



Introduction

When Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914 some people celebrated. Many believed that the war would be the opportunity for a great adventure and that it would be over by Christmas. The general view was that “England’s cause was just and honourable”.

On 29 August a notice appeared in the *Kentish Gazette* stating “A call to all men of Kent. Your country asks for soldiers, you the successors of the men of Kent who were never vanquished in all the centuries past, must respond to the call... Every man who joins will earn honour for himself, the gratitude of his friends and the thanks of his country. A new battalion of the Buffs is being formed, join at once.” The response to this appeal was tremendous and within a week over 800 men enlisted. Recruitment to the Royal West Kent Regiment proceeded equally well. Not everyone was swept away by the patriotic fervour, however, and Kent had its share of conscientious objectors.

The arrival of Belgian refugees in Folkestone in August 1914 brought home to the people of Kent the horrors of war. Many troops were stationed in the county and thousands more passed through on their way to the Western Front. Kent was subjected to more defensive measures than any other county. It would be the first county to be invaded and the fear of invasion was very real. As the war progressed, many Kent residents reported hearing the guns firing in France.

The First World War was the first conflict in which the civilian population was actively involved and was expected to make a positive contribution to the war effort. They had to cope with rising prices, shortages of food and fuel, and eventually rationing, blackouts and restrictions to their leisure activities and freedom of speech. Civilians were vulnerable to air attacks and were regarded as legitimate targets for military action. Workers were expected to contribute to greater productivity and British Summer Time was introduced in 1916 to increase the daylight hours available for work. Women made

enormous contributions to the war effort and their role in society and in the workplace was revolutionised. This experience of the 'Home Front' heralded a new pattern of life for the people of Kent.

This exhibition conveys the wartime experiences of men and women of Kent found in our archives and told in their own words.

Families

Few families in Kent were unaffected by the First World War: every town or village has its war memorial. The grief that lies behind these names is poignantly illustrated by the story of the Orchard family of Folkestone.

William and Rosa Orchard and their family moved to Folkestone in the early 1900s. All the Orchard men enlisted in 1915. William joined the Canadian Army while Will, the eldest son, joined the Royal West Kent Regiment. Arthur became a bandsman in the Buffs. George was in the Royal West Surrey Regiment and Tom entered the Royal Navy.

Will was killed on 22 June 1917. On 18 September Tom's ship was torpedoed and he drowned, a few weeks before his 18th birthday. George was killed on 26 April 1918 – his 28th birthday.

Arthur was the only son who returned home safely. Rosa, heartbroken at the loss of her sons, died in 1924 aged 56. She was followed seven years later by William who was 66.



1. Christmas card photograph of Mr and Mrs Orchard dated 1916

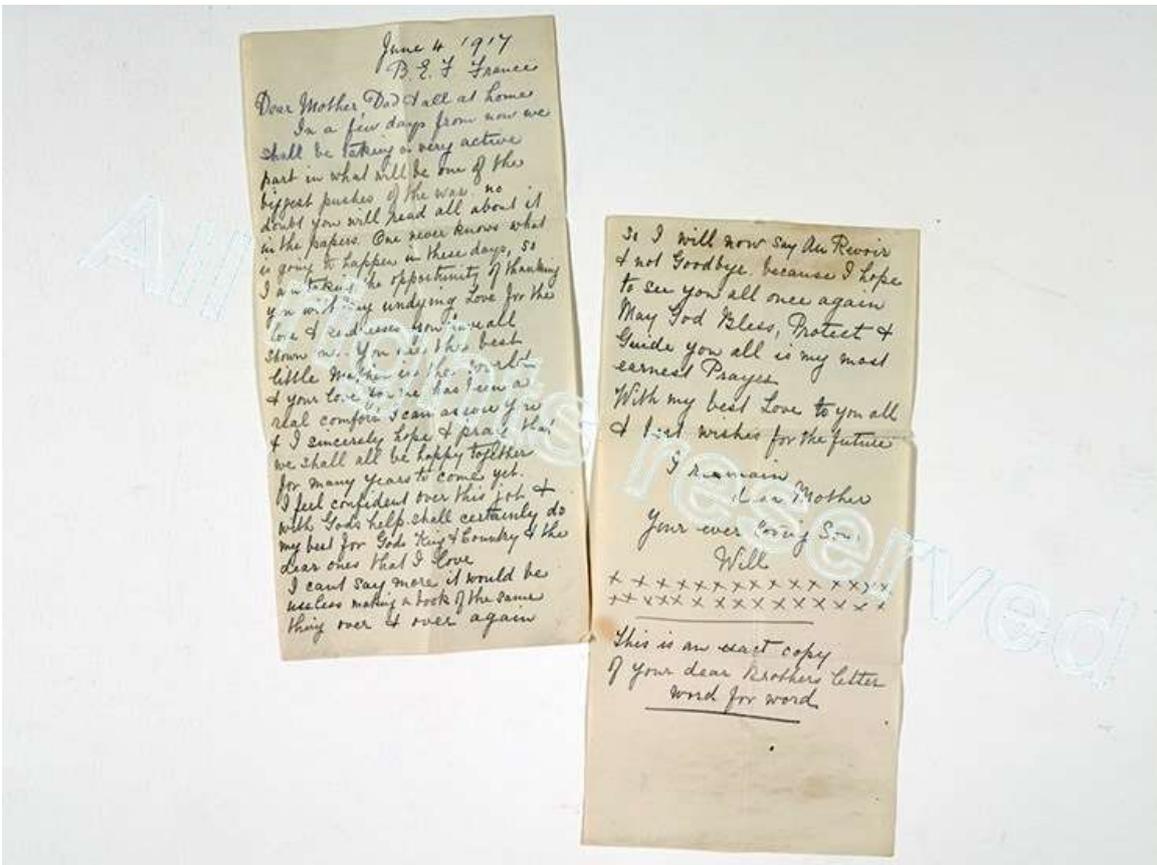
Kent History and Library Centre, EK/U174/7



2. Letter, dated 23 May 1918, from Mrs Orchard to her only surviving son Arthur
Kent History and Library Centre, EK/U174/2



3. Telegram notifying Arthur of the deaths of Will and Tom, with photographs of Will, his family and Tom. Also memorial cards for Will and Tom.
Kent History and Library Centre, EK/U174/1, EK/U174/9 (8)



4. Copy of the last letter Will sent to his parents before his death, dated June 4th 1917

Kent History and Library Centre, EK/U174/1 (4)



5. Telegram informing Arthur of George's death, with photograph and memorial card for George

Kent History and Library Centre, EK/U174/1, EK/U174/4 (1), EK/U174/5 (3)

