

8. Week four of life in Neston in the Great War

The panic buying of food that happened in the first week of the war had ceased once people realised there really was no imminent food shortage. Prices had risen slightly but sugar was the only item that had become a lot more expensive. The price of butter had now dropped from 2 shillings per pound to 1s 3d within a week.

Neston Council soon followed Government orders and established a Relief Committee ready to deal with the poverty that was expected, (but never really came to pass.) The County Council did a good job in organising this National Relief Scheme and every town was supposed to make contributions which were collected nationally then doled out to the towns as necessary for cases of hardship caused specifically by the war. Unsurprisingly there was some confusion as to how it would work.

Neston's Relief Committee consisted of all the councillors and the various church leaders including one from the Salvation Army and the mission worker for the colliery, Miss Mathews. These were joined by the biggest employers in the area, builder John Fleming and John Smith of Neston Laundry, Mrs Pemberton for the Red Cross, Miss Lyon for Ladies Club and John Cottrell for the Ancient Shepherds (a male friendly society). Mr Price, manager of Neston's North and South Wales Bank was treasurer.

Recruiting was just beginning to get more intense, and Captain Field, from the Birkenhead recruitment centre, sent out a car to Neston on Thursday (20th) and managed to round up four men who were taken to Birkenhead to sign up.

The Volunteer Defence Company, preparing to defend the town in case of invasion, filled various positions in its ranks, with a commanding officer, (Major Grundy), adjutant, drill instructors and orderly room officer. It was made clear that no-one under the age of 35 could be involved, as it was not to be seen as an alternative to enlisting in the regular forces. By the end of August well over a hundred men had joined and drill nights (Fridays) were starting. It had no official recognition for several months, and the movement nationally never really found a useful niche.

The one-day single innings cricket match on the 22nd against Birkenhead Park was a draw. Neston was not playing well that season.

A day later, on the border between France and Belgium, the first major encounter of the war was taking place, the Battle of Mons, and vast numbers of British casualties ensued in the next few days in the course of a disastrous withdrawal. Long lists of the wounded and dead would soon start appearing back home. The war had started in earnest.