forward, and we were not going to be outdone by the Germans (Hear, hear).

The chairman noted that the meeting needed to consider for whom the Corps was responsible—Swaffham town only, the town and surrounding parishes; the whole area of the police division. The vicar, Rev Keeling Scott, proposed that it should be the whole of the police division and this was carried.

Most of those present gave their names in as willing to enrol in the new Corps.

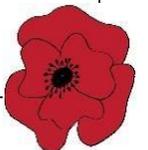
*Lynn News 25 Dec 1914*

By February the troop had 200 members

*Lynn News 27 Feb 1915*

The company paraded in the Antinghams, and new rifles were served out to A and B men. There were 42 on parade with 10 cadets.

*Lynn News 26 May 1917*



# Marching

The first church parade of the Swaffham and District Volunteer Training Corps was attended by 51 members. They gathered at market Hill under the command of Lieut Col Thomas and marched to Sporle. On the outskirts of the parish they were met by 30 members of the Sporle detachment and also the boy scouts with drums and bugles.

*Lynn News 16 Jan 1915*

Members of the Volunteer Training Corps met on the market place under the command of Sergeant Brewster where they were joined by the Red Cross detachment under Commandant F W Cooper. They marched to the toll bar where they were met by members of the Sporle, Necton and Holme Hale Volunteer Training Corps and the Sporle scouts with their drums and bugles. Together they marched to the parish church. Afterwards they marched to the market place where they were inspected by Lieut Col A W Thomas.

*Lynn News 3 April 1915*

The Volunteer Training Corps was inspected by Col Sherringham. The Swaffham detachment met at the Drill Hall and marched to Market Hill where they were joined by the contingents from Narborough, Sporle, Necton and Holme Hale. All marched to the Recreation Ground under the command of Lieut Col Thomas where the inspection took place.

*Lynn News 17 April 1915*

The Swaffham and Narborough detachments marched to Necton Park, joined by Sporle, Necton, Holme Hale and Bradenham detachments ...

*Lynn News 29 May 1915*

By June 1915 the local Corps had become organised into four companies.

A Company	Swaffham	commander:	H F Du Puys
B Company	Dereham		C Pearce
C Company	Wymondham		F A Bainbridge
D Company	Watton		Dr H Mallus

Commander and Adjutant J O Dennis



# The Sporle Scouts and Rev Avann

Baden Powell announced his new scheme for scouts between 16 and 17 in November 1914. The Corps would be ready, should invasion occur, to do whatever was necessary. Scouts were to be trained, generally, as infantry, although there were also cycling divisions.

Scouts were required to drill with real rifles and to learn how to shoot. Some troops were equipped with miniature rifles for target shooting purposes. Links were encouraged with the regular army and no unit could be “recognised” until an inspection had been carried out by a regular officer.

The vicar of Swaffham and local scout master is raising patrols to be trained for war service in shooting, army drill, judging distance, signalling, entrenching, pioneering, scouting and first aid. The conditions are that the candidates must be sixteen years of age, be total abstainers and non-smokers. *Lynn News 13 Nov 1914*

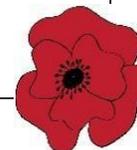
The Sporle scouts and their bugle band were known as the band accompanying the Volunteer Training Corps on their many parades.

First researches indicate that the scoutmaster mentioned above was the vicar of Sporle, Revd Arthur Avann who also appeared to run a small boys' boarding school in Sporle. In 1891 as curate at Cockley Cley he lived in Mangate, Street, Swaffham with his widowed mother and two boarders. By 1893 he was vicar of Sporle, living at the vicarage (1901 census) with a servant and eight boarders. A past pupil of the time remembers 15 boys so there were probably also local pupils. In 1911 there were still 8 boarders between 8 and 14 from the UK and beyond. He setup the first scout group in Sporle in November 1910. He retired as vicar in 1917, although he retained his position as scoutmaster until January 1918 when his successor at Sporle, Rev Vernon Smith, took over. Trade directories of 1933 record him as living at 6 Mangate Street. He died in 1945 aged 91.

Apparently after the setting up of the Swaffham Defence troop in November 2014 he equipped it with brand new Martini .303 rifles with bayonets. The scouts then struck a deal with the Volunteer Training Corps, who were drilling with wooden rifles —for the use of the Swaffham shooting butts in return for the lend of the rifles.

The scouts patrolled the town and villages by night, warned the police of approaching zeppelins and marshalled the public plane spotters at Narborough.

*Many thanks to Sporle History Group for this information*



## Other troops in town 1914

Troops from various regiments were stationed in Swaffham at different times. This resulted in fund raising events concerts, football matches and restriction of licensing hours in the inns. Sometimes soldiers were billeted in the workhouse.

Swaffham was used to troops in the town. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century the yeomanry had welcomed groups from other local troops for parades and exercises and in 1912 a very large manoeuvres was held in Swaffham with troops from several regiments camping on Sporle Road. Unfortunately, the site was washed out after a deluge and soldiers were billeted in the Assembly Rooms and with families until the camp had dried out.

