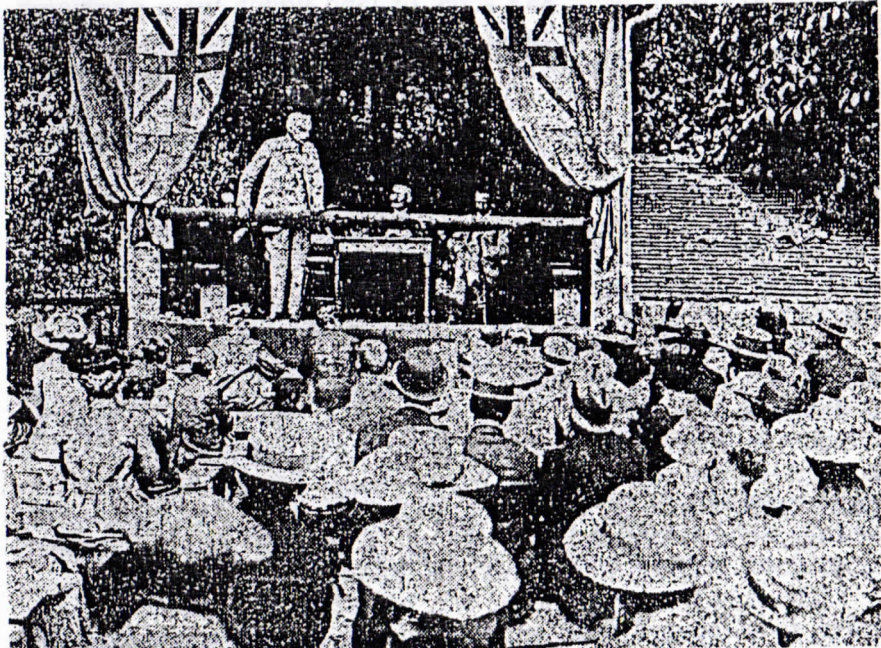


FOOD SUPPLIES IN WORLD WAR I THE EAST BARNET EXAMPLE Gillian Gear MA



The opening ceremony of the East Barnet Pig Farm
May 1918

Enemy attacks on the food convoys crossing the Atlantic during the First World War meant food shortages at home. As a result each district had to take steps to encourage increased food production and more efficient use of what food was available.

This bulletin looks at what was happening in the area managed by the East Barnet Valley Urban District Council (E.B.V.U.D.C.), an area of some 2,366 acres, with a population in 1911 of 12,281.(1) The district included the old village of East Barnet as well as the Victorian suburb of New Barnet, which had developed following the opening of the Great Northern Railway in 1850.

By 1914 New Barnet was largely built up, with just a few areas of open land remaining. The area of old East Barnet had undergone some development but was of a much more rural nature. Several large houses remained with their country parks, some of which had farms attached to them. There were also three independent farms as well as a farm run by a boys' industrial school.

In 1915 there were 893 acres of land which were producing crops. Most of the land under cultivation was growing permanent grass; 428 acres for mowing and 414 acres for grazing. There were some nine acres of clover, sixteen acres of lucerne, nine of cabbage, kale and savoys, three of cauliflower, twelve of mangolds and two of potatoes. There were also between thirteen and twenty five acres of orchards. (2)

Many of the local farms had livestock. The Ministry of Agriculture's returns for 1915 showed that there were 82 cows in milk, 173 other cattle, 221 pigs and 27 sheep, together with 29 horses for agricultural use and 38 other horses. (3)

There was little industry in the area, although John Dales had had a factory built in 1902, to the south of East Barnet in the Brunswick Park area. There was a Gas and Water Company, which ran from premises in Lytton Road, New Barnet and a council-owned sewage farm (where Osidge Library is now) which grew crops for sale at Barnet Market as well as disposing of sewage, and was on land bought from the Great Northern Cemetery Company in the previous century.

