



Belgian Refugees

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Extracts from local papers that mention Belgian refugees in the area around Okehampton during the WWI. There were many other references to refugees in other parts of Devon.

Devon & Exeter Gazette:

1914:

3.11. '...At the end of last week a further 20 Belgian refugees arrived at Bideford, making a total of 45, who are now being maintained by the town and its immediate district.'.... 'Exeter has now cared for some 800 Belgian refugees, and while many of them have been placed in homes in the neighbourhood, a considerable number are still housed in Exeter, and are being most hospitably treated.'

3.11; 'Chagford and Drewsteignton people are to be congratulated on the success of their efforts in providing and equipping a small Convalescent Home (registered under War Office and Admiralty) for taking wounded soldiers or sailors who are able to leave hospitals, but still require care. The cottage, which has been lent by Mr Templer, of Furlong, is now occupied by six wounded Belgian soldiers.... Two of the patients hope soon to be strong enough to return to the front, but the rest have been too badly wounded to serve again in the battlefield....'

13.11; 'a family of refugees has taken up residence in the [Bridestowe] parish. The parishioners have been asked for a monthly subscription for their maintenance, and a very liberal response has been received....'

20.11; 'At the [Okehampton] Drill Hall an enjoyable entertainment has been given in aid of the Belgian Relief Fund. There was a crowded house. The concert realised over £13' '.. The local committee who are looking after the needs of the 27 Belgian refugees in the town [Lyme Regis] estimate that a sum of £200 is needed for their maintenance during the next six months.'

Western Times:

1914:

21.10; 'A well-attended public meeting was held in the Town Hall, Okehampton, on Monday evening, to consider the question of providing accommodation for one or more families of Belgian refugees. The Mayor (General Holley) presided, and said Okehampton should do its share for this most deserving cause, and to the citizens to whom we all owed so much. At least ten families should be accommodated, and this could easily be done if all set to work, and gave it their whole-hearted support. It was therefore resolved that Okehampton should take some refugees, and that a committee be appointed to look after them. A committee of 16 ladies and gentlemen was appointed. Weekly subscriptions were solicited, and responses to the amount of £4 10s per week was the result of the evening's meeting, together with offers of furniture, bedding, etc, on loan. A vote of thanks was accorded the Mayor for presiding, and the meeting closed with the singing of 'God Save the King.'

27.11; 'Sampford Courtenay – a party of seven Belgians [refugees] arrived here on Friday.'

4.12; 'Two families of refugees reached Hatherleigh on Thursday evening ...the condition of the party on arrival ...was a pathetic sight, and brought home to those who witnessed it the horrors of war and the sad plight of Belgium in a way that it has not been previously realized in Hatherleigh.'

11.12; 'Drewsteignton; Mrs W Cooper, of Great Tree, has kindly sent a cheque for £2 to Mr W Bevens towards the support of the Belgian refugees in the parish

1915:

26.1; 'A meeting of the general subscribers to the Okehampton Belgian Refugee Fund has been called by the Secretary of the Committee for Tuesday evening. The total number of refugees now provided for at Okehampton is 34, and an average sum of £11 7s per week is being subscribed locally.'

29.1; 'Belgian Refugee Meeting in Okehampton; A sum of £172 11s 2d had been subscribed to the local Belgian Refugee Fund, average weekly subscriptions amounting to £11 9s. Mr W Rowse enquired whether the Committee were quite satisfied with the conduct of the people in their care. General Holley replied that the Belgians were not English people, and had a very different mode of living. There had been a great deal of gossip in the town, but it would be much better if people would bring any complaints which they might have to make to the Committee. The remarks which had been passed were unfounded and unjust.'



23.2; 'At Bridestowe the village had been decorated by the men of the Oxford Bucks Res who are stationed in the place, and the Belgian flag was flown with the Union Jack by the refugees resident here...

20.4; 'a wounded Belgian soldier is working in the canteen at the Okehampton artillery camp.'

24.8; 'The three cottages at Brightley, taken by the Okehampton Belgian Relief Committee for the fourteen refugees, are being given up, as the visitors, tiring of country life, have decided to return to Exeter.'

28.9; 'On Friday evening a Belgian refugee boy named Lemaitre, living at Brixham, had a very narrow escape from drowning in Brixham Inner Harbour, being rescued just in time by two Ramsgate fishermen, Messrs J Crust, third hand of the 'W E', and H Solley, the third hand of the 'Spitfire'.

1916:

7.1; Okehampton Town Clerk (Mr J J Newcombe) has announced that the Christmas Day dinner table collections at Okehampton, taken to aid destitute Belgians, amounted to £22 5s.