During the past week quarters have been prepared for the troop, and billets have been taken up by the Essex Regiment in the Corn Hall, Assembly Rooms, Workhouse, King's Arms Club Room and a large number have also been billeted in private houses. On Monday evening a concert was given in the vicarage room for the benefit of the troops quartered in the town. Troops which have been training in Swaffham have returned to Costessey. The men during their stay in Swaffham were well received and all round one heard regrets at having to leave. *Lynn News 23 Oct 1914*

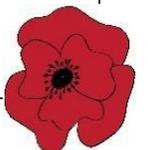
Orders were received that the troops quartered in the town were to return to Drayton to equip for foreign service. At the parade at the market place a stirring little incident happened. The captain, addressing the men, said "I am sure that before we leave Swaffham you would all like to show your appreciation of the kindness of Swaffham people by giving three cheers." The cheers that followed were certainly the very opposite to half-hearted ones. *Lynn News 6 Nov 1914*

Union Workhouse. It was agreed that the Master be authorised to grant facilities for the bathing of troops billeted in the workhouse. There was no such accommodation for those billeted outside. *Lynn News 20 Nov 1914.*

A contingent of the Sherwood Rangers and Notts Hussars arrived during Saturday night and Sunday. Officers were housed in tents in the Antinghams and the men in the main billeted in the Assembly Rooms, Corn Hall, local club rooms and other buildings. Some were in private billets. Men of the Notts Hussars and the Derbyshire Yeomanry also detrained for the camp at Narford. Before the soldiers left for their fresh quarters they were presented with refreshments at Messrs Chamberlayne and Co's warehouse near the station. The Baptist schoolroom has been thrown open to the men for music, refreshments, games and writing and the Grammar School gymnasium is available for them also. *Lynn News 20 June 1915*

Canadian troops were stationed on the Campingland; we would follow them around at the Fair on the Market Place until they gave us pieces of their coconuts. *Extracts from Ash Close, Swaffham, Bert Barnes*

18<sup>th</sup> June a soldiers' camp has been laid out on the Antinghams. (school log books 1915)



# The Red Cross and St.John's Ambulance become the Voluntary Aid Detachment

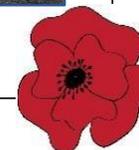
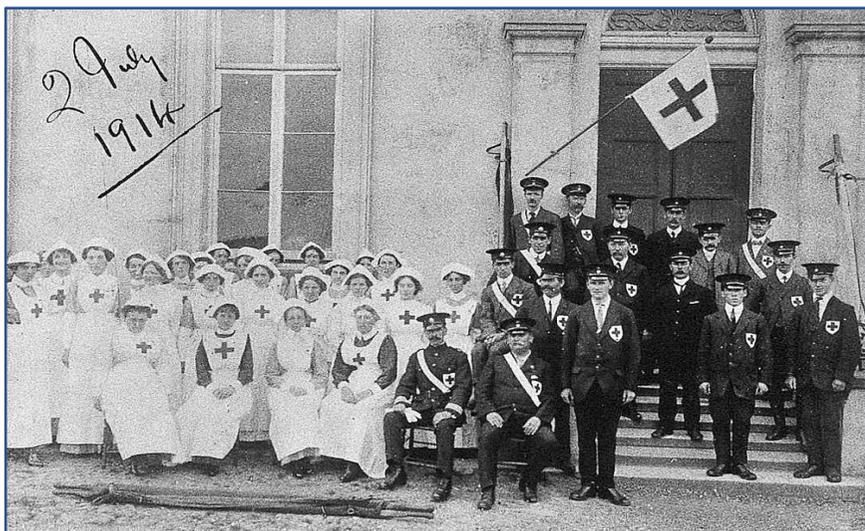
The outbreak of war in 1914 saw St John Ambulance join forces with the Red Cross to form the Joint War Committee to provide medical care for war casualties in hospitals home and abroad.

They supplied food and medical dressings for ambulance trains and provided rest stations at train halts. They also ran small hospitals and convalescent homes. They worked in Field-hospitals all over Europe in exhausting and conditions: "soldiers were lying in their dirty uniforms, straight as they came from the trenches, swarming with lice, all over the floors of the hospitals, on the floors of the hotels, in the shops, out in the streets, lying on the bare boards or a little filthy straw, with no blankets, in the depth of the rigorous Serbian winter...."

The Swaffham Voluntary Aid Detachment was formed during the early Summer of 1914.

25 June 1914. A demonstration was given in the Assembly Rooms on Thursday afternoon by local members. The small room was fitted up as a temporary hospital and about 20 lady nurses under Commandant Mrs Critchely-Martin [of Narborough Hall – see next page] attended to cases brought into the hospital by the men's detachment under the command of Commandant F W Cooper and quartermaster K. Matsell. The men of the Swaffham detachment formed three stretcher squads and rendered first aid to the injured— amongst them patients with severe burns, scalp wounds, ruptured varicose veins, ... steel embedded in an eye, fever and gunshot wounds.

*Lynn News 3 July 1914*



# The VAD continued

In August training continued with nursing and ambulance courses and a series of lectures given by Dr Thornton at the Corn Hall.

Mr Walker stated that the Assembly Rooms would be available as a temporary hospital and that the officers of the Baptist Church would place the schoolroom and classrooms at the disposal of the society if necessary. A committee was formed.

*Lynn News 28 Aug 1914 and Norfolk Chronicle 8 Aug 1914*

The men's detachment received a very good report from the July inspection. "Stretcher-bearer duties and improvisation of stretchers were good, considering the short time the detachment has been formed." The men were keen and smart, zealous and anxious to become efficient.

"This should be the making of a smart detachment".

*Lynn News 30 Oct 1914*

The report of the Red Cross from this inspection was very complimentary. The South Greenhoe division showed considerable knowledge of first aid. Home nursing was very efficient. "Much attention appears to have been paid to this subject and great credit is due to the lady superintendent." The cooks were efficient and keen. Preparations for a temporary hospital had been thoroughly well done. "An efficient hospital was equipped for inspection purposes, and left nothing to be desired."

