

LIFE ON THE HOME FRONT – MARLOW 1917/18

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The historian Arthur Marwick described 1917 as ‘the most equivocal year’ of the War, so that while the seeds of the Allies’ ultimate victory were then sown, this was at some considerable cost. By the spring of 1917, Germany’s relentless submarine campaign was hitting British shipping hard and impacting on the supply of essential food imports. At the outset of the War in 1914, Britain was dependent on imports for 80% of its wheat and 40% of its meat. Shortages of sugar, tea, butter, margarine, potatoes and meat led to lengthy food queues and prices rose. When a campaign of exhortation for voluntary restrictions in consumption failed, the Government gradually and reluctantly moved during the summer of 1917 towards introducing a framework for rationing.¹

The Marlow Remembers World War One Association (<http://marlowww1.org.uk/>) has been researching the impact of food shortages and rationing upon the town during 1917–18. Contemporary copies of the *South Bucks Free Press* provide a useful combination of reports of relevant official meetings, correspondence and other news items that allow a picture to emerge of the impact upon local residents, as well as broader aspects of life on this particular part of the Home Front during the final challenging two years of the War. These can be combined with archive material relating to the local Marlow Urban District Council and other public institutions in the town as well as the memoirs captured as part of a local oral history project.²

THE MARLOW FOOD CONTROL COMMITTEE

A key element in the Government’s programme for rationing was the creation of statutory Food Control Committees, based on existing local government structures. Accordingly, in August 1917 Marlow Urban District Council appointed a local Food Control Committee under the chairmanship of Alfred Davis, a journalist, J.P. and member of the

local conscription appeals tribunal.³ ‘It was pointed out that the Committee would have very important duties to carry out, and would start work almost immediately’. Its initial duties were defined as:

- To exercise certain powers in regard to the enforcement of the Food Controller’s Orders
- To register the retailers of various foodstuffs and to recommend necessary variations in the scale of retail prices as fixed by the Food Controller
- To continue and develop the campaign for food economy
- To administer a new scheme of sugar distribution.⁴

In some respects, the Committee served simply as an organising vehicle to ensure the successful application locally of national Government policy regarding food supply and distribution. For example, its initial primary focus was upon the local administration of a new national scheme for sugar distribution. Before the War, two-thirds of Britain’s sugar supply came in the form of beet sugar from Germany and Austria, from where supplies were now unsurprisingly no longer possible. Accordingly, sugar prices rose by 163% between 1914 and the end of 1916.⁵ Sugar supply and distribution was one of the earliest areas of concern nationally, with the Royal Commission for Sugar Supply placing a restriction on wholesale supplies as early as January 1917. In response, the local Marlow Co-op store began to restrict the supply of sugar, limiting it to one pound as part of a 3-shilling parcel for members only and with a maximum purchase of 6lbs.⁶

Following its establishment, the Marlow Food Control Committee handled the process for issuing cards to local householders to use to obtain sugar from local retailers. By January 1918, over 5,300 customers (including 1,000 from outside the Urban District) had been registered with local retailers.⁷

This set the precedent for an administrative process locally that was repeated on occa-



FIGURE 1 Alfred Davis J.P., Chairman of the Marlow Food Control Committee

sions during 1918 as the Government gradually extended the regulations concerning rationing to an ever-wider set of foods. By June, rationing in Marlow covered meat, bacon, sugar, butter, margarine, lard and tea.⁸ The changes in regulations necessitated the reissue of ration books and an efficient administrative response at the local level. To respond to the challenge, the Committee deployed a large force of volunteers operating out of temporary offices at the local Institute. In addition, the Committee diligently maintained a list of registered suppliers of meat, sugar, potatoes, bacon, ham, lard, fish and tea.⁹

LOCAL FOOD PRICES AND LOCAL RATIONING SCHEMES

It would be wrong, however, to view the activities of the Committee in purely administrative terms.

The regulations behind its creation gave it powers to be both proactive and interventionist and there is clear evidence that it responded to that opportunity.

From the outset, for example, it was active in setting maximum prices to be charged by local retailers for essential food items. In general, its decisions reflect the inflationary pressures on prices due to scarce supplies and the increased costs incurred by suppliers. This is well reflected in the movement in the price of milk as set out below.

In the space of one year, therefore, the maximum price for milk rose by 50%. The rates of increase in other foodstuffs were generally not so pronounced, but during the course of its operation the Committee regularly set prices for meat, butter, margarine and other essentials. In general, it seems to have been content to follow the lead set nationally, although it did complain in June 1918 that the price of bacon was too high for 'the poorer classes.'¹¹ Overall, it has been estimated that the cost of living for working class families rose during the War by between 67% and 81%. Wages doubled during the War and well-paid jobs were evident locally as the Wethered Brewery shifted some of its capacity to the manufacture of artillery shell cases.¹² However, overall increases in earnings often lagged well behind the most recent rise in the cost of living and households with many non-wage-earners were especially hard-hit.¹³

