

And the Horses went to war too!



In 2014 we can perhaps reflect on the changes in how we live, work and go to war by noting how our villages had many stories of the “War Horse”

At the outbreak of the war horses were much in demand by the army. The Remount department assisted by the police set about commandeering horses. Before the war many horses had been registered for service in time of war. The arrangement was that owners were paid £4 per year for a horse suitable for artillery work or 10 shillings for other horses (Coventry and Warwickshire local aspects of the Great war Volume 1 edited by Chris Holland)

The requisitioning of horses caused much hardship and problems in an age that still depended on horses especially in farming. There were complaints the price paid didn't compensate for the hardship. Farmers were losing not only their labourers but also their horses. There were concerns about how the harvest would be got in. It was reported in Stratford that requisitioned or purchased horses had in fact been literally taken out of their shafts. Below Cissie Grantham recalled how soldiers simply entered a field and took the harness off a commandeered mount

In Wellesbourne the three daughters of Alfred Day the farmer at Staple Hill were distressed when the horses from the farm were taken but then were to see them again a few weeks later in a field. by Leamington railway station looking neglected and unused (Naples of the Midlands Wellesbourne 1800 - 1939 by Peter Bolton)

In the book Joseph Ashby of Tysoe, Joseph complains of the impact of losing horses who were not only workers on the far but also part of the family.

“It was only a few days later that a group of army sergeants arrived in Tysoe, going from farm to farm selecting horses. From the stables of the Orchards they took Captain, without a by-your-leave. Captain ... had achieved almost membership of the Ashby family.... Every farmhouse in Tysoe had some such shock and grief that day”

(From “Joseph Ashby of Tysoe” by M.K. Ashby)

A current resident of Walton recalled in 2013 that her grandfather a local builder had his horses confiscated.

The late John Grantham not long before his death in 2013 recounted how his mother, Cissie Grantham often repeating her own recollection as a child of sitting on the wall by the Kings Head in Wellesbourne on the corner with Hoppers Lane. She sat and watched grooms and stable boys standing in tears as the road was filled with horses being taken by the military. She also recollected as is told in "Wellesbourne and Walton at Work" published by the Wellesbourne History Society, how members of the army would go into a field take the harness off a horse and lead it away giving the horseman a card to hand to his employer saying the horse was required for war service.

It seems as if there may well also have been some skulduggery at work in the county. As early as August 1914 the War office published in the local papers the following warning.

OFFICIAL NOTICE

O.H.M.S.

WAR OFFICE NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the only Persons who now have authority to Buy Horses on behalf of the Government in the County of Warwickshire are the following Purchasing Officers: -

Major J Baldwin, Groveley, Northfield,
J.P, ARKWRIGHT, Esq., Hatton, Warwick
F. ARKWRIGHT, Esq., Dunchurch, Rugby
P.C. PUCKLE, Esq., Kineton
Major F.B. STAPLETON BRETHERTON, District Remount Officer,
Captain St. J. LOFTUS, District Remount Officer

The names and Addresses of any other Persons representing themselves as acting on behalf of the Government in the Purchase of Horses should be at once notified to the local Police or to me.

G.C. SANDARS, Major
Deputy Assistant Director of Remounts
Chipping Norton
August 21st 1914

Shortly after the start of the War in August 1914 the Stratford Herald wrote:

“Wellesbourne

Over forty horses were despatched on Wednesday for military work.”

A paragraph later perhaps rather obvious they announce,

“We are asked to state the gymkhana arranged for Thursday afternoon next in support of the St Mary’s (Aston Brook) aid scheme has been postponed.”

As well as the farming community being affected there would have been an immediate impact on the local activities of foxhunting and polo which were well supported by the local upper classes. Many of the participants would have been young enough to serve and also belong to territorial units such as the Warwickshire Yeomanry so sometimes those with such units would be taking along their own mounts.

The Polo Monthly of September 1914 reported,

“ what good service has been rendered by polo players and their ponies at so momentous a crisis. It has long been admitted that the polo pony is a most useful type of horse for military purposes. ... Though too small, of course for artillery or ordinary cavalry he makes an excellent mount for Territorials, mounted orderlies, senior officers of infantry regiments, etc. He is handy, fast and easily accustomed to military service. ... Small wonder therefore that the military authorities on the issue of mobilisations orders were particularly keen on polo ponies...”

Two more items from the Leamington Courier in 1914 indicate the huge number horses that were becoming casualties even though the war had only just started.

WAR OFFICE

COUNTY OF WARWICKSHIRE

The following Classes of HORSES are urgently required:-

- (1) **RIDING COBS, 6 years old and upwards 14,2 to 15.1 hands. Must be quiet to ride with good mouths and up to weight. Strong Polo Ponies will be suitable.**
- (2) **HEAVY DRAUGHT HORSES from 5 years old upwards. Must be serviceably sound.**
- (3) **LIGHT DRAUGHT (ARTILLERY) HORSES are also required.**

**Apply, with full particulars, by letter to
F. G. ARKWRIGHT,
Government Purchasing Officer,
Dunchurch, Rugby**

HORSES FOR THE ARMY

WHAT CANADA CAN DO

The motor car is being utilised in an extent hitherto unknown and dreamt of, but on the other hand never before has war made such a demand on horses for the artillery, the cavalry and other mounted branches of the service, The wastage has naturally been enormous. Whole batteries of artillery have had to be left behind by the retreating armies, the horses having been killed , and the cavalry of all the armies has had an enormous mortality among its mounts.

The article then goes on describe how Canada has adopted a patriotic policy to supply horses.

Immediately the article continued that meant 30,000 horses from just three "prairies provinces alone"

(Published in October 1914)