*Lynn News 13 Nov 1914*

## **Mrs Constance Critchley-Martin.**

The Critchley-Martin family bought Narborough Hall in the late 19th century, rebuilding the estate and enjoying the life of country life of hunting, shooting and fishing, and immersing themselves in community life.

In 1915 Mrs Critchley-Martin was appointed commander of West Bilney Hall home for the wounded but it proved to be too small and in 1916 the patients were moved to Narborough Hall which could offer space for 40 beds. Mrs Martin continued in charge and the ballroom was converted into a hospital. When the hospital closed in June 1918 607 men had spent some time there. She died in 1923.

From the beginning of the war she was very active in the Red Cross and with the Belgian refugees in Swaffham.



# Belgian Refugees in and around Swaffham

Between August and September 1914 over 20,000 men, women and children arrived from Belgium to east coast ports, fleeing the enemy. When Antwerp fell in October 1914 1000 refugees arrived in Lowestoft on one day. The numbers increased until the end of the year and then tailed off as it became more difficult to cross the channel. However, by June 1915 it is estimated that 265,000 refugees had arrived in England. Although most people were sympathetic at first there was little integration and it was commonly felt that the Belgians could do more to help the war effort.

In Swaffham a meeting was convened in the Corn Hall on Tuesday afternoon to consider what steps should be taken to help Belgian refugees. Shingham House had been placed at the disposal of Mrs Critchely Martin by Mrs Fielden. This would accommodate 10 to 12 people and promises of furniture and furniture for the families were wanted, also of food and other necessities. A committee was formed.

*Lynn News 2 Oct 1914*

On Tuesday five Belgian refugees arrived in Swaffham enroute to Shingham House and were met at the station by Mrs Critchley Martin, the vicar, Madame Tatin and others. Other refugees to follow later.

*Lynn News 9 Oct 1914*

In Holme Hale a new cottage was not to be used for Belgian refugees owing to an order prohibiting further refugees coming into the country

*Lynn News 6 Nov 1914*

A request. A bill in a local tradesman's window reads. "The little stranger within our gates. Will any kind friend lend a pram for the new Belgian baby? Kindly communicate with Mrs Page, Bank House, Swaffham". This is the second infant of Belgian nationality for which this kind of appeal has been made.

*Lynn News. 20 June 1915*



# Fundraising

Fund raising of all kinds was always there for both local and national causes. This is just a selection

From noon until evening 30 ladies in relays of 6 took collecting boxes for an hour and a half each and canvassed on behalf of the prince of Wales' Relief Funds. The sum of £17. 1s 9d was collected, £9 15s of which was collected in coppers. *Lynn News 4 Sept 1914*

Women's Liberal Association. In response to Queen Mary's Appeal for comforts for the troops a jumble sale was held in the Baptist schoolroom. Total amount raised was £4 which will be used for the purchase of wool for making socks. *Lynn News. 2 Oct 1914*

A quantity of poultry, sheep, pigs and farm vehicles and produce given by persons living in the town and neighbourhood were sold for the benefit of the Belgian Relief Fund. £58.14s.7d was raised. *Lynn News. 4 Dec 1914*

A fancy dress football match was played on Thursday afternoon 26 November on a field lent by Mr William Quadling. The teams were "Old Crocks" versus "Have Beens". The game resulted in a win for the "Old Crocks" who scored four goals to nil. Profits to go to the Belgian Relief Fund. *Lynn News. 4 Dec 1914*

To assist the collection of eggs for wounded soldiers the children of the Baptist parents were asked to take gifts to the Baptist church. Over 200 eggs have been sent away. *Lynn News 12 June 1915*

A Pound Day in the interest of the Red Cross Hospital at the West Bilney Manor House was held at Swaffham. There were 40 donors of 7lbs of tea; 15lbs of sugar; 4lbs of marmalade; 30 eggs; a bottle of Bovril; quantities of potatoes .... *Lynn News 20 June 1915*

As a result of a dance held at the Assembly Rooms on Wednesday £1 has been forwarded to the fund for Norfolk prisoners in Turkish hands and 10 shillings or recreation rooms for the use of troops. 55 were present. *Lynn News 10 Feb. 1917*

Over three guineas were raised by a lavender sale at Brewery House in aid of the Cottage Hospital funds.

The assembly room of the Grammar School with an appreciative audience for a concert in aid of the RSPCA Fund for Sick and Wounded Horses ... The proceeds amounted to £14.

£2 3s 6d was collected at the Baptist church for the Lord Mayor's Armenian refugees fund *Lynn News 17 Feb 1917*

Mrs Page of Bank House made an appeal for waste paper to assist the local Belgian Fund and as a result during the past month 1 ½ tons has been forwarded to the mills, producing £4.15s. *Lynn News 1918*



# Entertainment

Lectures, concerts, fetes, tea and garden parties, dances, sales of work and many other forms of entertainment were held for enjoyment and also to raise money.

