

Farming, Food and Rural Life

As an agricultural community, rural activity was an important part of life and the town turned out for the Rhuddlan and District Annual Ploughing Match which in February 1913 was held at Tŷ Isa Farm in Sarn Lane, and won by Mr Abel Hughes of Waen who, having won it in three consecutive years was allowed to keep the Silver Challenge Cup (value £10-10s) presented by Corbett, Williams & Son of Phoenix Iron Works, Rhuddlan. Mr Owen Jones of Abbey Farm, Rhuddlan upheld the honour of the town by taking first prize (£3) for the best “in foal mare” in the competition. The annual Bodrhyddan Agricultural Society Show attracted large entries and attendance and the town turned out in force for the Annual Hare Coursing Meeting.

Arable farmers prospered in 1913 with local sales per ton of wheat yielding 35s, barley 31s and oats 21s, compared with 31s, 24s and 17s respectively in the previous year. As with farmers today, Mr E Pierce of Criccin must have been pleased and relieved to receive a certificate saying no TB had been found in his cattle or milk.



Farm workers with a steam traction engine

Food was in plentiful supply and the housewife could buy two fowl for 5s/3d–6s and 15-16 eggs for 1s. Depending on the cut, beef cost 7d-11d per lb, mutton 8d-11d per lb, pork 5½d-5¾d per lb and rabbit 1s/3d per lb, obviously a luxury! E B Jones in Rhyl advertised China-Ceylon tea blend at 2s/4d per lb and whiskey at 4s per bottle but when war began they cut the price of a 2lb loaf by 20% to 2d.

In 1914 many farm labourers responded to the call to arms and even farmers such as Mr T Wilson of Tŷ Coch on the road to Cwm joined the colours, selling his entire stock of cows, calves, heifers and sows in March 1915. Agricultural output was threatened and women from the Women’s Land Army along with Belgian refugees stepped in to fill the breach, performing admirably in work which most had never experienced before. Despite this and because of a reduction in food supply caused by the sinking of merchant cargo ships by German U-boats (2/3rds of UK food was imported), food supply began to dwindle and soon every garden in Rhuddlan was turned into a fruit and vegetable plot, with lectures on productive gardening on offer. Many townsfolk reared chickens, guided by a free book published by the government on the care of poultry and, recognising the value of high quality egg protein in wound healing, an Egg Bank was established where people could make gifts of eggs for injured soldiers.

The demand for timber increased dramatically as war continued and again women and refugees did most of the work of felling, trimming, carting and sawing. Ash wood was required for aeroplanes and other woods for collieries, huts, munitions, trenches, boat keels, artificial limbs, tool handles, railway sleepers and rifle butts. Timber harvesting took place on an enormous scale in North Wales and some estates such as Coed Coch at Abergele were stripped of trees.

The need for home grown food became increasingly acute and in 1917 County War Agricultural Committees (CWACs) were formed, with Mr G Roberts and Mr E Humphreys representing Rhuddlan PCC on the Flintshire committee. Tasked with surveying every farm and smallholding and agreeing quotas with each farmer to increase arable output for 1918, the CWAC found, for example, that Abbey Farm, Rhuddlan, (owned by Captain Rowley Conwy) and farmed by David Jones, totalled 181 acres in 1917. The acreage was allocated as follows: wheat 6, barley 2, oats 21, potatoes 1, root vegetables 4. It was agreed that the following year, 12 acres would be given to clover and 14 ploughed for cereals, with Mr Jones volunteering to plough an additional 36 acres. The record shows that the farm employed 3 men, had good outbuildings, stocked 4 workhorses, 5 other equines, 15 milk cows, 51 other cattle, 240 sheep and 4 pigs, but there was some damage to crops from game and rabbits.

The Denbigh and Flint Hunt set up a free Bull Service, organised by Mr R Williams of Criccin to enable local farmers to access the service of bulls, donated by local landowners and farmers, in order to increase cattle breeding for milk and meat.



The Denbigh and Flint Hunt on Rhuddlan Bridge

To assist the farmers in feeding the country, the CWACs supplied corn, seed potatoes and potato sprayers to spray against blight. Large numbers of agricultural implements – tractors, ploughs, corn drills, rollers, cultivators, harvesters, harrows, threshers, carts, horses and drivers were also supplied. The Flintshire committee also appointed an engineer in 1917 to arrange the clearing of watercourses between Prestatyn and Abergele to drain Rhuddlan Marsh and thus bringing the waterlogged land into production.

However, in January 1918 and despite a massive surge in food production, rationing was introduced for tea at 2oz/person/week, butter and margarine at 5oz/person/week, sugar and meat, but at least the price of milk was fixed at 4d /quart. Each person had to register for food purchase with their local grocer by June 1918 and ration cards and tokens were introduced.

By the above measures and by the introduction of the convoy system of armed vessels to protect cargo shipping across the Atlantic, the population of Britain were fed and starvation was avoided. Rationing would continue, however, into the 1920s.