The Committee's primary motivation, repeated many times in contemporary documentation, was a concern for ensuring equal access to affordable food for all parts of the local community and it was for those reasons that it was also prepared to take, at times, a more decisive role and not wait for a national lead. From the early part of 1918, for example, it was monitoring the local food supply closely and actively considering the introduction of a local voluntary rationing scheme ahead of a possible national arrangement being introduced. It even considered the possibility of offering to buy tea chests from local households to reduce the risk of the hoarding of food.¹⁴ In particular, it was concerned about supplies of butter and margarine and, in February 1918, following consultation with local retailers, introduced a local rationing scheme with the aim of securing an equal supply of butter and margarine for every individual, based on the London and Home Counties ration of 4oz per

TABLE 1 Maximum prices for milk in Marlow, 1917/18¹⁰

<i>Date of Decision</i>	<i>Period for Prices</i>	<i>Price Details</i>
October 1917	Immediate	6d per quart delivered 3d per quart collected from the dairy
November 1917	Immediate	6½d per quart delivered 6d per quart sold over the counter
	December 1917 – March 1918	7d per quart delivered 6½d per quart sold over the counter
April 1918	May – September	6d per quart delivered 5½d per quart sold over the counter
June 1918	Until end of July	6d per quart
	August – September	7d per quart
September 1918	Until the end of November	8d per quart delivered 7½d per quart sold over the counter
	December 1918 – April 1919	9d per quart delivered 8½d per quart sold over the counter
October 1918	October – November 1918	8d per quart
	March – April 1919	7½d per quart sold over the counter
	December 1918 – February 1919	9d per quart 8½d per quart sold over the counter

person. Existing tickets used for sugar rationing were to be used by customers who were required, in the main, to obtain their supplies of butter and margarine from their sugar retailers.¹⁵

The Committee was also active in attempting to secure adequate supplies of butter and margarine for the town. In February, it was reported that, thanks to the energy of the Committee, a supply of half a ton of margarine was obtained for that week's distribution and that, although butter was in very short supply, a ration of 4oz was available for each person. It congratulated itself again in early March that the local rationing scheme for butter and margarine was running smoothly. This local scheme was replaced by national arrangements in April, but was reckoned by the Council to have been 'a great success' as prior to its establishment, supplies had been short and unevenly distributed.¹⁶ Even after the introduction of the national scheme, it seems that the local Committee was still prepared to take the initiative on occasions concerning the supply of butter and margarine, for in May 1918 it increased the weekly ration from 4oz to 5oz.¹⁷

It also intervened proactively concerning the rationing of tea. This was a particular area of

concern both nationally and locally during the final years of the War. In November 1917, the *South Bucks Free Press* reflected the advice of the national Food Controller that 'during the next few months there may possibly be a shortage of tea. It is one of the little inconveniences we must suffer on account of the war, but the difficulty can be overcome by drinking coffee instead of tea.' Notwithstanding such exhortations, the local Committee continued to be concerned about the supply of tea and, in March 1918, required retailers to register in anticipation of the introduction of a rationing scheme. In June, it was announced that the Ministry of Food would not introduce a national rationing scheme for tea, but the Committee decided to ration it in Marlow to 2oz per head from 14 July. The scheme remained in place until just after the armistice was signed in November when, under the instructions of the Ministry of Food, it was discontinued.¹⁸

With the armistice in November 1918, food controls were gradually lifted. For example, it was announced that during the week before Christmas, the meat ration would be doubled and that sales of turkeys, geese, ducks, fowls and game would not be restricted during the festive season.

However, the rationing of meat continued until November 1919, of butter until early 1920 and of sugar until November 1920, thus necessitating the continued operation of the Committee long after the War had finished.¹⁹

THE NATIONAL KITCHEN

The proactive nature of the local Food Control Committee in relation to the introduction of voluntary rationing schemes would position it comfortably within a group of what Marwick calls 'progressive local authorities', something that is reinforced by the decision it took in December 1917 to be the first in Buckinghamshire to start a communal kitchen.²⁰

The kitchen was opened on 11 January 1918 in a ceremony attended by senior figures on the local Urban District Council, Viscountess Devonport and the Lord-Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire. Viscount Devonport provided the premises at 55 High Street at half rent, the Council agreed to advance £50 for equipment expenses and the Marlow Gas Company carried out all fittings and lent stoves and a gas fire free of costs, with the Committee purchasing two gas boilers. A cook and kitchen maid were employed and a number of ladies enrolled as voluntary helpers. It was intended to open the kitchen from 12 noon until 2pm.²¹

The aims were clearly set out in a letter from the regional Food Commissioner that was read out at the opening ceremony. Such kitchens, he declared, 'conserve the food of the country, they improve the health of the children and workers, and besides being economical in food, reduce the cost of living and...encourage a better knowledge of the use and the way to cook vegetables, and generally improve the standard of cooking throughout the country.' To be successful, it was stressed that the kitchen should use the produce of local tradesmen and hopefully also that of allotment holders.²²