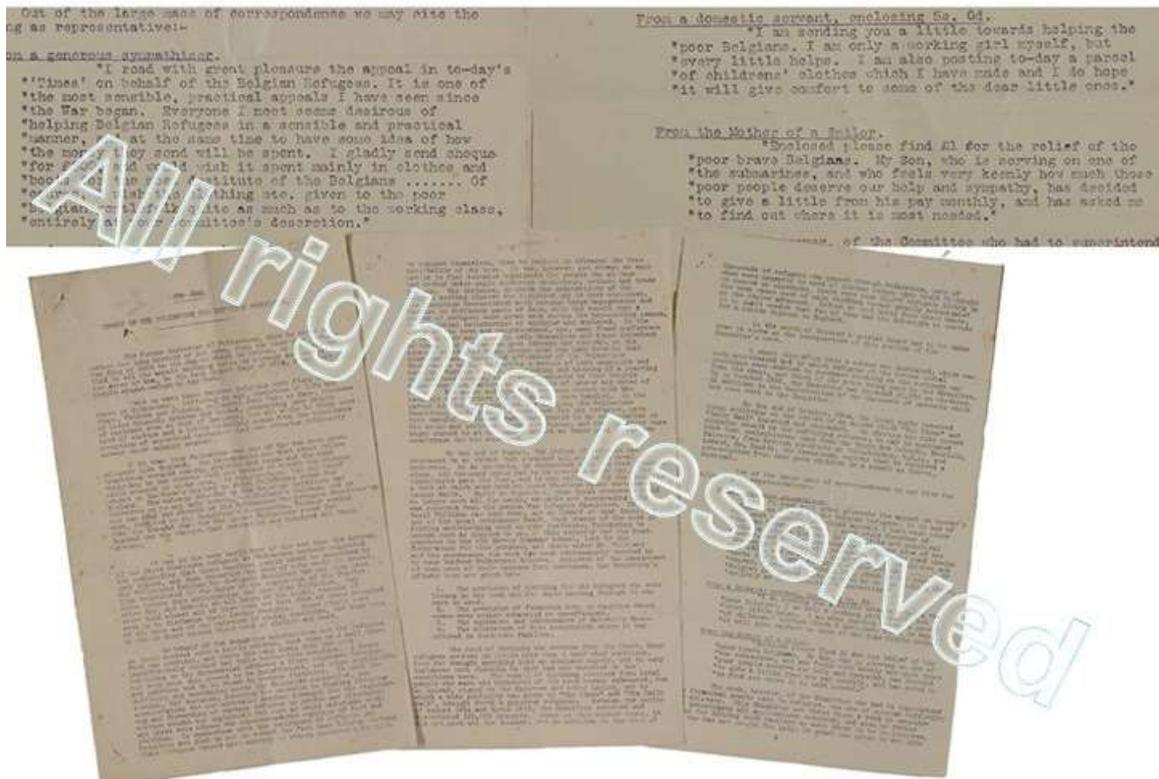
Belgian Refugees

Following the German invasion of Belgium, Britain offered support to thousands of refugees. In August 1914 large numbers of Belgian refugees began arriving at Folkestone in fishing boats and colliers. In one weekend alone, 20,000 Belgians arrived, gaining Folkestone the title of the 'Refugees' Gateway to Britain'.

The presence of the refugees brought home the impact of the war to Kent residents at a time when information about what was going on at the Front was otherwise restricted.

In order to manage the huge number of people the National War Refugees Committee was set up. Soon more than 2,500 local committees were established throughout the country, including many in Kent, which immediately set to work to provide food and shelter.

The Folkestone Belgian Committee for Refugees assisted 15,000 Belgians to settle in Folkestone and helped another 64,500 refugees to travel onwards from Folkestone to other parts of England.

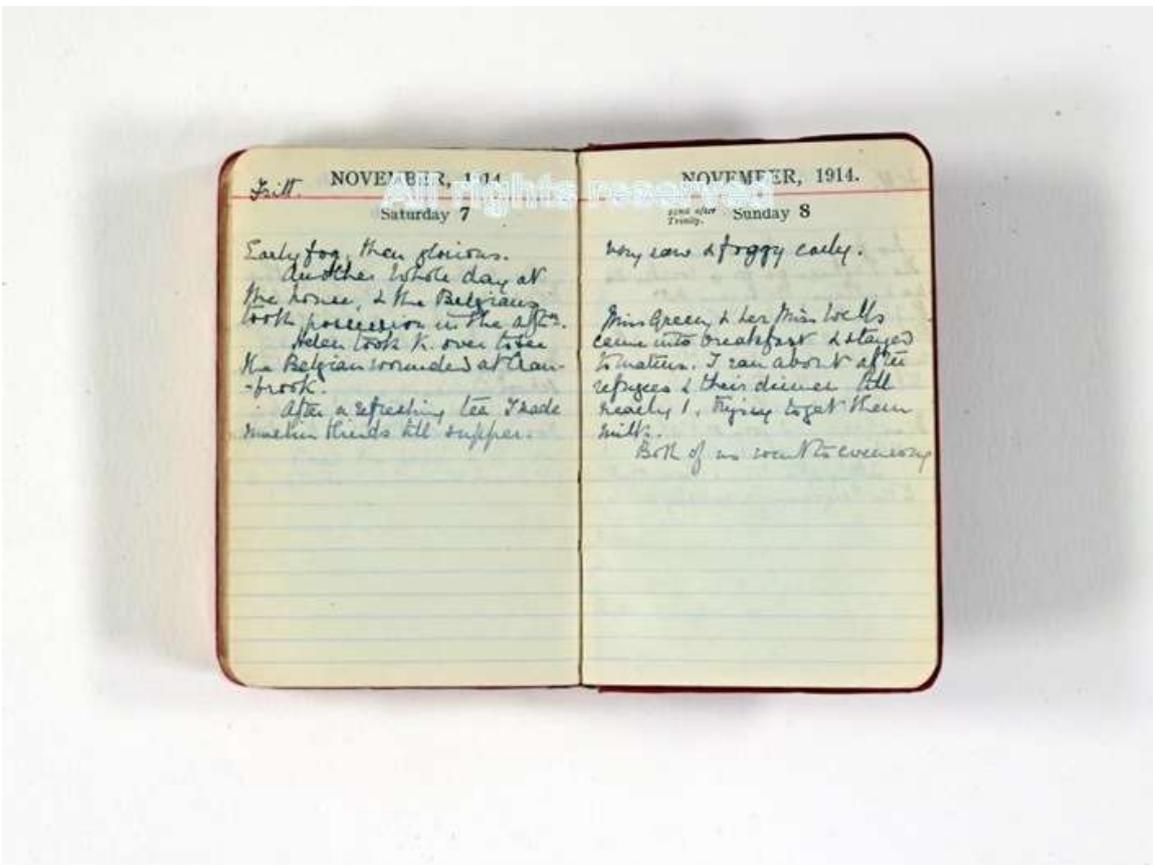


1. Report of Folkestone War Refugees committee, including first person accounts taken from correspondence received
Kent History and Library Centre, Fo/AC2/1



2. Photographs of Belgian refugees from Ostend, dated 1914

By kind permission of Folkestone Library, Kent County Council, FWW (52), FWW (54), FWW (55), FWW (58)