The first two years of the war had seen few measures being taken to safeguard food supplies but as the war continued and imports reduced concern was beginning to grow. The local newspaper published letters in both February and March of 1916 on the fraught question of "Whether pigs should be permitted on the local allotments?". The council debated the matter and agreed that under the special circumstances of wartime, they could be permitted. By the winter of 1916 the local press reflected growing public opinion that all available land should be brought into cultivation and an editorial in December 1916 urged the use of vacant land. (4)

ALLOTMENTS

The E.B.V.U.D.C. decided on the 18 December 1916, following the passing of the government's **Cultivation of Lands**

Order 1916, to set up a committee to acquire land for use as allotments by local residents. Seven councillors attended the first meeting on 22 December 1916 and they co-opted four additional men to represent the four local council wards. The committee had 3,000 handbills printed and circulated, which told the public of its intention to acquire land for use as allotments. The idea was received enthusiastically and by the 5 January 1917 the committee had received 140 applications from prospective users of the land and 36 allotments had been provided. By 12 January the number of applicants had grown to 177 and 105 allotments had been created.

The committee was allowed to supply seed potatoes to the allotment holders but in January it raised the question with the food controller as to whether they could also supply other people who were growing produce outside the scheme. In January 1917 the committee ordered two tons of seed potatoes in addition to that ordered by allotment holders from the Hertford War Agricultural Committee. They also bought six tons of lime in January from the Portland Cement Company, which they resold at 1/9d a sack: they also sold soot. In May 1917 it was decided to buy two potato sprayers, also that water should be supplied in dry weather. In April 1918 the committee stopped selling potatoes, lime and soot and it was suggested in November 1918 that as there were so many holders they should form an association to do this themselves.

Security of the allotments was to be covered by putting up warning notices stating that it was an offence to damage or trespass on the allotments, although the committee was not prepared to put up fences. The Board of Agriculture sent a circular letter in February 1917 announcing penalties for damage to land and produce. (In 1918 there was a local prosecution for trespass which resulted in a conviction and fine of £3.)

In January 1917 the committee asked the Board of Agriculture if they would extend the time allowed for the use of land until it was needed for building or other exceptional purposes. After at first refusing the Ministry did extend the right to tenancy to the 31 December 1918 and then in November it was further extended to the end of 1920, because there were many applications for allotments from demobbed soldiers.

The Local Government Board recommended in February 1917 that council land should also be ploughed up but the local council thought that it was too late to cultivate its land except for Leg of Mutton Field in Long Street (Longmore Avenue).

By November 1918 the area of land which was let was thirty three and three-quarter acres and rents were £32.12.8d per annum. The committee had sold 13 tons, 92 lbs of seed potatoes, 23 tons of lime and 101 sacks of soot, during the previous year. They had been left with a large quantity of spraying material because allotment holders had not carried out spraying to any great extent.

In December 1919 land had to be reclaimed by its owners. Under the DORA Acquisition of Land Act allotment holders were entitled to retain land for two years after the end of the war. At least one local resident held land in Park Road for a further eighteen years, since the legal owner could not be traced. (5) Recreational land could be used for two years after the end of the war under the Land Settlement (Facilities) Act 1919.

The committee minute book records notice to quit being given to many allotment holders during the following year. Holders were allowed to claim compensation for lost produce and amounts such as Mr. H. Gamester's £2.14.6d. and Mr. Hunt's claim for £1.15s.6d. were made.

In December 1921 the East Barnet Allotment Holders Association's War Allotments sub-committee met. It is minuted in November 1922 that it is "Not necessary to give formal notice to quit to plot holders due to give up their war allotments on 25.3.1923". The Association asked the Council to provide permanent allotments for the district under the new Allotment Act and to retain as much land as was possible which remained from the wartime allocations. The Association were particularly concerned about the needs of the 105 plot holders on the Leg of Mutton Field who were under notice to quit on 25 March 1923.(6)

FOOD CONTROL/RATIONING

As well as the production of more food there were local provisions to assist in the distribution of food. A Food Committee was appointed on the 17 August 1917 with five local councillors and five local people. Four of the five councillors were also on the allotment committee. An executive officer (E.O.) Mr. A.T. Wilkinson was appointed at a salary of £2 per week. (He was replaced in December 1917 by Mr. J.A. Kippen). The committee met at the offices of the Sanitary, Housing and Building inspector every Friday evening. Two lady clerks were appointed, one senior and one junior at a wage of £1 and 10/- respectively and advertisements were placed in the local paper. A Mrs. Tribe was

appointed senior clerk, starting on the 10 September 1917 and J.M. Smith was appointed junior clerk.