The emphasis was placed on the business nature of the enterprise and the desire that it would attract a broad cross-section of customers from across the town to avoid any impression that it was a charity. Evidently, the kitchen was an 'experiment', the first in the County that was expected to attract national interest and, if successful, would be followed by others in the district. It was made clear that the kitchen was expected to be self-supporting and



FIGURE 2 55 High Street, Marlow. Home to the National Kitchen in 1918.

that if it failed to gain sufficient support to achieve financial success, it would be closed down.²³

On the opening day, all 420 portions were sold out in half an hour. There were some initial teething difficulties in the operation of the kitchen due to limited cooking facilities, but it was reported that prospective customers 'desired to give the preference to others less fortunate than themselves in the matter of food'. These initial problems were soon overcome and the repeated exhortation was for the kitchen to be used by all parts of the community, in part because the margins were tight and therefore a high turnover was required to keep prices at the level that would be affordable to all.²⁴

At regular intervals during 1918, the *South Bucks Free Press* reported enthusiastically on the kitchen's success in terms of sales and the perception that it was successfully appealing to many classes of the local community. Before the end of February, the Ministry of Food was already referring enquiries from other small towns across the country to Marlow for particulars as to how a

kitchen could be made to work for a small urban area.²⁵

The kitchen's apparent continued success throughout the year can also in part be attributed to its ability to secure supplies of foods that were increasingly difficult for the general public to get hold of, for example currants.²⁶ Additionally in April, it was reported that 'an extra inducement to deal at the kitchen is the new rationing of gas and coal, which will compel economy in fuel for cooking.'²⁷ This was echoed in August when it was felt that the kitchen would prove a great benefit to the public during the winter months owing to the drastic rationing of fuel.²⁸ At the end of August, the takings at the kitchen were the highest since January, both in terms of sales of food over the counter and the number of meals served on the premises. The increased sales were attributed to the 'urgent necessity for householders to economise in fuel under the new rationing order.'²⁹ The concept of the national kitchen spread rapidly across the country such that, by August 1918, 623 were operating nationally.³⁰

It would appear, however, that the Marlow kitchen was never entirely a successful commercial venture, despite regularly breaking its own sales targets. It felt it necessary in December to apply to the Ministry of Food for an interest-free loan of £100 to meet the costs of the capital outlay. Evidently sales began to fall away quickly following the cessation of fighting in November 1918. In January 1919, as a result of continued financial losses, the kitchen was closed.³¹

LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION

The Committee, and the Council more generally, were both also active in co-ordinating a wide range of local efforts and initiatives to increase food production and educate the public on matters of food economy. This was part of a national drive to maximise food production to reduce the reliance on imports and minimise food waste.

In December 1916, local authorities were given powers to take over unoccupied land for allotments without the owner's consent. In the spring of 1917, common land, parks and playing fields across the country were being dug up to generate more land for production. The number of allotments nationally doubled to an estimated 1.3 million and, by

the end of the War, over 90,000 acres were under cultivation.³²

Locally, the Council in Marlow co-ordinated efforts to maintain the allotments of men on active service and acquired a meadow from Mr. L.J. Smith for local residents to use as temporary allotments, rent free, until the end of the War.³³ In February 1918, the Council approached the trustees of Mr Riley's will to permit the cultivation of a portion of Crown Meadow in the centre of town, rent free. The Trustees assented 'if a demand were shown, on payment of a quit rent, and the erection of a sheep-proof fence, and on the Council undertaking to re-sow with grass at the end of the tenancy.'³⁴ It is doubtful whether this substantial amount of land (now a public park in the centre of the town) was indeed used for cultivation during the War, as in April 1918 an inspection of allotments in the town reported positively on the extent of cultivation and argued against further land being acquired, given that some existing plots in Mill Road were vacant.³⁵

Increasing local food production was evidently seen as something to involve the whole community. In March 1917, following a relaxation in regulations concerning pig keeping, the Reverend Skinner applied to the Council for permission to rear pigs at the vicarage while, in the following year, lock-keepers on the Thames were using their gardens to grow vegetables and fruit as well as breeding poultry and rabbits.³⁶

School children responded positively to exhortations to help the national drive to increase food production. Already in 1915, pupils at Sir William Borlase's School had been maintaining private gardens. The Head Master reported to the Governors that 'a new feature this year has been the establishment of private gardens for some of the boys. I have this week presented two War Loan vouchers as prizes for two excellently kept gardens.'³⁷ In January 1918, the *South Bucks Free Press* reported with evident pride on the achievements of a class of 14 boys at Marlow C.E. Boys' School who, under the guidance of the assistant master Mr Ripley, had produced vegetables worth in excess of £13, equivalent to the rate of £150 per acre. The achievement was reckoned to be sufficiently worthy to attract the attention of the *Daily Chronicle* which commented that, 'in the way of the allotments it is doubtful whether anything better has been done'. In addition, between them,

the boys' and girls' schools collected over 3 tons of horse chestnuts.³⁸ In August of the same year, a Scout camp was held at nearby Frieth for the Bank Holiday weekend, with the Scouts spending Monday working the land.³⁹