3. Diary of Mary Gertrude Hallward, describing her involvement with efforts to assist Belgian refugees at Frittenden

Kent History and Library Centre, U1291/F37



4. Belgian pill box cap

By kind permission of Folkestone Town Council



5. Scrapbook compiled by Ruby Kate Jackson, showing Belgian silk flag and postcard requesting clothing for wounded Belgian soldiers

Kent History and Library Centre, RU102/F/1

Air Raids

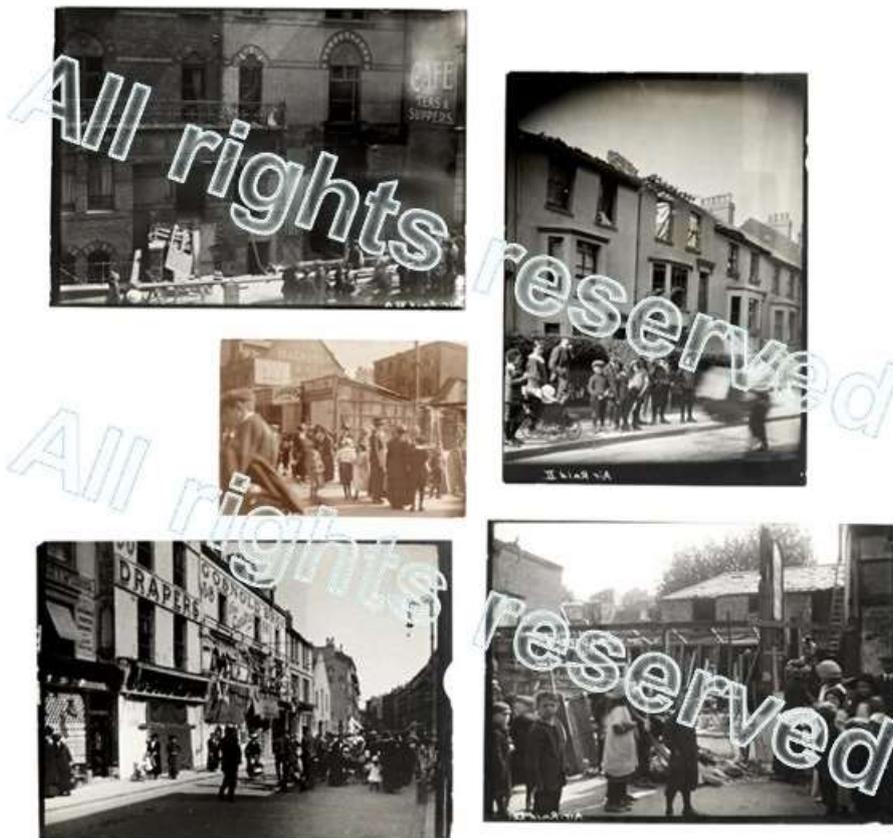
The first German bomb to land on British soil fell on Dover on the morning of 24 December 1914, merely smashing the windows of St James's Rectory.

In January 1915 Kaiser Wilhelm authorised the aerial bombardment of Britain. Only coastal defences and industrial areas were to be targeted but inevitably civilian casualties occurred.

Most of the first air raids were carried out by airships, usually Zeppelins, later Gotha bombers were deployed. The Kent towns often suffered as they lay along the route these aircraft followed to London.

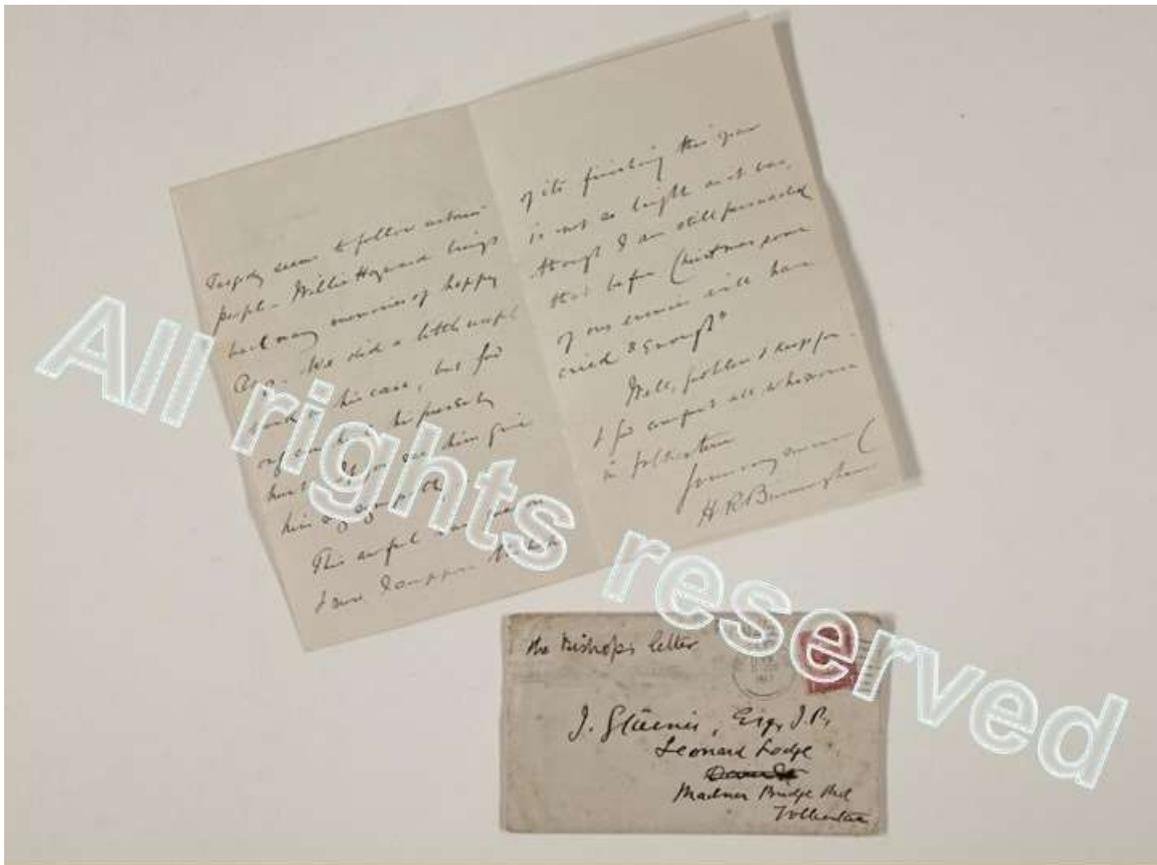
The most damaging raid was on Tontine Street in Folkestone on 25 May 1917. A single bomb fell, killing 61 people, most of whom died instantly. One observer compared the scene to a battlefield. Another commented "...the street was filled with dead and dying, some torn limb from limb, intermingled with mangled carcasses of horses...".

For the first time the population of Kent felt unsafe from aerial attack as aircraft were being used as weapons of war.