A fete was held on the Paddocks pasture lent for the occasion by Mr George Heyhoe. There were 12 sports events, pig and cake guessing competitions, a baby show, Pentney band and fireworks in the evening. *Lynn News 4 Sept 1914*

A Soldiers' Concert was held in the vicarage room. For the benefit of the troops quartered in the town and was well-attended. *Lynn News 13 Nov 1914*

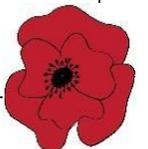
During 1914-15 lectures were held in Swaffham and the villages focusing on the war. Often these were organised by the vicar of Swaffham, Rev Frederick Keeling Scott, chaplain to the Forces. In Swaffham most were held in the Baptist Church which was very active throughout in providing support for the billeted troops, the Belgian refugees and all manner of other causes.

"Fire and Sword in Belgium or how Germany makes war". November 2014. "From Mons to the Marne" December 2014

The 6th battalion Essex Regt arranged a concert in the Assembly Rooms, including two boxing bouts. *Lynn News 6 Feb 1915*

A "BUTTERFLY DAY" on behalf of the work of the R.S.P.C.A. in tending sick and wounded horses on the various Allied fronts was held on Saturday, when a number of lady and girl helpers paraded the streets with artificial butterflies for sale. Out of 186,000 horses which have been treated in hospitals 143,000 have been cured and got back to work. The percentage of animals lost (16) compared with 60 in the South African War. At a concert in the Corn Hall, which followed the street sales, a collection was made by L.T.O. Evans who took part in the naval operations at Ostend and was the last man but one to leave one of our vessels which was sunk. The arrangements for "Butterfly Day" were in the hands of Miss Palmer (The Hollies), the secretary for the local branch of the R.S.P.C.A. Amount raised £32 2s 1d. *Lynn News 11 May 1918*

The soldiers' Christmas – On Christmas Day a number of soldiers were entertained by the inhabitants to dinner and tea in the Assmebly Rooms. ... A hot dinner of roast beef and mutton with vegetables, plum pudding and mince pies was served. The rooms were tastefully decorated. After tea a concert was held in the ball room.



# Housing

Housing, or rather the lack of good, affordable housing for the workers, was a real issue in both Swaffham and the surrounding villages.

19 glaring cases of overcrowding. Building of houses needed should not be shelved for the duration. *Lynn News 9 Oct 1914*

## **Housing inquiry.**

There were about 860 rented houses in Swaffham, 211 with a rental of over £10. That left about 619 cottages under this rent and of these there were about 20 with three bedrooms.

Of the remaining 600 there were about 152 back to back type with one entrance door.

Of this 152, many had only one room upstairs and one down. 82 of them were crowded into 17 yards of alleys or cul-de-sacs.

The remaining 448 of the 600 were generally built in long rows—very few had gardens.

Most opened into a yard, common to the whole of the row. Sanitary arrangements in many cases were within six or eight feet of the living room and in some cases as near as five feet.

Many back bedrooms were so small it was impossible to put up a full-sized bedstead.

These 448 cottages were two bedroom type and often rooms were lean-to. The majority of kitchens were about 9 x 7 feet and the front room 12 feet square.

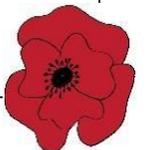
The small back room often had no window but a small pane in the door.

The council had decided to build 6 houses but 30 houses should be built.

New houses should have three bedrooms, two living rooms, a kitchen and about 1/3 acre of garden. They should be built 6 or 8 to the acre. The cost would be £175 to £200.

Mr Norris, late sanitary inspector, said that 50 of 800 houses were unfit for human habitation but have been repaired. About a dozen were still unfit on account of dampness.

The medical officer said that in Bullyard, Cockyard and Wellyard there were about a dozen houses he considered unfit for human habitation and about six houses in a similar condition in the rest of the town. *Extracted from Lynn News 16 Jan 1915*



# The men and their houses 1915

At the Housing Inquiry January 1915 several men spoke.

**Mr Albert Mouton.** In 1911 Mr Moulton lives in Lynn Street with his wife and seven children, ages ranging from 1 to 18. He is the town postman , his eldest daughter (18) is a book keeper and his eldest son (14) is a milk boy. He “has 2 bedrooms and 2 lower rooms. 6 children aged 2-5. His only son has to lodge out. Three of the girls are under 10. The scale of his wages was 24s per week. Several times he has tried to get a bigger house but in vain. He pays a rent of £9 a year. He is willing to pay £8 to £10 for a similar house.”

**Mr Harry Goodrum.** In 1911 Mr Goodrum lives at 2 Ash Close with his grandmother, aunt and sister. By 1915 he has the same house but with a wife and one child. He is a grocer’s traveller. He has four rooms and pays £6 14s 9d per year, including water rates. His back room is 7 foot by 13 foot and there is a corresponding bedroom about the same. Sanitary arrangements are not separate from the shed. There is no window in the back living room; only a small pane of glass in the door.

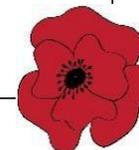
**Mr A Hutson.** In 1915 Mr Hutson lives on Lynn Street in a four roomed house. He is a carter with one child. He pays £7 10s rent for very small rooms, although it is not damp. He wants a six room house and would pay £9 to !10 rent. Drainage arrangements are unsatisfactory.

**Mr Cook.** In 1915 Mr Cook lives in Church Walk for £8 8s 8d a year inclusive water rate. He has three rooms downstairs, two up and a garret. It is sufficient but he wanted a better house. He is willing to pay £10 for 3 bedrooms, 2 living rooms and scullery. He is not able to use the garret as it was not wind and water tight and the house, which abutted on the churchyard, was 2 feet below the level of the churchyard. In 1 bedroom he has to stand a basin to catch water which leaks through the roof. The windows are unsatisfactory, 6 of them not being able to open.