Blackberry picking for the production of jam was an activity that generated particular interest and support from local children. In October 1917, during three half-holidays, the school children of Marlow collected one and a quarter tons of blackberries, receiving 1d per pound as a reward. References to blackberry picking are also to be found in the log books of Bovingdon Green Village School and Little Marlow Village School.⁴⁰ Without an adequate supply of sugar, it was of course impossible to produce jam, regardless of the volume of blackberries collected locally. Consequently in 1918, the Food Control Committee co-ordinated arrangements locally to ensure there was a sufficient supply of sugar for jam. Forms of application for sugar to make jam were made available for residents who grew their own fruit. An additional allowance above the general 10lbs of sugar was available for those who were prepared to sell the extra jam to the local Food Control Committee. Over 250 people applied for sugar for jam, with thirty-nine indicating they would use extra fruit to make jam for sale.⁴¹

One area of particular concern both nationally and locally was ensuring an adequate supply of potatoes. Efforts were made locally in 1917 to encourage allotment holders to grow more potatoes, but in March 1918 the *South Bucks Free Press* carried an announcement that, over the course of the preceding year, potato consumption in Buckinghamshire had exceeded production in the County by 7,800 tons. Consequently, the national food controllers were appealing to every man 'who has a farm, a garden, or an allotment, to plant more potatoes, and make the County self-supporting', a message reinforced by the local Council.⁴² The Council itself grew and sold potatoes, including to the National Kitchen. In April 1918, it was reported that the potato yield from the cemetery had been sold for £8, but Alfred Davis reiterated the importance of local residents increasing the potato crop 'to the fullest possible extent... This was a serious matter, and he hoped everyone would do their level best to grow more potatoes.'⁴³

As a means of improving the potato crop, considerable emphasis was placed both nationally and

locally on the importance of spraying the plants. In June 1917, Wooburn Horticultural Society reported a partial failure of the last year's potato crop due to blight, while in the same month the Hambleden Cottage Garden Society arranged for potato spraying to avoid a similar problem which was to spread across the Chilterns and Thames Valley area during the summer.⁴⁴

In Marlow, a sub-committee was set up with the power to purchase spraying machines and arrange for their use by local potato growers. By August 1917, two machines had been bought and were in constant use.⁴⁵ Similar efforts continued into the following year. In February 1918, the national Food Production Department issued a free booklet on 'Potato Disease (Blight) and its Prevention' which urged spraying of the crop.⁴⁶ In June, Mr W.V. Cousin wrote to the *South Bucks Free Press*, urging potato growers in Marlow to be ready to spray their potatoes early in July and advertising a demonstration to be given at Marlow Cottage Hospital. In the same month, the Council purchased an additional potato sprayer and arranged the spraying of its own crop in the summer.⁴⁷

Measures were also taken locally to educate the public both to improve the efficiency of local food production and also in food economy. For example, in January 1918 two lectures were given at the Marlow Institute, under the auspices of the Buckinghamshire County Education Committee, on 'soil preparation and manuring' and 'vegetable production'. In the following month, three lectures were given at the Drill Hall, Oxford Road, by Miss E.C. Shaw on Economical Cookery and Food Economy, while a further series of lectures on bee-keeping were given at the Institute. An additional series of lectures on food economy was given in April.⁴⁸

FOOD AND CRIME

The variety of food control regulations perhaps unsurprisingly resulted in transgressions that generated a number of prosecutions locally. In April 1917, John Bryant of Queens Road, Marlow was charged at the Borough Petty Sessions with selling potatoes at a price exceeding that specified by the Food Controller. He was fined 2s 6d plus costs of 6s 6d, clearly not a sufficient enough deterrent as he appeared before the court on a similar offence later in the month. In May, Thomas Durkin was

charged with moving a pig from Marlow Cattle Market without a licence to do so and was accordingly fined 10s. Similar cases were reported the following year. In July 1918, Alfred Fowler of Henley was found guilty of selling underweight bread in Hambleton and fined £2, while in October Dan Lovell, a farmer from Fingest, was charged under the Growing Grain Crops Act 1918 with unlawfully feeding cattle on growing oats.⁴⁹

It is difficult to establish whether the increasing scarcity of food resulted in more theft, but in May 1918, Emma Beaver and Florence Chivers of Dean Street, Marlow were each fined £1 for stealing vegetables valued at 10s from a field owned by William Chappell. A month later, three boys were found guilty of stealing 10lbs of bread from the temporary Army mess room at Spinfield.⁵⁰ In November 1917, William Anson was fined 10s for trespassing in woods in Little Marlow in search of game while in February 1918, the paper reported that Thomas Henry Hall, a youth of 17 originally from Gateshead, appeared before Marlow Police Court and pleaded guilty to stealing three fowl to the value of £1 17s 6d from the estate of Lord Sumner in Ibstone, where he had previously been employed. Hall was arrested by a police officer in plain clothes while trying to sell the stolen fowl in Beaconsfield. For his misdemeanours, he was sentenced to one month's imprisonment with hard labour.⁵¹