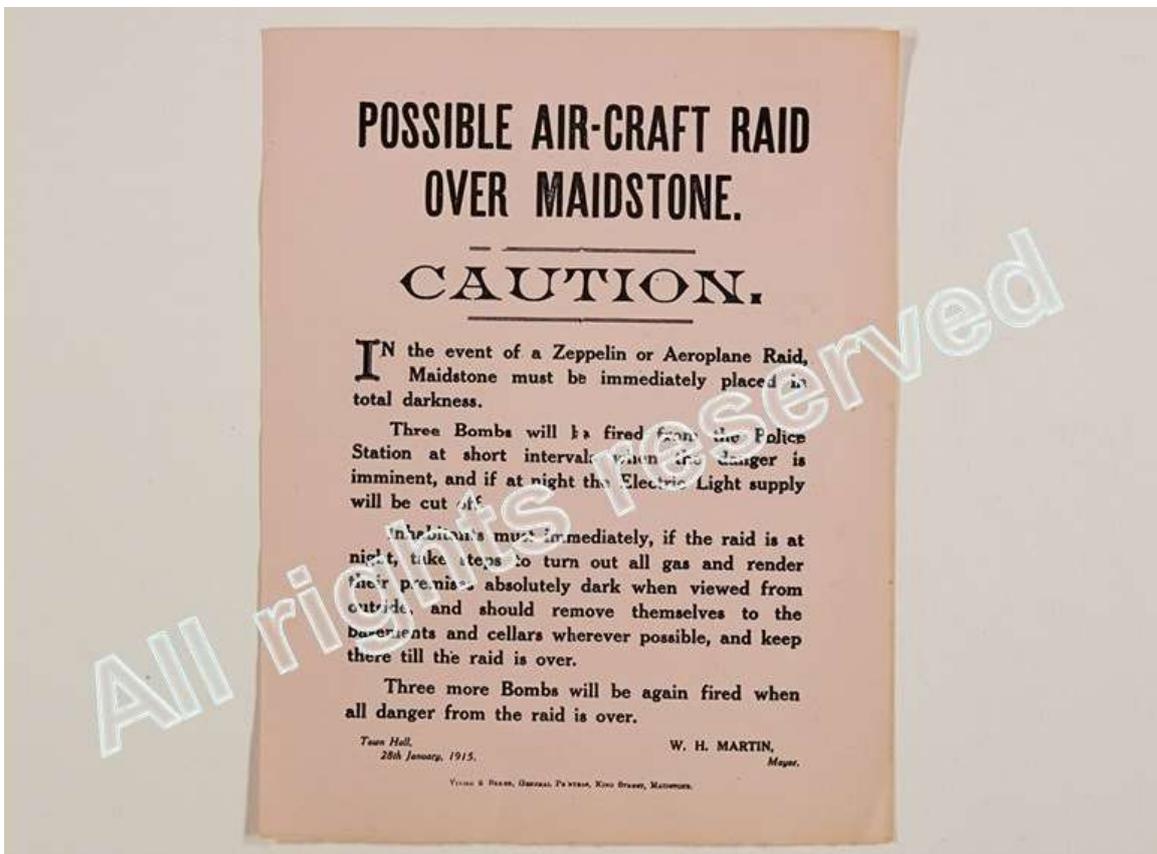


1. Collection of photographs showing air raid damage to houses and shops in Folkestone

Kent History and Library Centre, Fo/S1/3/1 and Fo/z3/1



2. Letter of condolence from the Bishop of Birmingham to the town of Folkestone regarding the Tontine Street air raid, 1917
Kent History and Library Centre, Fo/S1/3/2



3. Air raid instruction poster for Maidstone
Kent History and Library Centre, U2052/Z1



6. Royal Flying Corps sweetheart brooch

By kind permission of Elizabeth Finn, Collections Development Officer, Kent History and Library Centre



7. Evacuation orders for assembly at Warre Recreation Ground, Dumpton Park and Southwood Cricket Ground in Thanet

Kent History and Library Centre, R/U103/1/6

just a card to let you know we are safe, you
 will hear of the air raid this evening, we were
 on the green by the lab father had walked down
 by the chair & we were sitting on the seat, we saw
 the thing & it was over our heads very high looked
 like an enemy airplane never dreamed it was an
 enemy & it was in fact. - then an awful bang & another
 & another & there were at least one fell in the gap
 & a the sound of a Queen's factory, in the Oval & I
 was in fortune road & I saw damage done in fortune
 road to houses, many of the windows at Melcham & house
 below, & we have the soldier injured
 & there were, saw the soldier in an house, a
 cab horse died & I wish it was the
 ground - At sunrise father & I went to
 to see to see away, had to kill

CARD
 M. E. C. Barrett
 Higher Lane
 Lynton
 Warrington

him up, I soon brought him home
 & got him straight to bed & he seems
 fairly quiet now, says he is not
 - I can hardly keep my
 mind to write but know you
 will be anxious about us - well
 I say how I am after the night
 I wish it was the low

8. Postcard sent by Fanny Barrett to her son Ewart, describing an air raid on Margate
 Kent History and Library Centre, R-U119/F/1



9. Newspaper report on the Tontine Street raid by German Gotha bombers on Folkestone on 25 May, 1917, which killed 61 people and wounded 174
 Kent History and Library Centre, Fo/Z3/1