The committee had problems deciding whether some apple pies and meat pies made by Mrs. Randall, a baker in Victoria Road, should be regarded as short pastry goods and therefore not **prohibited goods**. Towards the end of 1918 the committee asked if it was allowed to fill vessels from milk churns in the street, to which the Ministry replied "they had no knowledge of any prohibition".

Applications from retailers were made asking for certificates registering them as sugar retailers, in September 1917. Complaints about the unfair distribution of sugar were greeted with the reply in the local press "When the sugar cards come into operation in January, distribution should be on fairer lines".(7)

The committee dealt with infringements of orders issued by the Ministry and where appropriate ordered that the sugar should be returned to the supplier. The committee had to decide whether cases should go to court or be dealt with by the E.O. A case of over-charging for meat was brought to the committee's attention; the error was rectified and the tradesman censured.(8)

The committee did try to work with local retailers and a deputation of local butchers was received on 14 September 1917. This followed the introduction of the Meat (Maximum Prices) Order 1917. The butchers deputation submitted a price list of meat and prices were agreed by the committee for imported and home killed meat. Prices for meat seem to have been agreed fortnightly and "delivered to the butchers" who could protest but whose protests did not necessarily make the committee alter the prices. In November 1917 a deputation of butchers asked that the price of wing ribs be raised from 1/6d to 1/7d. The committee agreed to bear it in mind when prices were set on 24 November.

The E.O. was authorised in November 1917 to purchase milk over the counter from Manor Farm Dairy to see if milk was being sold in accordance with the Committee's resolution at 1d per quart less than the price as which it was delivered to the house. If the price was found to be higher he was instructed to apply to the council for authority to take immediate proceedings and that should this happen Mr. Poole should be instructed to prosecute.

However, in December 1917 a letter was received from the joint managing director of the dairy Mr. W.G. Lane pointing out that the dairy had a special licence from the Ministry of Food to sell milk over the counter in Barnet at 1/2d per quart above the

price fixed by the Committee (7 1/2d per quart). The committee expressed their annoyance that the Ministry had not kept them informed and wrote a letter of protest, complaining that they felt preferential treatment was being given to one trade and wrote to Lord Rhondda asking for an interview.

From time to time circulars were received from the Ministry regarding matters of food control policy. Leaflets were received in December 1917 relating to the use of potatoes in bread and the committee agreed to ask local bakers what they intended to do. It was agreed that 20lbs of loaves containing potatoes should be baked on 17 January 1918 by Mr. Lee and Mr. Smith, and the E.O. of Stoke Newington was to be asked to supply one of the loaves baked in his district to Lord Rhondda's proportions, to compare.

Local G.P.s applied to the Committee for permission for white bread to be supplied to people on medical grounds. (A strange request in view of modern ideas.) In November 1917 Dr. Elam of New Barnet asked for the supply of white bread to Mr. Alfred Hostock of Bulwer Road on account of his illness. In December the Divisional Food Commissioners decided, despite protests from the committee, that future applications for white bread for invalids should be made to the Scientific Adviser at the Ministry of Food, at Palace Chambers, Westminster.

A new Requisition Order for margarine was received in December 1917 and as a result local shopkeepers were invited to a special meeting on 1 January 1918 regarding the extension of the ticket system regarding rationing. The committee agreed to ask E.O.s from other areas for copies of their schemes.