COAL, GAS AND PETROL

It was not just food shortages that caused concern. Coal shortages during the War led to sharp increases in prices to the extent that the Government decided to intervene and impose domestic price control.⁵²

The winter of 1917 was particularly cold and access to adequate heating became a major concern.⁵³ In November and December, the local Council in Marlow wrote to the District Supply Committee at Derby enclosing a statement of stocks in the town and asking for a delivery of emergency supplies. In January 1918, the Council was concerned about the very low level of coal stocks amongst local dealers. The District representative of the Coal Controller promised to send an emergency stock without delay. In February, it was reported that an emergency dispatch of 100 tons had been promised for Marlow: this was received by early March.⁵⁴

By April, the national position regarding coal supplies had deteriorated sufficiently for the Board of Trade to contact the Council asking that it appoint an officer to superintend local coal rationing. By June, the Council had established a Coal Supplies Committee which held discussions with local suppliers concerning the distribution within the town to avoid hoarding by residents and an adequate supply to 'the poorer classes'. The Committee also had powers to fix the prices of coal locally and accordingly established a range of maximum prices in the area to take effect on 21 June that were then increased very soon afterwards on two occasions as a result of a rise in pit prices. There were further increases in September.⁵⁵

The shortage of coal was remembered many years later by local residents who participated in an oral history project organised by the Marlow Society. Ivy Tagg recalled that 'Coal was scarce. We used to have a truck...and we used to go all up the Common and get firewood twice a day on the truck...We'd got no coal. We were hard up.' Florence Hall remembered that, despite collecting dead wood for heating, her family still 'put our coats round the doors at night to keep the draught out then took them up to put them on the bed to keep you warm, put them on in the morning to go to school.'⁵⁶

One of the knock-on effects of the increases in coal prices was the impact on the price of gas. Initially, the Marlow Gas Company was effective in containing any price increases. In fact, in February 1917, it reduced the price of gas by 2d per 1,000 cubic feet, so that the rate was only 2d higher than at 1914 in spite of a great rise in the price of coal. In October, it further reduced the price of gas to pre-War rates due to an increase in sales, despite the increase in coal and labour costs.⁵⁷ At its Annual General Meeting in March 1918, the Gas Company stressed how it had successfully reduced the price of gas to pre-war figures over the course of the preceding year due to the large increase in business. However, when combined with the increase in the cost of coal, this had inevitably eroded profits and it anticipated the need to increase prices in the near future, which it duly did with effect from 1 April. It remained keen, however, to emphasise the low cost of gas supply in the town compared with other areas. For example, it was reported that in Tring, with a population similar to Marlow and with the benefits

of easy supply as it was on the main railway line, prices were 1s per 1,000 cubic feet of gas higher.⁵⁸

In July, as a result of further increases in the price of coal and materials, the Gas Company reported that it was 'compelled' to revise the prices it charged for gas and coke. It continued to stress that the new prices compared favourably with other companies.⁵⁹ In April, it was also announced that rationing of gas would commence, with each customer's consumption of gas limited to five-sixths of the amount from the last year. Responsibility for operating the scheme was placed in the hands of the Marlow Gas Company.⁶⁰

One of the areas that generated a lot of local interest was that of public lighting. On the one hand, there were frequent complaints at Council meetings that the lighting in the town was inadequate, which was attributed to the shortage of labour for replacing mantles. This was first raised as a concern at the start of 1918 and resurfaced in the autumn when the lighting of public lamps recommenced. As the Gas Company continued to encounter difficulties in providing labour, the Council recommended that the lamps could be lit and extinguished either by special constables or by looking to get women to do the work.⁶¹

Local public services also came under strain directly as a result of rationing. In July 1918, the local Fire Brigade had purchased a motor to haul the fire engine, owing to the difficulty of acquiring horses. However, its application to the Petrol Control Committee for a supply of petrol had been refused, meaning that the Brigade would probably not now be able to attend fires outside the town. By September, the Council had been reassured that a permit for petrol for the engine would be issued.⁶²

The other concern with public lighting was to reduce its use to economise on gas consumption. In May 1918, the lighting of street lamps was discontinued for the summer. In September, the Council accepted a tender from the Great Marlow Gas Company for the provision of public lighting until March 1919, requiring both a reduction in the number of lamps to be lit and the hours when they would function.⁶³

With autumn and winter approaching, the national situation concerning coal supplies continued to cause concern and, in October, the Urban District Council, in line with other local authorities, was asked to consider measures to

secure economy in fuel and lighting. This generated a discussion locally within the Council and amongst traders about agreeing an early closing time during the winter months, but this idea was abandoned as no agreement could be reached.⁶⁴