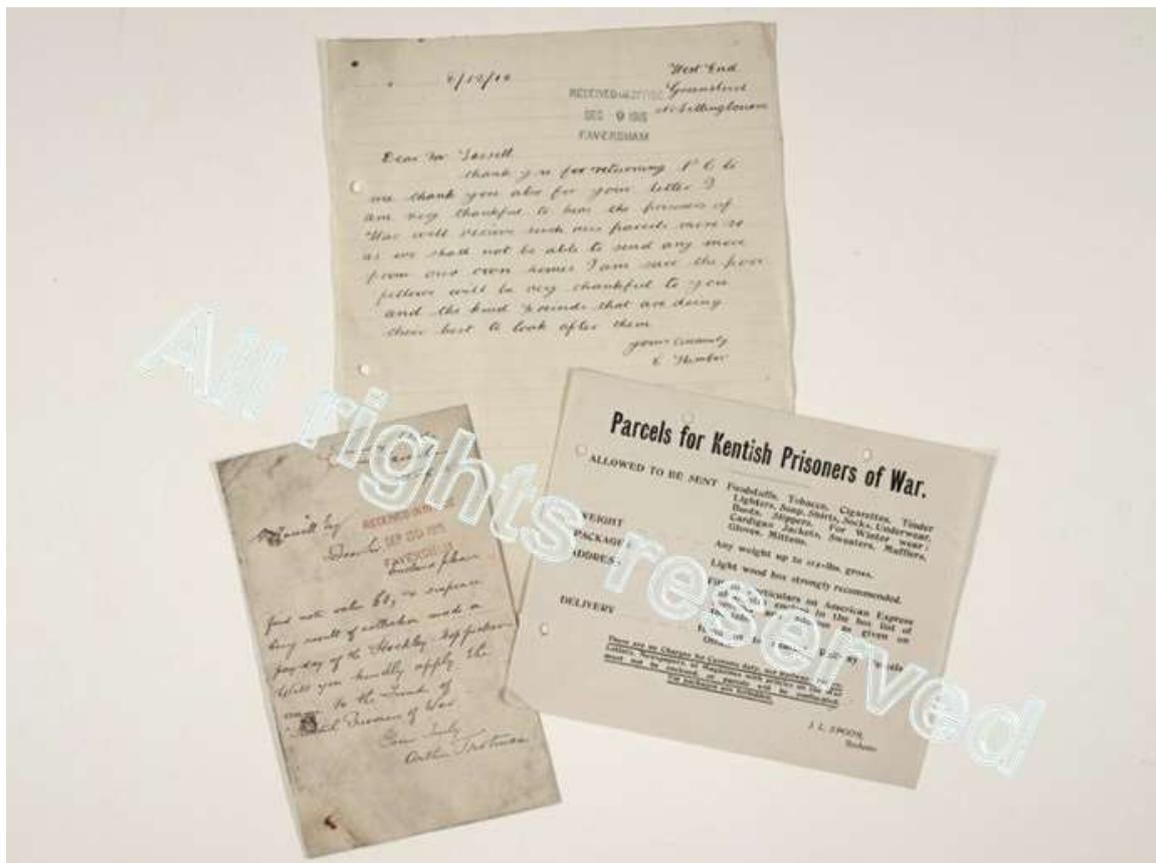
Hardship

War production took priority over civilian needs and the people of Kent experienced increasing austerity in their daily lives. Prices rose steadily. Food shortages led to 'Eat Less' campaigns. By 1917 starvation loomed. Florence Palmer of Milton Regis commented "...There is nothing to eat! The war bread is so nasty, and everything double the price." Eventually in 1918 rationing was imposed.

Many new taxes were introduced. The Government acknowledged that people would need financial help but most money was raised voluntarily. The Prince of Wales' War Relief Fund collected over £6 million by November 1918; much of this money was administered locally. Kent people also benefitted from other funds, such as the Air Raid Victims Relief Fund.

Whilst enduring these hardships many people were coping with bereavement or the anxiety of not knowing if their men were dead or alive. Air raids were another hazard. Yet the people of Kent did not forget local men who were prisoners of war in Germany and provided comforts for them through the Kent Prisoner of War Fund.

These experiences made people more vulnerable to the flu epidemic that came at the end of the war. More died from this than were killed in the war.

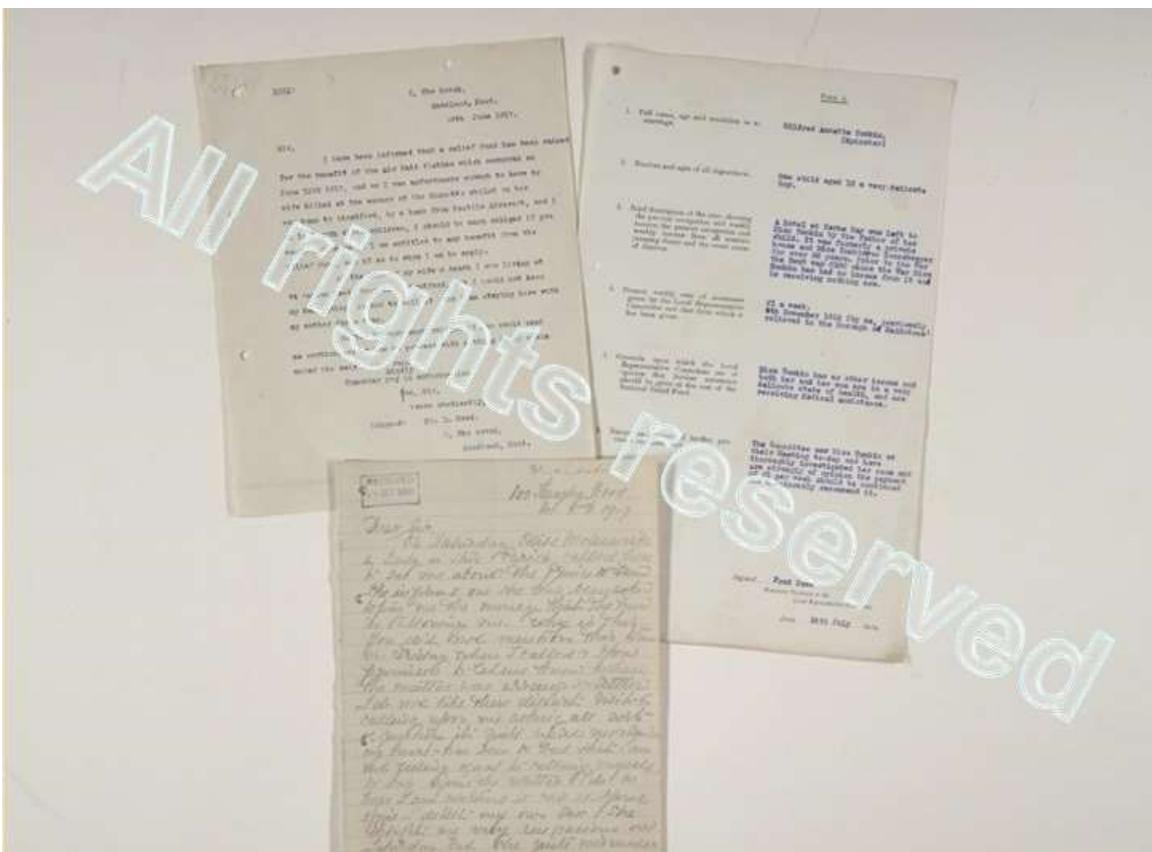


1. Series of documents relating to the Faversham and Rochester branches of the Kentish Prisoners of War Fund
Kent History and Library Centre, Fa/CZ/3



2. A brass Christmas tin, sent by Princess Mary to sailors and soldiers serving overseas for Christmas in 1914. The tin contained gifts such as chocolates and cigarettes, pencils in bullet cases, and tinder lighters.

By kind permission of Andrew Morgan, Military Historian



3. Collection of letters to the Kent Committee of the Prince of Wales National Relief Fund, requesting financial help for distress caused by the war
Kent History and Library Centre, C/A/2/10/17



4. A 1914 penny

By kind permission of Andrew Morgan, Military Historian



5. Correspondence relating to gifts sent by children in America to the children of serving, or deceased, soldiers and sailors of Great Britain, 1914. With requests to be included, letters of thanks - and one gift returned due to its unsuitability. Kent History and Library Centre, C/A/2/11/2

Letters Home

Letters were a vital link between men and women serving overseas and their relatives and friends.

Most soldiers left school at 12 or 13, but, as the Great Chart letters show, were still able to write clear, articulate and often poetic letters.

Willie Martin-Tomson, an officer in the Royal Flying Corps, became a prisoner of war in Germany in July 1916. His letters to his parents while imprisoned were deliberately light-hearted, but his joy at regaining his freedom is unmistakable.

Women played an active part in the war, as nurses, doctors and ambulance drivers, in uniformed services, such as the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), and in the Women's Land Army. Cicely Stanhope wrote to her aunt Evelyn about her life as a VAD cook and as an officer in the WAAC.