**Mr Arthur Young.** In 1915 Mr Young is a carter with 8 children. He has to have 2 houses but uses only 1 room of 1 dwelling. He pays 2s 3d a week for 1 house and 2s for the other. He is prepared to pay £10 for a good dwelling with 3 bedrooms, 2 living rooms, scullery and garden.

*Lynn News 16 Jan 1915*

The vicar, Rev Keeling Scott commented that before the war of 800 houses 73% had 2 bedrooms or less and that there had been no cottage building within living memory. After the war 36 houses were built.



# Life in Ash Close

Extracts from Ash Close, Swaffham by Bert Barnes in The Pedlar Quarterly

I was born in Ash Close, Swaffham, in the year 1911, in a little four-roomed cottage at the bottom end of Oddfellow's Yard, or Spink's Yard as it was usually called. The yard consisted of a row of cottages, eight in all, I think. Our family was fortunate in having a front and back yard, which gave us a certain prestige. The rent was 2/6d per week, which I know took a bit of finding.

Ash Close had two other yards, Well Yard and Cock Yard, and to venture into either of these invited danger. There were two entrances into the close, which are still there, one leading to Spinner's lane, the other into the town.

A public house stood at this entrance, and I remember Johnson's gun shop and a little sweet shop where we would take our farthings to spend. "Archie" Bayes baker's business was at that end of the Close, with the smell of freshly cooked bread.

And "Dick" Dent's grocery store in Dent's Yard where we could purchase a hapenth of broken biscuits or a farthing's worth of locust beans. He kept several racing pigeons, and we could also buy firewood or kindling.

My father, Herbert Edward Barnes, was apprenticed as a tailor with Mr Tom Fayers, whose business was in Ash Close. ...

You can imagine how crowded we were in our tiny living room, six and sometimes seven of us, and when the chimney "smoked", as it often did, we would cough and splutter, it's a wonder we survived. The front room was out of bounds all week, but Sundays we had tea in there and father played his flute and accompanied in singing hymns.

Over the other side of the brick wall that bordered our two yards was Surridge's sawmills, with the constant sound of steam saws working to slice up logs for making cricket bats.

[My grandfather Drake] owned a piece of land in Ash Close with sheds and a stable and a white pony, which looked all skin and bone.

My Uncle Alf lived in Ash Close and I can recall sitting in his back garden on summer evenings listening to his gramophone.

The house in which I was born is gone now and so are many of my old schoolmates. There were the Tuttlés, Nunns, Tufts, Claxtons, Savages, Stibbons, Drakes (my cousins Reg and Eric), Barretts, Peakes, Thompsons, Suttons, and so many more.



# Wages and Prices 1915

Agricultural labourer—15s a week

Mechanics (married) up to 27s

Other workmen 24-33 s

Casual labourers 3s a day

*Lynn News 16 Jan 1915*

Extract from a letter from an agricultural labourer to Sir Richard Winfrey, MP, complaining about the storage of wheat which would normally have been threshed by this time to gain a higher price.

Currently, although his wages remain at 16s a week, he has to pay:

6s more for 10 stone of flour

1 ½ d more for a 2lb loaf

1 ½ d more for 1lb of sugar

3d more for 1lb of butter

3d more for 1lb of tea

1s 6d more for 1 cwt of coal

He has to pay 4s insurance and club money.

He can only afford one small piece of meat a week which just lasts from Friday to Monday. The rest of the week the family has to have bread.

*Lynn News 21 Jan 1915*

Swaffham UDC. The provisions of a man with two or three children would cost at least 3s 6d per week more than in normal times. It was agreed that both ordinary labourers and foreman of the roadmen should have a 1s rise.

*Lynn News. 6 Feb 1915*



# Captain W.E. "Biggles" Johns

W.E. Johns first came to Norfolk in 1912 when he took the job of sanitary inspector or "nuisances inspector" for Swaffham Rural District Council. He joined the Norfolk Yeomanry and his unit was mobilised with the First World War in 1914. He then transferred to the Machine Gun Corps. In 1917 he transferred to the Royal Flying Corps and was stationed at Narborough Airfield where he worked as a pilot instructor.

Johns used his experiences of active service during WW1 to invent 'Biggles' - alias James Bigglesworth - a daring, clean-cut hero. In the books, Biggles spent his early years with his uncle in Norfolk and also learnt to fly at No 17 Flying Training School in the fictional 'Settling' in Norfolk.

When he left Swaffham there was some argument about the salary he was receive whilst on active service.

The proposal to reduce the salary of Mr W E Johns to £25 per annum and to increase the salary of Mr W A Lavender, temporary substitute to £75 per annum was sanctioned by the Local Government Board.

*Lynn News 6 Feb 1915*

Mr Johns was appointed in 1913 at a salary of £100 per annum. He was a trooper in the King's Own Norfolk Yeomanry at the outbreak of war and as such was called up for service. The council was resolved to reinstate him on his return and to pay him a salary of £30 per annum during the continuance of the war. They appointed a temporary substitute at £30 per annum and the Local Government Board sanctioned these arrangements. In December the temporary substitute tendered his resignation and the council induced him to withdraw it by increasing his salary to £75 per annum. At the same time they rescinded their resolution to pay Mr Johns £30 per annum during the continuance of the war and framed another resolution to pay him £25 per annum during the period. [Mr Johns ...consented to it. [Mr Johns] has now said he objects to the sanction.

