

Carol Clammer and Richard Clammer, *Beachley and the First World War: the story of a shipyard and the transformation of a rural parish* (Lydney, Lightmoor Press/Tidenham Historical Group 2017). 192 pp., many b/w ill. Hardback, £25.00 [ISBN: 9781911038269].

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The centenary of the cessation of the First World War, and subsequent peace treaties, has very much focused the mind of the British public and raised national awareness of the conflict. It is often all too easy to focus attention on individual battles and distant theatres of war but it is crucial that we continue to explore the impact of conflict on the home front, and in particular on those that were effected by indirect enemy action. This work does so most admirably.

The First World War required the production of military materiel on an unprecedented scale and the ability to both manufacture and supply was critical to British military effectiveness in the field. Consequently, rural communities many miles from front line action found that the demand for wartime hardware impacted upon their lives in ways that they could never have imagined at the outbreak of the conflict.

Construction of airfields throughout the British countryside for the purposes of pilot training are often cited as having the most significant impact on rural life both in terms of visual pollution, associated noise pollution, and the terrifyingly exciting introduction of aerial technology to the populace. In Shropshire, for example, the Royal Flying Corps airfield at Shawbury was equipped with electricity long before the neighbouring village received connection to the mains. However, despite the inconvenience of airfield construction to the local populace they were ultimately allowed to remain in their homes and the land was swiftly returned to agriculture once the need for military flying has creased post-war. However, the government intervention at Beachley had a rather more significant, long-lasting and dramatic effect.

Even today it is difficult to conceive that the fate of the Beachley Peninsular was intrinsically linked to German U-Boat activity, so one can only imagine how the news of evacuation was received by the local residents. However, this was an evacuation indirectly necessitated by the rate of loss of Allied Merchant Shipping inflicted by German U-Boats and was instigated by the British government who were so concerned that they developed a National Shipyards programme to counter the threat.

Under the Defence of the Realm Act the government effectively took control of industry and created two National Shipyards on the River Wye. The first of these, National Shipyard No.1, amalgamated the established yard at Chepstow and was operational in August 1917. The following month letters of eviction were received by residents on the opposite bank of the river so that the construction of National Shipyard, and associated railway, could commence at Beachley. Despite the vast capital investment and associated disruption, the

armistice was signed long before any ships were completed but the impact upon the landscape was irreversible.

Carol and Richard Clammer have produced a publication that not only encapsulates the impact that demands of industrialised warfare can have on home-front communities, but have also put the development into a much broader social context. The publication is well researched and utilises a wealth of primary sources that greatly enhance the experience for the reader. The illustrations are genuinely outstanding and curated in a method that allows for the exploration of not only the construction of the military installation and its associated infrastructure but also the unique social history of a community irreversibly altered by a non-violent military intervention.

One of the most important achievements of the work is that it avoids the temptation to simply cease the investigation once the disposal of surplus machinery and materials commenced in 1919. The inevitable series of compensation claims and associated valuations that followed throughout the 1920s make most interesting reading and are a consequence of War Office strategy that are often overlooked. This remained all the more poignant for those who had been evicted in September 1917.

However, with any large scale military infrastructure investment there is often a repurposing of the facility and recycling of built infrastructure. At Bleachley this resulted in the opening of the Central Training School for Boys which eventually closed as the Army Apprentices College in 1994. Bleachley's association with the military continued through the twentieth century. Firstly, the camp at Sedbury was further expanded to house the additional military personnel required for Boy's Technical School. During the Second World War the site was once again in use as a prisoner of war camp, although they were mainly employed in agricultural work unlike their First World War comrades who were directly involved in construction of the National Shipyard some 25 years previously.

The author's evaluation and guide to the surviving structures and installations in the landscape is a valuable resource for both historians and archaeologists alike and reminds us of the importance of preserving and recording such military archaeology before we lose them to future development and pressures of planning. The recent announcement that Bleachley Barracks has been designated for closure in 2027 only strengthens the importance of this work in documenting the relationship between the local community and the military.

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