The letters here are a fragment of those that were written. These intimate and deeply personal documents bring the writers and their wartime experiences vividly to life.



1. Letters and portraits from two of the volumes of the Great Chart Soldiers and Sailors Fund

Kent History and Library Centre, CH144/17 and CH144/19



2. Personal kit spoon, fork, and button polisher

By kind permission of Andrew Morgan, Military Historian



3. East Kent Regiment cap badge, found in northern France

By kind permission of Andrew Morgan, Military Historian



4. Pay book with Will of Private Arthur Murrell
 Kent History and Library Centre, WKR/B10/Z1



5. Letters from Cicely Stanhope, VAD cook and officer in the WAAC, written whilst serving in France
 Kent History and Library Centre, U1590/C616



6. Letters written by Second Lieutenant Willie Tomson, from Gütersloh Prisoner of War camp in Germany
 Kent History and Library Centre, R/U7/F4



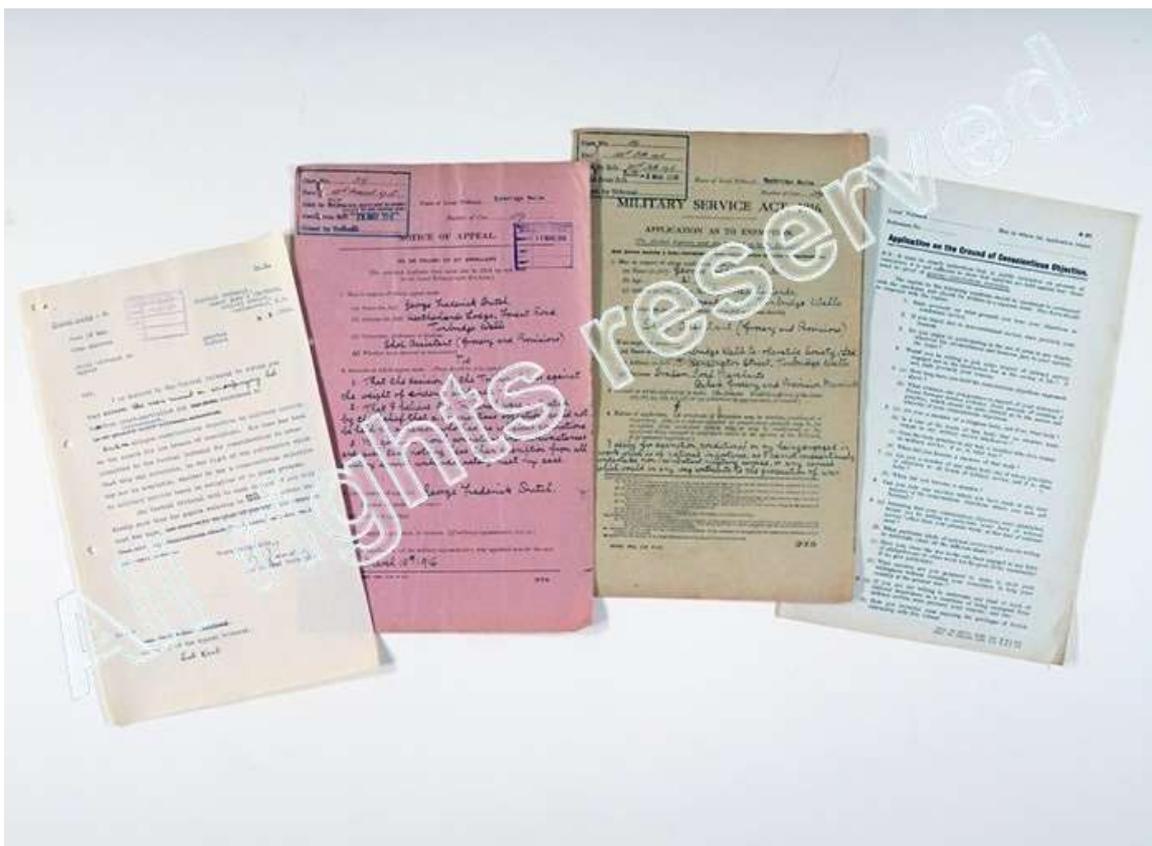
7. Embroidered postcards sent by soldiers in France between 1914 and 1918
 By kind permission of Elizabeth Finn, Collections Development Officer, Kent History and Library Centre and Kent History and Library Centre, U3687/Z4

Conscientious Objectors

Under the Military Service Act 1916 unmarried males aged between 18 and 41 became eligible for conscription to the armed forces. Men could claim exemption on a number of grounds, the most controversial being the 'conscience clause' allowing them a conscientious objection to active participation in the war. Over 16,000 made that claim.

Those seeking exemption appeared before local tribunals. George Dutch told the Tunbridge Wells Tribunal: "... as a convinced and earnest Socialist, I believe in and advocate the Brotherhood of Man, and the sanctity of human life...." Tribunals included a military representative who cross-examined applicants, often giving them short shrift. Unconditional exemption was rarely granted and many appealed. George Dutch, like so many unwilling conscripts, was arrested, handed over to the military, court-martialled and sentenced to six months' hard labour.

The anger directed at conscientious objectors, scornfully known as 'conchies', often affected their families. George Dutch's father lost both his job and home. In all 5,970 conscientious objectors were court-martialled and sent to prison. 1,330 refused to do any kind of alternative war work.