*Lynn News. 27 Feb 1914*

The Local Government Board wrote that most local authorities whose inspectors of nuisances were on military service were keeping their posts open and allowing them half their salary or the difference between their salary and their military pay and requested that the council reconsider. In response, the RDC thought that the allowance of £25 a year made to Mr Johns was fair and just and the clerk was instructed to reply that the council saw no reason to alter their previous decision.

*Lynn News 31 March 1914*



# Licensing Hours

In pursuance of the new Intoxicating Liqueur (Temporary Restriction) Act the Justices made an order closing all the public houses at nine o'clock each evening until further notice.

*Norfolk Chronicle 8 Sept 1914*

A letter was received from HQ of the Essex Regiment stating that at present it was not proposed to station any more members of that regiment in Swaffham. If it should be so decided they would again make application for a reduction in the hours of business of the public houses. Since September 17th the houses had been closed at 9pm each day. This had caused some dissatisfaction in the town.

*Lynn News 3 April 1915*

An application was made to rescind the early closing time of 9pm to the original 11pm was adjourned as Swaffham may have more soldiers.

*Lynn News 1 May 1915*

Mr G A Walker again made application for the removal of the restriction orders. The Volunteer Training Corps on Monday evenings after two hours of hard drill were unable to obtain any refreshment. Men who worked late on allotments or members of the Bowling and Quoits club and stopping guests at the hotels were inconvenienced. The orders were rescinded.

*Lynn News 15 May 1915*

Note: George Arthur Walker was a brewer's manager living in Swaffham. (1911 census)

At a special meeting of the licensing justices held on Monday, an order was made under the Temporary Restrictions Act, for the closing of all public houses in the South Greenhoe division at 9 pm, except for the parish of Swaffham, the closing hour in which is to remain at 10pm as under the existing order.

*Lynn News 1916*



# Delivering the mail

## Swaffham's Two-Horse Night Mail

Until 1920 the mail was delivered to Swaffham by two one-horse carts, one from Mileham, the Dunhams and Sporle, the other from Rougham, Weasenham and Castle Acre. From Swaffham to Brandon the night mail was by two-horse van for some years driven by Charles Lock.

The last London post left Swaffham just before 9.30 pm. In 1952 it was 7.15 pm.

At 9.30 Mr Lock would climb on to his exposed seat and drive out of the yard of the posting stable in the Market Place. Calls would be made at Hilborough and Mundford and the London-bound mail would be handed over to the railway at Brandon. At Brandon Post Office Mr Lock would drop the remainder of his load and get fresh horses. At about 1.30 am he would pick up the incoming letters from the station and begin the return journey, driving through the night to arrive in Swaffham in the early hours of the morning.

Only once was he unable to get through, owing to deep snow, but there were many occasions when the roads were buried so deep that they could not be seen, and the horses would wander off it, pulling the van across the heath.

*(newspaper unknown. 3 October 1952)*



# Crime

Swaffham was the Rural District centre and so crimes came before the magistrates' court from over the town and neighbouring villages. Major crimes were dealt with at Thetford County Court.

Here is a small selection from *Lynn News* of 1918. The vast majority of cases were about the lighting / non lighting and licensing of vehicles.

Fined 10 shillings for riding a bicycle without lights

Fined 5 shillings for not shading an acetylene gas lamp on a bicycle

Failing to shade windows

Bound over for stealing £3 10s from her employer at Manor House

Under the Bread Act the Co-op was fined £2 for delivering bread without the proper scales

Removed to an institution for stealing a five tine fork valued at 1shilling. "In consequence of rambling statements made by accused and his conduct Dr A.W. Thomas was sent for and after examination of accused certified him as unable to plead."

A woman from Watton road was fined 20 shillings for assaulting another woman at Swaffham. On hearing the decision "defendant excitedly said she would not pay, called to her husband not to do so and went off into a fit."

A roadman was charged with stealing onions and was fined 5 shillings.

Four Swaffham schoolboys were charged with cruelty to a cat by throwing it into Northwell pool three or four times and once over a hedge. "The parents were asked by the chairman if they would give an assurance that they would whip the boys. One consented, the others refused and these three were each fined three shillings."

A Swaffham man from Tower Courtyard was charged on remand with inciting a young woman of Norwich to commit an illegal offence. He was also charged with supplying her with noxious drugs.

An errand boy who stole goods from Lane's grocers on several occasions was found guilty. His father, who admitted he knew that the goods were in their house was sent to prison for two months, his mother was fined £3 2s 6d for receiving the goods and the boy was sent to reformatory school.



# Appeals for military exemption

Judging cases from the Rural District magistrates, military representatives and other interested bodies were regularly called together as a Tribunal to consider the many appeals from employers that employees should be exempted from military duty. Mostly the appeals came from small farmers or were connected with agriculture where there was a real crisis.

Here is a selection from *Lynn News 1917*

A widow claimed on behalf of her only son aged 19, engaged as a baker, and stated she understood that the Prime Minister had stated that the only son of a widow should not be taken. A discussion ensued as to allowances and the military representative pointed out that she would be probably better off financially without her son. -Applicant: How's that? I mean I shan't have my boy? – Appeal refused.

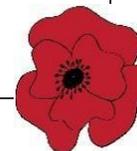
A Swaffham firewood and coal merchant, single, 36, claimed that military service would mean the loss of his business, the only one of the kind in Swaffham. Short exemptions had been given to enable the business to be sold and the appeal now was dismissed.