FUEL AND LIGHTING ORDER

In July 1918, the Council received a copy of the new Household Fuel and Lighting Order which required it to appoint a special committee and appoint a local fuel overseer. In October, householders were reminded that forms of application for fuel and light ration needed to be lodged before the end of the month, while in December the Council announced restrictions on provision of domestic coal, coke and other solid fuels as a means of reducing overall demand. In future, no delivery of coal, coke or other solid fuel to a private house should exceed one ton in one month except with the consent of the local Fuel Overseer, Mr A.G. Hill. Additionally, no trollymen, hawkers or other retailer was to deliver more than 1cwt at a time to any private dwelling house.⁶⁵

Lighting restrictions were introduced from early on in the War specifically to reduce the risks associated with aerial bombing.⁶⁶ As elsewhere, enforcing compliance with Lighting Orders generated a regular flow of local court cases that were reported in the *South Bucks Free Press*. In November 1917, two people were accused of riding bikes through the town 'with an unshaded acetylene lamp'. Edith Moon of Holyport was fined 2s 6d but William Bayley was discharged with just a caution on account that he had only recently been discharged from the Army as unfit for duty and was ignorant of the regulations.⁶⁷ On 15 February 1918, three more people were fined for cycling without the proper lighting, resulting in fines varying between 2s 6d and 20s.⁶⁸ There were further cases the following month, with fines of 2s 6d being issued to Samuel Higgs of York Road, Kenneth Stevens of West Street and Albert Carter of South Place, while in April, Albert Stevens of Lane End was summoned for riding a bicycle with an unshaded lamp and was fined 5s. In September, Benjamin Carpenter of Hurley was charged with the same offence and, failing to appear at the court, was fined £1 in his absence.⁶⁹

The newspaper also reported breaches of regulations concerning the shading of lights at home.

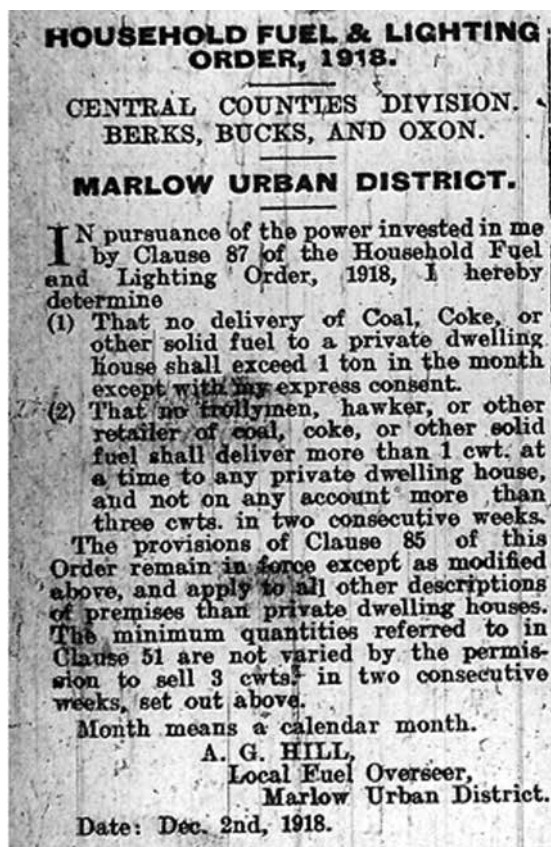


FIGURE 3 The Fuel and Lighting Order, 1918 as it appeared in the *South Bucks Free Press*.

This became a necessity in the light of Zeppelin raids on London and was remembered years later as the cause of some inconvenience for local families.⁷⁰ It also resulted in a number of cases before the courts. For example, in March 1918, Walter Robertson of Glade Road and Florence Reeves of the Quarry Laundry were both fined 10s for ‘not shading a light’ at their residences.⁷¹ In August 1918, Elsie Wetherman of Pheasants Hill, Hambleton was summoned for not shading the light at her home. She pleaded guilty, arguing however that she did not think it necessary to screen lights in the countryside. She was fined £1. The following month, Ada Marshall of Marlow was fined 10s for not shading her light at home and Harry Austin, of Hambleton, was fined 10s for not shading an acetylene gas lamp. In October, Helen Brooke of Remnantz, Marlow was fined 5s 6d for

not screening a light at the house at night. She had apparently gone to bed and forgotten to turn off a light in the kitchen which, with the blinds not pulled down, was visible to a local policeman.⁷²

Restrictions on the supply and also use of petrol, which was largely consumed only by a small proportion of the population who could afford cars and motorbikes, also generated a steady flow of alleged cases of non-compliance to the local courts. In August 1918, Carl Hein of Fawley was fined £5 for using a motor cycle without adequate lighting and a further £5 for unlawfully using petrol in Marlow in the previous month. At the same hearing of the Petty Sessions, Alfred Winstanley of the R.A.F. was fined £2 also for unlawfully using petrol in the town. In the following month, Frederick Painter, a farmer from Stokenchurch, was fined £2 for using petrol without being authorised to do so for driving a motor bike through Marlow.⁷³

AN ‘ALIEN INVASION’?