1. Frederick Dutch, a conscientious objector from Tunbridge Wells
Kent History and Library Centre, C/A2/15/14/D

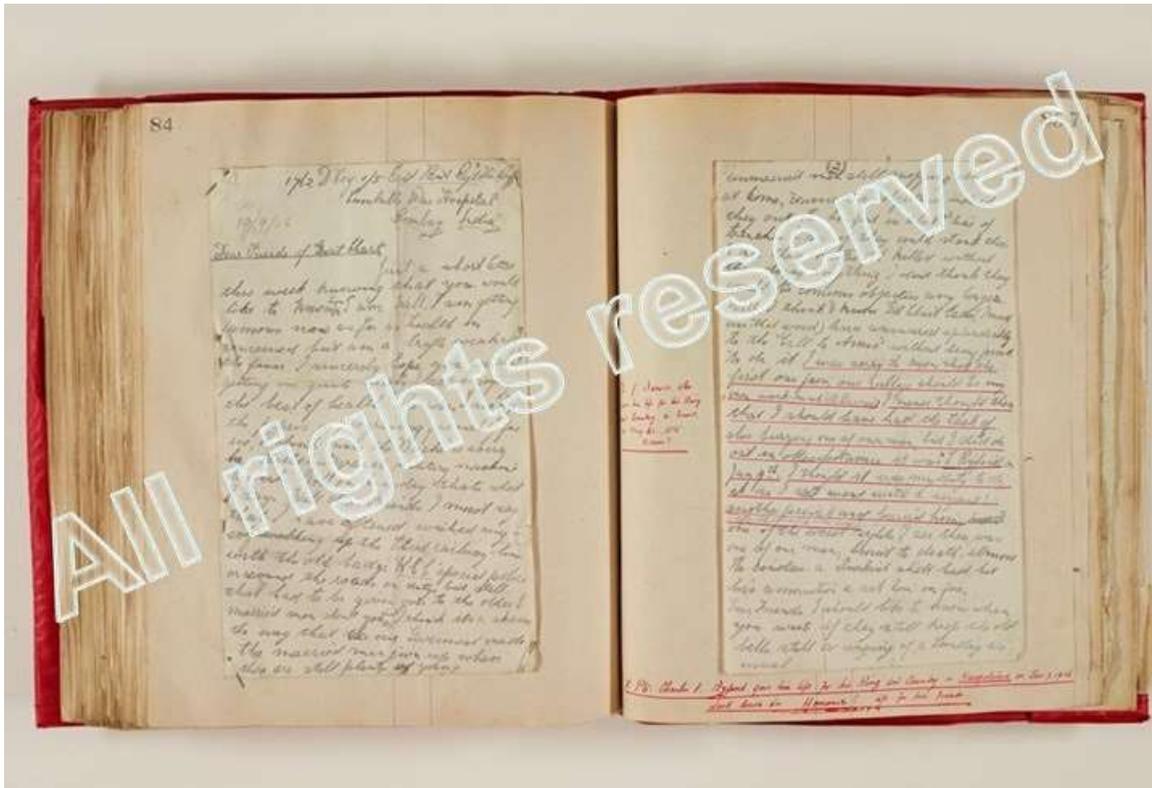
The image shows an open historical document, likely a jail nominal register, with handwritten entries in black and red ink. The document is divided into two pages with various columns for names, addresses, and dates. A large 'All rights reserved' watermark is visible across the center.

Register Number	NAME	Address	Occupation	Age	OFFENCE	RECEIVED	Duration	CLASS	Admission	Admission Fee	Admission Date	DATE of RELEASE	REMARKS
1058	Barker	William			Mild offence of Contumacy	6/10/15	5	Lab	2/10/15		2/10/15	2/10/15	in 1/20/15
1059	Head	Donald				6/10/15	6	Lab	2/10/15		2/10/15	2/10/15	in 1/20/15
1060	Head	Donald				6/10/15	1	Lab	2/10/15		2/10/15	2/10/15	in 1/20/15
1061	Head	Donald				6/10/15	6	Lab	2/10/15		2/10/15	2/10/15	in 1/20/15
1062	Head	Donald				6/10/15	1	Lab	2/10/15		2/10/15	2/10/15	in 1/20/15
1063	Head	Donald				6/10/15	6	Lab	2/10/15		2/10/15	2/10/15	in 1/20/15
1064	Head	Donald				6/10/15	1	Lab	2/10/15		2/10/15	2/10/15	in 1/20/15
1065	Head	Donald				6/10/15	6	Lab	2/10/15		2/10/15	2/10/15	in 1/20/15
1066	Head	Donald				6/10/15	1	Lab	2/10/15		2/10/15	2/10/15	in 1/20/15
1067	Head	Donald				6/10/15	6	Lab	2/10/15		2/10/15	2/10/15	in 1/20/15
1068	Head	Donald				6/10/15	1	Lab	2/10/15		2/10/15	2/10/15	in 1/20/15
1069	Head	Donald				6/10/15	6	Lab	2/10/15		2/10/15	2/10/15	in 1/20/15
1070	Head	Donald				6/10/15	1	Lab	2/10/15		2/10/15	2/10/15	in 1/20/15

2. Maidstone Jail nominal register, August 1915 to February 1918
 By kind permission of Maidstone Museum, Maidstone Borough Council



3. Certificates of exemption from Military Service, and certificates of the National Registration Act, 1915
 By kind permission of Sheila Malloch, Historic Collections Officer, Kent History and Library Centre, and Kent History and Library Centre, H/U32/Z1-3



4. A letter from a Great Chart volume written by Private Douglas Skinner expressing his views of conscientious objection
Kent History and Library Centre, CH144/C11

White Feathers

Following the call to arms, some men were less than eager to enlist. Charles Penrose Fitzgerald, a retired admiral who lived in Folkestone, was angered by the number of men 'loafing' and 'idling' around town. He recruited 30 local young women to approach any man of military age not in uniform, to remind them that 'British soldiers are fighting across the Channel' and present them with a white feather which symbolised cowardice. The movement quickly spread throughout Britain and was supported by the Government as an aid to recruitment.

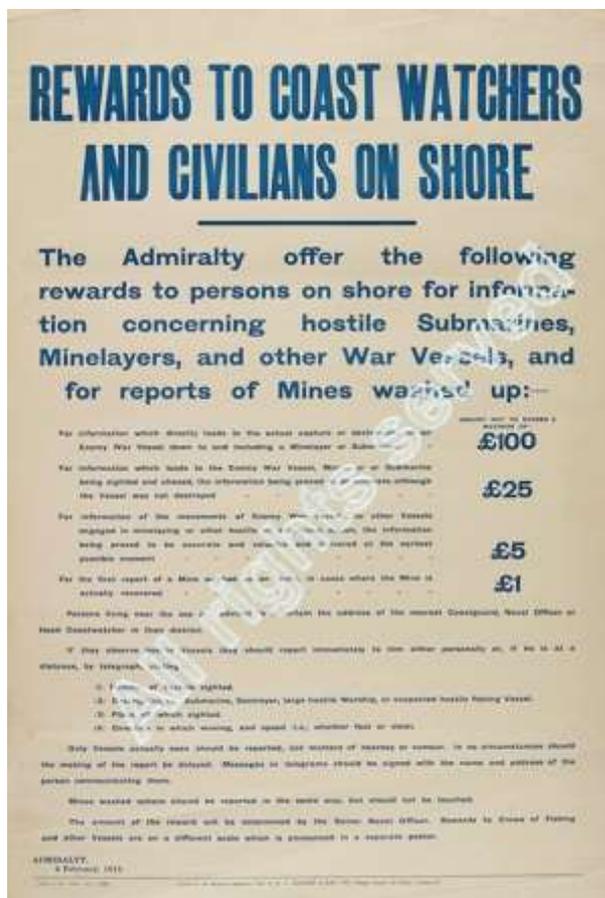
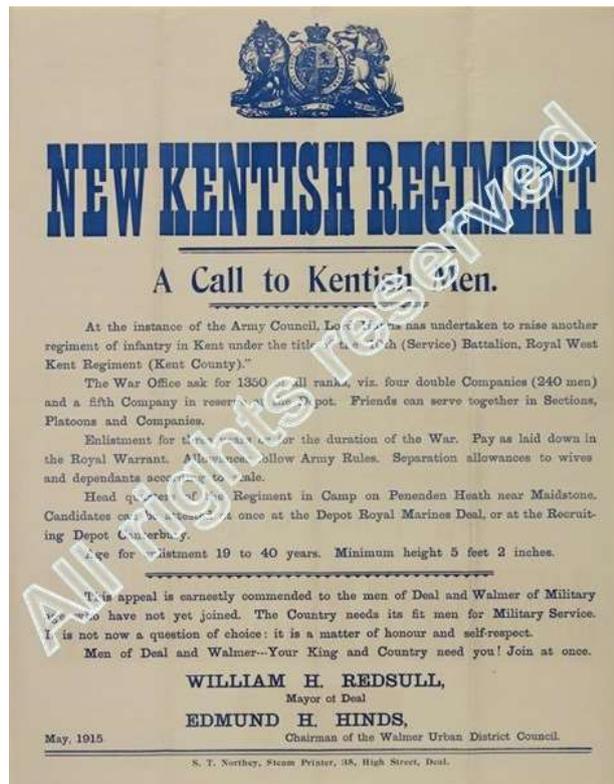
Nobody knows how many white feathers were handed out as many were presented to soldiers on leave in civilian clothing, or men deemed unfit for military service. To prevent this from happening, khaki armbands or a brass lapel badge bearing the words "on War Service" were issued.

