



WW1: The Home Front

Background

WW1 was the first British war which affected every member of society. Hundreds of thousands of men left to go fight. This meant that there was a shortage of labour in factories and on the fields. Eventually women and children were brought in to replace them. Blockades in the Atlantic meant that there were food shortages. The Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) enabled the government to control the lives of civilians. The government could take over any land it needed and could censor newspapers. Later restrictions included the introduction of British Summer Time to allow people more daylight for working, the watering down of beer and reductions in pub opening times.

What records are there and what information will they contain?

Local Government Records (Ref: GCC or C)

Within the County and District Councils various committees were set up to oversee the administration of agriculture, war relief and unemployment after the war. The following minute books might be of interest.

Type of record	Reference	Information
Council minutes	GCC/COU/1	Details of the County Council's work – day-to-day business and steps to implement Government directives/legislation. Can provide general information about what is going on in the county.
War Agriculture Committee and sub-committee minutes and papers, 1915-21	C/CWA/1-5	Specific information about changes introduced to maximise food production in the whole county. Includes detailed information about equipment and manpower, surveys of farmland, use of women workers, children and POWs
War Relief Executive and Unemployment & Distress committees minutes, 1914, 1919-21	C/CX/M2/2	Some information about applications for assistance immediately after the war

Parish Records (Ref: P)

Parish registers can include additional notes about local/national events and involvement in the war effort. Parish magazines are very eclectic and can include some very specific information about local reactions to/effects of the war and the church community's contribution to the war effort.

Minutes and correspondence of the Parish Councils are the most useful sources for information about the effects of the war on the community and the contribution of the civilian population. The survival rate varies and there is no consistency in the amount of information they include.

For more information see Research Guide 58: Parish Records.

Magistrate Court Records (Ref: PS)

The Petty Sessions heard cases brought under the Defence of the Realm Act and contraventions of the food rationing legislation – they generally don't include much specific information: just the details of the offence and sentence. More generally the court registers will provide information about the range of minor criminal offences. For more information see Research Guide 33: Petty Sessions.

School Records

School records often contain a lot of information about what is going on in the local community. Log books contain entries about what pupils and staff were doing. They contain entries about staff joining the army, pupils planting potatoes and picking berries, ex-pupils in the Army visiting the school, the shortage of coal and much more. For more information see Research Guide 9: School Records.

Newspapers

Newspapers contain a wealth of material regarding everyday life, national and local politics, war news, plus local events, local services, entertainment and sport. They are also useful for finding information on local deaths and reports on coroner's inquests. The war news included tends to have a positive slant in order to improve morale.

For a list of Gloucestershire Newspapers and where to find them please see the Newspaper Handlist on our website.

Personal Records

Gloucestershire Archives is lucky enough to hold a wide range of diaries and letters with both male and female authors ranging from housewives and school teachers to landed gentry and members of parliament.

When looking at these records it should be remembered that they can be biased. Exaggerations or understatements should be allowed for. Letters were generally written for the recipient and not for posterity. Diaries were often kept as a personal record and not meant for public use. Some personal records may make little or no mention of the situation. Even if the effects of the war are not directly mentioned authors of letters and diaries still bear witness to history.

How to Find the Records

To view a list of records in these collections please use our online catalogue, which can be found on our website at: www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives. Click on the link which says "online catalogue". Select the "Search the Archives Only" option and type the reference given above into the Finding Ref field. Click "search" and then "overview of records", this will bring up a list of items under that reference. Click on the blue number on the left hand side to view more information about each item.

Other items such as diaries and letters can be found by conducting a search using the Any Text field. You can sort your results by clicking on the "Year" column header.

Further Reading

More detailed guides about research WW1 can be found at <http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/article/115324/Resources-for-researching-WW1>.