Mr Matthews supported the application of the guardians of the Swaffham Union for the exemption of the workhouse master, pointing out that the porter had gone, that the guardians had failed to get anyone to replace him and that the master was the only male officer in the workhouse. The position required a strong man. The Tribunal granted conditional exemption

A farmer sought exemption for two of his sons, one 30, a shepherd, and another 33, a working bailiff, drillman, thatcher and machinist. Col. Beshar: You have no sons in the war? – Applicant: No. – Col. Bewsher: You are willing that other people should fight and that your sons should look on? You ought to let one go. – The father: You can have one of them after harvest if you like. – Conditional exemption was given to the younger son and temporary exemption to September 30 to the other, this to be final.

The parish sexton and verger, a married man with six children, was given conditional exemption. He stated that in addition to looking after a large churchyard he dug the graves, of which there were 57 last year and 10 in one month.

The vicar (Rev F.K.Scott) was summoned in respect of the ineffective shading of lights at the vicarage. He pleaded guilty. *Lynn News 1916*



# School

The log books exist from both the elementary school and for Hamond's Grammar School for a few of the war years.

For the elementary school Swaffham only ever had an attendance rate of around 85 – 90%, especially at harvesting times and during poor weather. **Health issues** abounded, especially in the areas with poor housing and sanitation.

1914: November 13<sup>th</sup> The attendance has fallen considerably this week. Children are suffering from colds etc. One case of scarlet fever

1915: A "Notice of Closure" was received from the Medical Officer of Health, on account of an "Epidemic of Measles", from March 24<sup>th</sup> to April 14<sup>th</sup>.

1918: December 6<sup>th</sup> average attendance very poor, owing to influenza. No fires since Tuesday as no coal available. (Note. The lack of coal continued into 1919 - January 24<sup>th</sup> school closed for the day – no coal; February 3<sup>rd</sup> no fires lit, physical exercises taken until coal arrives and fire lit; March 6<sup>th</sup> no coal for afternoon fires.

## **The war brought in daylight saving.**

1915: January 29<sup>th</sup> children assembled at 1.30 this afternoon and were dismissed at 3.30, in order to enable the cleaner to begin her duties earlier as it is not desirable to have lights in the school buildings after 5 pm; 27<sup>th</sup> January The police (acting under military instructions) said there must be no bright lights in the schools after 5-o-clock. Consequently, the afternoon session was begun earlier and slight alterations were made to the timetable. This was notified by the head teacher to the NEC and HM Inspector; 29<sup>th</sup> October Owing to regulations regarding lighting on account of the war, The morning session will close at 11.45. Only the last lesson being curtailed. The time has changed from 5-o-clock to 3.15.

**Visiting soldiers** were always an attraction

6<sup>th</sup> July 1915. The Band of the Sherwood Rangers, by kind permission of Col. Dawson, played selections at the annual prize giving at the Vicarage Lawn. They had assembled outside the Boys' school at 2.45 and headed a procession, via the Shirehall, to the Vicarage. The boys marched four abreast; the girls and infants falling in at the corner of the Shirehall Green. The boys and the girls contributed national songs of the Allies and the infants, some interesting and amusing games.

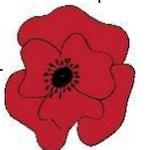
## **Teachers joined up.**

Jan 7<sup>th</sup> 1915 one of the teachers, W. B. Clarke, enlisted in His Majesty's forces.

1915. One of the teachers, R.H. Limeburn, had to report to Britannia Barracks, Norwich. However he was back at school the next day having been rejected by the military doctor because of his eyesight. 1916: February 29<sup>th</sup> Mr. Limeburn went away on active service this morning.

1915 12<sup>th</sup> July Miss Nora Layern, who had just completed training at Norwich, began work at the school this morning. There had previously been male teachers at the boys' school, but the war caused a shortage and ladies began to teach the boys.

1916 Mr H.W.Coe, master of the boys' school has been presented by the staff and scholars with a wristlet watch on his taking up duties with the colours



# Health

It was reported that there were no allotments in the town which were not under cultivation and that there were applicants for plots. The question of planting potatoes in the new cemetery was discussed and deferred.

(Note it was discussed on several occasions but eventually decided against.)

*Lynn News 6 January 1917*

The rainfall at Swaffham for 1916 was 28.12 inches, the highest total since 1912 (the year of the August flood) when 34.32 was registered. Rain fell on 186 days during the year, the greatest fall being on March 28<sup>th</sup> (1.26), the result of the blizzard the previous night. February was the wettest month with 3.83 and July the driest when 0.9 was registered.

*Lynn News 13 January 1917*

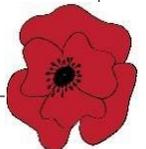
**The Cottage Hospital** officially opened in 1888, built from funds collected to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. From that time its main funding arm was The Friends who organised many events but especially The Hospital Week. By 1912 there was also a small operating theatre.

It was here that up to 1914 Dorothy Madge Smith of Oakleigh House learnt her nursing skills which were to launch her on a distinguished nursing career.

It was also from here that Emily Backhouse, matron at the hospital, practised her nursing skills before joining up in 1915, leaving her sister and next of kin Amy Backhouse at the hospital in her stead.

Emily left England in July 1915 and served on the Troopship Euripides, bringing down the wounded to Alexandria. She also served on Hospital ships from time to time, eventually settling at the 3<sup>rd</sup> General London Hospital in 1917. A report from there in 1919 when she was demobilised reads "She is an excellent Sister who has done very good work, especially in the Eye Department. I consider she is very fitted for promotion to a higher rank. I consider her one of the best of the Nursing staff."

