

Captain Stuart Rose had seen thousands of “Blue Boys” return to the front line, knowing of the horrors to come. The brief respite at Summerdown Camp was a far cry from the trenches of France. Captain Rose, as dental surgeon of the Camp, had been with them for some time. He even had his own clinic where men would come to be seen for any number of tooth-related issues.

The men were given blue uniforms to wear, hence the Blue Boys nickname. This served a dual purpose- it showed people that they were injured soldiers rather than conscientious objectors- who would often be given white feathers as a sign of cowardice. It also provided the soldiers with a clean uniform, rather than the dirty, lice-infected one they would have worn for many months.

The legacy of Summerdown Camp, having housed over 150,000 soldiers during its existence, can be seen in the road names: Summerdown and Old Camp and in items such as the Summerdown Camp Journals. These newspapers were published regularly at the camp from 1915 and they inform us of the day-to-day goings on in the camp. It continued to run as a convalescent camp until 1922, helping those recover from the toils of war. After this, the contents, buildings and equipment were sold off at auction.

When war was declared in August 1914, life in Eastbourne continued as normal but that soon changed. 120,000 men were sent to France as the British Expeditionary Force and the army relied heavily on patriotic volunteers. By May 1916, as losses mounted, conscription was brought into force and made military service compulsory for all men of fighting age. In total, Eastbourne contributed 7500 men and women to the cause.

One of these men was Robert Collier, a soldier in the Royal Sussex Regiment. Robert saw a lot of front line action and was in the trenches at the Battle of the Somme. He kept diaries during this time and the picture you’re seeing now is an extract from one of them. It shows day to day life in the trenches with shelling, strafing and casualties but also documents where and when Robert was in France. Robert’s story is part of The Story of Eastbourne.

Life in Eastbourne was further disrupted with the presence of U-Boats off of the coast. Britain relied heavily on food imports by sea and food prices increased by more than 50%. Any disruption to its imports could be catastrophic for Britain. From March 1915 until November 1918, German U-Boats sat in the stretch of sea between the Royal Sovereign Lighthouse and Beachy Head. This strategic point meant that any merchant ships coming from Newhaven or Dover would be prime targets. In total, 57 ships were sunk- 54 of which were British or allied ships. Rules of engagement started out quite civil- the German crew would fire a warning shot and either capture the crew or ask the crew to get into their lifeboats and away from the ship before it was sunk. From January 1917, however, Germany began firing without warning. During the war, at least 14 U-Boats operated off of Eastbourne’s coastline. This image is of a German U-Boat that washed up at Birling Gap although it was not due to conflict. After the war, the U-boat was being towed to France as part of the German reparations when it became detached near Beachy Head and came to rest at Birling Gap, damaged beyond use.

Anti-German sentiment grew quickly around the country. Foreign nationals, particularly of German, Austrian and Hungarian nationality were required to register with the police and notify them of any travel plans. They were also not allowed to own certain items such as motorcycles. In September 1914, foreign nationals were banned from certain coastal towns. Soon, the government ordered the

police to round up the men of enemy nationality who were of military-age and they were expelled from Eastbourne. An Eastbourne entertainment venue had to reassure the public that a singer that was due to sing was English despite her Polish surname.

World War One began 11 years after the first flight by the Wright Brothers. Flying was in its infancy but Eastbourne would prove to be instrumental in the progression of flying during the War. In 1911, the Eastbourne Flying School opened on Willingdon Levels under the tutelage of Frederick Fowler, a self-taught pilot. By 1913, Frederick had teamed up with Frank Hucks to create the Eastbourne Aviation Company- in this picture, Hucks and Fowler are seated in the middle. They had a base on the Crumbles where they could launch their planes on the sea. Although private flying was halted at the outbreak of war, the Crumbles site was used for refuelling and servicing planes that would patrol the water. The Admiralty took a great interest in the company and leased a site on St Anthony's Hill and paid for the construction of two hangars at the Crumbles site.

In September 1914, a flying training school was begun at the St Anthony's site with Frederick Fowler being made temporary Flight Lieutenant and a Major in 1918. By October 1915, Eastbourne was a crucial training centre for Australian, British, Canadian, American, Brazilian and Japanese pilots. In 1916, Frederick was sent to patrol the skies and seas around Dunkirk where he would search for the tell-tale signs of a submarine.

Considering how new the practice of flying was, it was a dangerous business. There were more than 10 fatal flying accidents in Eastbourne alone during the war years as planes were flimsy and pilots were without parachutes. After the war, Eastbourne Aviation Company continued to fly people around the South Coast, taking off from the beach opposite the Queen's Hotel. The company ceased to exist after 1932 but her importance in the training of fighter pilots and in the progression of flying in general should not be forgotten.

Eastbourne companies did their part for the war effort. A large amount of the work that men had done before the war was now up to women and the men too old or unfit to fight. In the Spring of 1915, newspapers reported that there was a Shell shortage and so, the Eastbourne Corporation Municipal Omnibus depot, located off of Churchdale Road and remembered in the Ecmob Road acronym, produced 3530 mines and 370 000 bombs to help. Caffyns garage and Mr Lovely's garage often competed against each other. In one such instance, Mr Lovely offered to provide the framework for an ambulance if a donor was able to pay for the bodywork. Not to be outdone, Caffyns donated an entire, complete ambulance to the war effort and so Mr Lovely was obliged to do the same!

A ceasefire was signed on the 11th November 1918 but the war did not formally end until 28th June 1919 with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The first group of POWs from Germany arrived on 21st December 1918, just in time for Christmas. One cannot look back at World War One and not think about the casualties. One in ten Eastbourne households received a telegram informing them that a loved one was dead or missing. 1056 men and women did not come home to Eastbourne. An extract from For the Fallen "They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old..... Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.... At the going down of the sun and in the morning, We will remember them"