First World War Posters

A wide range of posters were designed and printed during the First World War primarily as a means of recruiting men but also to encourage everyone to 'do their bit' and work for the war effort. Propaganda posters were needed because when Britain declared war in August 1914 there was only a small professional army - the British Expeditionary Force. As this was before the radio era the easiest and quickest way the Government could communicate with people was via posters which were displayed everywhere in public places.

The poster dated May 1915 advertising the formation of a new Kentish infantry regiment by Lord Harris of Belmont at Faversham is another example. To make his appeal to the men of Deal & Walmer more attractive the poster mentions that, 'friends can serve together in sections, platoons and companies' but finishes with the more menacing tone that 'it is not now a question of choice: it is a matter of honour and self respect'.

New Kentish Regiment ▶
 Kent History and Library Centre,
 UD/Wa/C78



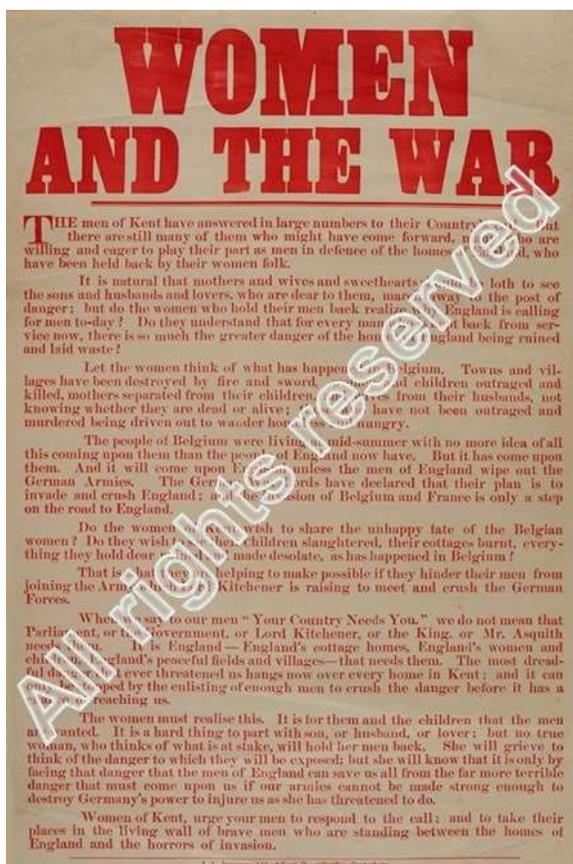
The Admiralty issued a series of posters to coastal regions such as Kent. Poster 2 entitled, Coast is dated February 1915 and offers rewards for information concerning hostile submarines, and other war vessels and for coast watchers to notify the authorities when any mines are washed up. The rewards offered are quite substantial and indicates how great the fear of invasion was.

Rewards to Coast Watchers
 Kent History and Library Centre,
 U2246/9/Z/19/44

During the war years many information posters were produced by the Government. The Public Warning poster, showing British and German aircraft and airships for identification purposes, was issued in response to the first Zeppelin airship attack that occurred on January 19, 1915.

German aircraft were characterised by wings that sloped back and if a German aircraft appeared people were advised to take shelter in the nearest house and advise the authorities of the direction of flight. Initially, 500 copies of this poster were printed but such was the demand a further 10,000 were distributed. Members of the public could also purchase this poster for themselves for 2d.

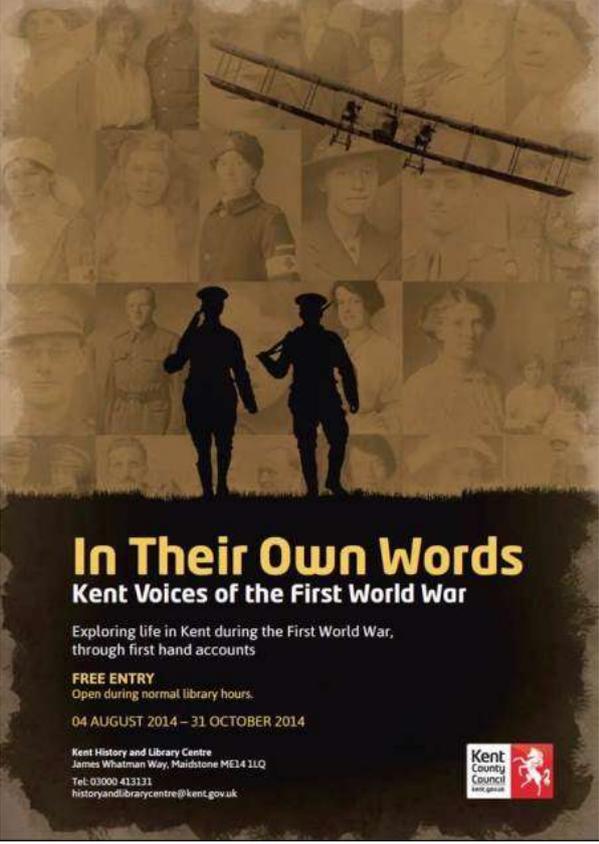
Public Warning, Airships ▶
 Kent History and Library Centre,
 U2246/9/Z/19/41



The Women and the War poster, printed in Canterbury in 1914, employs the tactic of fear and accuses women of preventing their men folk from enlisting. The poster blatantly plays on the fears of women by asking whether, 'the women of Kent wish to share the unhappy fate of Belgian women' and whether 'they wish to see their children slaughtered, their cottages burnt, everything they hold dear ruined and made desolate?'

Women and the War
 Kent History and Library Centre,
 U2246/9/Z/19/1

THIS IS A VIRTUAL VERSION OF
AN EXHIBITION THAT HAS BEEN
ON DISPLAY AT THE KENT
HISTORY AND LIBRARY CENTRE,
MAIDSTONE



In Their Own Words
Kent Voices of the First World War

Exploring life in Kent during the First World War,
through first hand accounts

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04 AUGUST 2014 – 31 OCTOBER 2014

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