The restrictions on the supply of coal, gas and petrol generated the occasional complaint through the local newspaper, directed primarily at those who flouted the regulations. In particular, complaints were directed at the perceived flouting of restrictions by incomers to the town and surrounding area. Many of the incomers came to the town from London to escape bombing raids. The risks associated with air raids on the capital were apparent by the spring of 1917. The worst raid came on 13 June 1917, when 162 people were killed and 432 injured.⁷⁴

In February 1918, the *South Bucks Free Press* reported that the anti-aircraft guns defending London from German raids were heard ‘very plainly’ at Marlow. As a result of the raids, there was an influx of temporary residents in the town, and ‘Bisham Grange, Quarry Court, and other houses have been let for occupation forthwith’.⁷⁵ On 22 March, it was reported that, as a result of the influx from London, houses and apartments in Marlow were being ‘eagerly snapped up’ and that ‘prices showed a marked tendency in an upward direction.’ The town was now as full as at the height of the river season before the War. There was further concern that, ‘if the suggested closing of London theatres and restaurants at 10.30pm is brought into force, there will probably be a further rush to secure quarters in the riverside towns, for a great number of

theatrical and other people will be free to reside in the country.⁷⁶ Such was the level of the influx from London that the Great Western Railway Company restricted ticket sales to the riverside towns of Marlow, Maidenhead and Henley because of the serious congestion being caused at the ticket offices in Paddington and on the trains.⁷⁷

Other incomers in the spring of 1918 were refugees from Eastern Europe, in particular Russians fleeing from the recent Bolshevik revolution. In Maidenhead, it was reported that there had been a 'veritable invasion' of some 2,000 Russian and Polish refugees who were renting and buying houseboats as well as houses and apartments. This prompted an angry letter, originally to the Daily Mail, from Mr Eglington of Maidenhead who complained that the new fuel restrictions were regularly being ignored on the river Thames by 'hundreds of electricity-propelled craft, crammed for the most part with migratory aliens' who were driving at speed and indulging in an 'enormous wastage of essential coal.'⁷⁸

In Marlow, by contrast, the Council's primary concern was the risk to public health resulting from overcrowding. However, it reported in April to the Local Government Board that 'the influx of aliens owing to London air raids... have been much exaggerated.' The 38 Russian and 14 Greek refugees residing in the town were lodged in twelve different houses and there was deemed to be no risk to the public health, in part because, in the view of the Council, the refugees were 'not of the lowest class.'⁷⁹

The strict requirements for registering the arrival of 'aliens' in the area again generated a series of cases to the local courts for non-compliance. In April 1918, Joseph Polocki de Gama Machado and his wife were charged 5s each for failing to notify the authorities of their arrival in the district, as was their host George Sophronopoulos of Bovingdon Green. At the same hearing, Mrs Hards of the *Greyhound Hotel* in Marlow was fined 5s for not adequately recording and reporting the residency of a Russian guest. The following month, Mary Shaw of Lilliebrook was fined 10s for the same offence in relation to two Americans who stayed at her guest house. A similar batch of cases came before the next hearing of the Petty Sessions at the end of May, while in September, Rose Meakes of Moor Common was fined 5s for not keeping a register of

aliens. In almost all cases, the defendants unsuccessfully pleaded ignorance of the requirements of the legislation.⁸⁰

HOUSING SUPPLY AND HOUSING CONDITIONS

Concern about the sufficiency and adequacy of the country's housing stock had been a cause of concern before the War and was exacerbated by the conflict. By the end of the War, the housing shortage was estimated at some 600,000 dwellings.⁸¹ This crisis was apparent in Marlow, which had its own unique challenges. With the shortage of labour and disruption to supplies, the War impacted adversely upon the repair of housing in the town. While the Council intervened to improve matters through statutory notices, it was concerned that these were rarely complied with. The Council expressed concern at times about the state of housing in Cambridge Road, while in September 1918 an apparent subsidence threatened a house at the corner of Station Road and Mill Road.⁸² Problems with labour supply were also restricting the Council's ability to undertake and follow through on housing and sanitary inspections around the town.⁸³ At the end of October 1918, the local Medical Officer reported four cases of mild scarlet fever, resulting in the patients being removed to hospital and their houses disinfected. He also reported that he had visited a property in Portlands that was in a ruinous condition and dangerous, recommending that it should be immediately demolished.⁸⁴

The War exposed the poor quality of some of the housing stock in the town and the increasing need for new houses to be built. As early as August 1917, Marlow Urban District Council considered a letter from the Local Government Board concerning housing schemes after the War and promising Government assistance. In the following month, it determined that between 12 and 20 new houses would be required to replace houses which should be condemned for sanitary reasons.⁸⁵ In June 1918, the Council began to consider the preparation of a scheme for providing housing after the War, focused on erecting twenty houses for the 'working classes'. In November 1918, University College, Oxford wrote to the Council saying it would be willing to sell an enclosure of land in Dean Street for



FIGURE 4 Dean Street, Marlow, c.1910. One of the areas that caused concern about the quality of housing.

