



## Meriden's First World War Centenary Commemoration 2014-2018

### Food in Edwardian England



There were vast differences between rich and poor. The Bull's Head, Meriden offered celebratory meals for groups and societies. The Odd Fellows had an annual dinner. Food was a sign of social status. Malnutrition was commonplace. A family at Cornets End lost 5 babies from malnutrition shortly before and during the Great War. 150:1000 died under the age of 5. A labourer earned perhaps only 19/6d per week. His wife needed to do casual work and children contributed as soon as they were old enough.

For the coronation of George V in 1911, there was a celebration in the village with details of the special meal served to the paupers in the workhouse. Lamb with mint sauce, potatoes and another vegetable, fruit and custard. A generous benefactor gave eggs for breakfast there for everyone. The workhouse children joined the village children at the school for a special tea after all the older villagers over 60 years had a cooked lunch there. No details of the food served.

Families fostering children from the workhouse received 4/- a week a greater amount per child allowed than for a similar poor family.

Labourers' typical meals: The men had more nourishing food like meat and cheese because they needed to keep up their strength for heavy work in Meriden as farm labourers. Breakfast: father only bacon; others porridge with water and brown sugar perhaps a small amount of milk.

During the week: Main meal on Sunday was a roast joint often cheap beef with a piece of fat for rendering down for dripping plus Yorkshire pudding to decrease amount of meat eaten, vegetables in season, home grown in the country. Cheapest meat was mutton (lamb). Mondays Tuesdays: Meat from Sunday roast and bubble and squeak, pickles; Wednesdays: stew and suet dumplings; Thursday, Friday Saturday: rissoles, suet dough lining a basin with meat steamed, pigs' fry or other offal, tripe and onions, vegetable soup flavoured with meat bones. Puddings: rice pudding made with milk and a dab of butter and sugar.

Evening: Tea, bread and jam, dripping, perhaps a slice of cake. Bed time: cocoa, bread and cheese, dripping and toast made over the fire using a toasting fork. Potatoes and bacon and fish like kippers or jellied eels; whelks; fish and chips or pies in the towns where specialist shops catered for them.

Picnics for higher classes only: Sandwiches, cakes, pate, cheese.

#### Rationing from January 1918:

Panic buying hit the poor. Black market food if you were rich enough. My grandfather bought fresh eggs at 6/- for half a dozen! Government established a Ministry of Food only a few items rationed like sugar, meat, butter. More added later. Extra acres cultivated for the nation but allotments increased too especially in the suburbs though they were an older idea in some areas like Northamptonshire. Country gardens were often generous attached to farm cottages and cultivated for growing vegetables.