There was at some time during this period an isolation or fever hospital in Swaffham.



# The war memorial

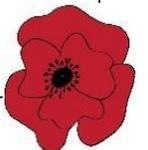


The first (wooden) war memorial was erected in 1919 ready for the town's Peace celebrations in November. It was secured with guy ropes and was erected in roughly the same place as the present permanent memorial.

It was also decided to fund two other memorials both in the parish church – the William Morris designed memorial window and a table roll.



Additionally the Town Council has a framed roll of honour and a printed list of the names and regiments of all Swaffham people who served in the forces was regularly updated. Roll 9 being the last found in 1917.



# The Women

We know very little about women during the war.

There are three names on the Roll of Honour 9.

**Emily Backhouse** who was matron at the Cottage Hospital and then served abroad.

**Richenda Fisher** who served as nurse with the French Red Cross.

**Maud Winkfield** who served with the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps. Maud was probably the daughter of Robert and Mary who settled in Swaffham in 1903 after Robert retired for the Lincolnshire Regiment as colour-sergeant. If so, Maud was born in 1893 in Aldershot, although the Winkfield family came from Pentney.

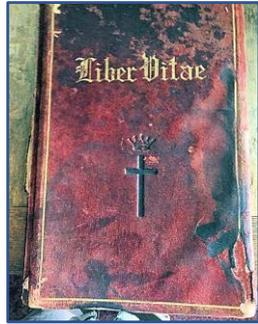
We know that wives of serving men were left to run both families and businesses and in some cases as widows. Where we see women's occupations from the censuses it is usually charwomen, laundresses or dressmakers.

We also know that at Weasenham there was a training school for landworkers but none appear in Swaffham census returns as yet. However, we do know that some women farmers or smallholders collected eggs to send to the soldiers

We also know that there was a host of women who were the backbone of the community in fund raising, VAD work and charitable acts around the town.



# The Churches

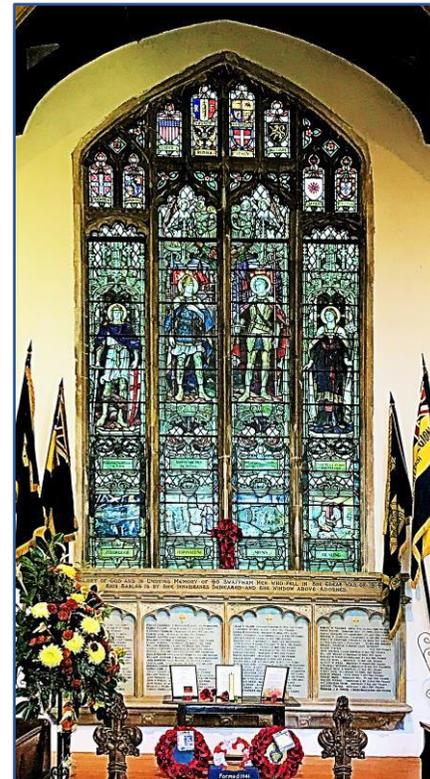


The Baptists were a very strong group in town at the time and were very generous with both time, effort and rooms to help where it was needed. They provided entertainment and rest rooms for the soldiers and were constantly raising funds for a variety of causes.

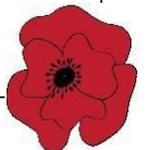
It is to this church that we owe the Liber Vitae which contains the names of those who died in the war, often with photographs and sometimes with text.

It was in 1911 when a Catholic church building was established in Swaffham for the first time since the Reformation. And in 1914, just before the beginning of the war, the first few nuns, from German-speaking Austria arrived in town to a house in Providence Row. It must have been a hard time for them but they established themselves and by 1920 had managed to move into their present home in Mangate Street.

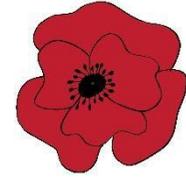
It was, perhaps, the individual church members from the Methodist Church who moved the town forward at this time. They were renowned for their fund raising events and their family teas. The names are familiar – George Sterry Mantripp, Israel Shingles, Ernest Wagg, George Green, the Daborn family. All were very influential in maintaining stability during these rough times.



With Rev Keeling Scott as Chaplain to the Forces until 1916 at its head the parish church was very active in raising funds, organising lectures, running the scouts and other groups including the Young Men's society. It was here where the memorial services for the fallen were held and it was from the vicar that a lot of the news was communicated to the Lynn News



# SOURCES



The sources for the material in this book are taken from a variety of primary and secondary sources.

The major resources used:

Liber Vitae compiled by the Baptist Church. Now at Swaffham Heritage. Use of images from this book is permitted for research and family use only

Archives from Swaffham Heritage, Swaffham, Norfolk

Information and images from family members and friends and are credited. Norfolk Record Office

Sporle History Group for Rev Avann

Swaffham History Group

Lynn News and County Press (shortened in text to Lynn News) Deanery Magazines

Swaffham Parish Church St. Peters and St. Paul Parish News

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk>. Images used were taken from the public family trees only. <https://www.findmypast.co.uk>

<https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk>

<https://www.fold3.com>

<https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk>

Research continues, and this book will be updated at intervals.

Dates will be posted on Swaffham Heritage website and on Facebook.

Many thanks to the researchers on this project over several months, especially Peter Bruce, Tricia Burnham, Ric Parsonson, Mike Slater, Peter McCabe and Tom.