the construction of 20 houses. The Council was concerned that the price was too high and decided to advertise in the local paper, asking for the offer of sites. In December 1918, the Council decided to prepare a scheme for 45 houses and continued to look into possible sites.⁸⁶

The increase in demand for housing in Marlow had consequences for other organisations in the town. In June 1918, the Governors of Sir William Borlase's School were informed that school entries had temporarily increased because families were moving out of London to avoid air raids. This was doubtless a source of some relief to the school as its pupil roll, particularly for boarders, had decreased from the start of the War as some families were finding it hard to afford the fees. At the same time, however, this increase in students from outside meant that the school reduced from 12 to 6 the number of free scholars for 1918/19.⁸⁷

LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES

Part of the reason for the deterioration in some of the local housing stock was due to the shortage of labour caused by the War. A similar problem affected other local public services. For example, in March 1917, the local Council reported that it was unable to give proper attention to the roads and footpaths due to the lack of available labour and eventually they would require considerable sums to make good the neglect during the War period. In 1918, problems with labour supply were also put forward by the local Water Company as part of the reason for an irregular supply of water to the town. This was a source of irritation to local residents and concern for the Captain of the Fire Brigade, who was concerned about the implications in the case of a fire.⁸⁸

INFLUENZA

From about the end of June 1918, the country was afflicted by a huge outbreak of particularly virulent influenza. This first wave reached its crest in the second week in July, being followed soon after by another wave that peaked in early November. There was a further outbreak at the start of 1919. Total civilian deaths across the country exceeded 140,000.⁸⁹ The outbreak was first reported in Marlow in October, causing the closure of the town's schools and Sunday Schools. By November, the local medical officer reported that influenza 'had remained epidemic' in the town, resulting in 'several fatal cases.'⁹⁰ The impact of the flu epidemic was remembered many years later by local residents participating in an oral history project organised by the Marlow Society. Percy Plumridge recalled:

'I don't remember much about the end of the war other than the flu epidemic, which was dreadful. That was just before father came home. I had had it a long time previously, thought to be poisoning of some sort and then my brother and my mother went down with it at the same time and left me to look after them. Nobody would come in for fear of catching it because it was a dreadful epidemic – a tremendous number of fatalities...the Vicar came around and he said that a lot of people he had seen had turned black after they died and he thought it was the Black Death.'⁹¹

The range of sources therefore all highlight the challenges facing the town's population during the final two years of the War. They also serve to highlight the proactive nature of the local Council in intervening in the production and distribution of food to ensure adequate supplies across the local community. A similar approach to the history of other towns in Buckinghamshire will help to form a useful comparator to Marlow's experiences.

NOTES

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8. *SBFP*, 7 June 1918.
9. *SBFP*, 4 January 1918, 18 January 1918, 8 February 1918, 15 February 1918, 22 February 1918, 1 March 1918, 10 May 1918, 24 May 1918, 7 June 1918.
10. *SBFP*, 26 October 1917, 2 November 1917, 3 May 1918, 21 June 1918, 27 September 1918, 11 October 1918.
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14. *SBFP*, 4 January 1918, 25 January 1918, 8 February 1918.
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16. *SBFP*, 22 February 1918, 1 March 1918, 15 March 1918, 29 March 1918.
17. *SBFP*, 31 May 1918.
18. *SBFP*, 22 March 1918, 7 June 1918, 21 June 1918, 28 June 1918, 22 November 1918.
19. *SBFP*, 22 November 1918; Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (hereafter CBS), Archive Catalogue Reference DC17/1/33 'Marlow Urban District Council Finance Committee Minute Book, 1915–1926'; Marwick, 311.
20. Marwick, 234.
21. *SBFP*, 14 December 1917, 4 January 1918, 18 January 1918.
22. *SBFP*, 18 January 1918.
23. *SBFP*, 11 January 1918, 18 January 1918.
24. *SBFP*, 25 January 1918.
25. *SBFP*, 15 February 1918.
26. *SBFP*, 17 May 1918.

27. *SBFP*, 12 April 1918.
28. *SBFP*, 16 August 1918.
29. *SBFP*, 23 August 1918.
30. *SBFP*, 15 November 1918; Van Emden & Humphries, 282.
31. *SBFP*, 5 July 1918, 6 December 1918; CBS Archive Catalogue Reference DC17/1/33 ‘Marlow Urban District Council Finance Committee Minute Book, 1915–1926’.
32. Van Emden & Humphries, 213–215.
33. *SBFP*, 6 April 1917; CBS Archive Catalogue Reference DC17/1/10 (1915–1917) and DC17/1/11 (1917–1920) ‘Marlow Urban District Council Meeting Minute Book’.
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35. *SBFP*, 5 April 1918.
36. *SBFP*, 9 March 1917, 2 August 1918.
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54. *SBFP*, 6 November 1917, 4 December 1917, 4 January 1918, 8 February 1918, 8 March 1918.
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61. *SBFP*, 4 January 1918, 8 February 1918, 8 November 1918, 6 December 1918.
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