Following a deputation by a Miss Ellis, Mr. Furneau and a Mr. Dolling, it was agreed in December 1917 that a system of rationing be adopted, on a coupon system for tea, butter and margarine. At this time recipes and advice were appearing in the local press suggesting substitutes for dried fruit and how to use sugar.(9) In November 1917 Mr. Barnard, chairman of the Herts. War Agricultural Committee spoke on the urgency of the food problem and the need for more land to be brought into use, for local farmers.(10) In December a talk was given by Sir Arthur Yapp, national secretary of the YMCA who led a campaign against waste.(11)

At the January meeting with the local grocers it was agreed to operate a card system rather than a coupon system but the Ministry supplied details of the scheme used in London and the Home Counties and East Barnet's own scheme was dropped in favour of

that scheme. Meat was becoming increasingly scarce and a notice was put in the Barnet Press in January warning that meat supplies were only 25% of those available in October.

In the autumn of 1918 considerable difficulties were experienced in getting sugar for home jam making. The committee agreed to write to the Ministry objecting to the regulation which stopped the use of sugar allocated for jam for making blackberry jam. The committee also recorded that "It was decided that owing to the many changes made by the Ministry in the scheme for the distribution of sugar for jam, that no useful purpose would be served in making an inspection of the gardens or the fruit preserved". A small touch of rebellion perhaps.

In October 1918 new ration books were issued and it was made easier for some people to change retailers. There were protests during the autumn of delays in the delivery of jam and the shortage of cheese, dried fruit and milk. Efforts were being made to get butchers voluntarily to label their meat and the chairman of the local butchers committee, Mr. Daniels, agreed to do so.

The following autumn a new rationing scheme was introduced which involved registering with retailers who sent in returns. Despite appeals in the local press many people failed to register within the specified time.

The E.B.V.U.D.C. Food Control Committee continued with its work after the war, until June 1920 when a letter of thanks was received for their work from the Council and a vote of thanks was proposed to the chairman.(12)

MUNICIPAL PIGGERIES

The suggestion of setting up a municipal pig farm was first raised by the Local Food Control Committee in March 1918. It was agreed to look into the matter and a committee of five people was appointed. The chairman of this committee was Cllr. Eli Frusher, reputed to be "one of the best-known pig experts in North London", who ran his own pig farm at Folly Farm in New Barnet and had a butchers shop in East Barnet Road.(13)

The committee agreed that a pig farm should be established and land was rented on Cat Hill at a cost of £52 p.a. There was room for 100 pigs, with a paddock and a building suitable for breeding sows. Circulars were sent to local residents asking them to save their household waste for the pigs and about 450 people agreed. In July 1918 enough waste was being collected to feed

twelve breeding sows.

A farm manager was paid £2 per week plus 10% of any profit and a boy was taken on. The council put up £1,000 as working capital and further money was lent which was to be repaid as the pigs were sold. The farm was opened in May 1918 by Mr. H.S. Cautley MP, Director of Pig Production for the Board of Agriculture. It ran for nearly two years and was sold as a going concern and the stock was auctioned on 31 March 1920 with a final profit of £64.10s.11d.

The success of the pig farm was applauded in the **Municipal Journal** of 2 July 1920 which said "it is believed to be the only one which, after not only producing food during a critical period, is also able to show a profit at the close of the century". Obviously it was a highly successful enterprise.(14)

The effects of the First World War on the local population seem to have been considerable. It brought out an enterprising spirit in coping with the situation. Researching the records relating to food controls has brought to light local personalities and places which deserve to be included in the recorded history of the area.

(This subject is covered in greater detail in a thesis written in 1986 by Gillian Gear a copy of which is available at the Museum.)

REFERENCES:

- (1) 1911 Census
- (2) B. King *Study of the Geographical Development of East Barnet* quoting Ministry of Agriculture figures.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) Barnet Press 26.2.1916
- (5) Ibid. 23.12.1916
- (6) The late Mr. Richardson, Welbeck Road
- (7) All material for this section is taken from the Minute Books of the Agricultural Committee unless otherwise specifically stated
- (8) Barnet Press 17.11.1917 p.5
- (9) Ibid. 22.12.1917
- (10) Ibid.
- (11) Ibid 8.12.1917
- (12) All material for this section is taken from the Food Control Committee Minute Book unless otherwise specifically stated.
- (13) *Municipal Journal* 12.7.1918
- (14) Ibid 2.7.1920

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