



Isle of Man in the Great War (Your Towns and Cities in the Great War)

Caroline Smith

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In August 1914, the Isle of Man was in the middle of a very successful summer season. The tourist industry was crucial to the island, but suddenly holiday-makers left and the Steam Packet vessels that normally brought them were requisitioned. The future was uncertain for those who relied on the season and their pleas for assistance were ignored. For some, the cost of living became impossibly high and without the welfare measures that had been brought about in Britain, many faced destitution. Others however, particularly farmers and those involved with the internment camps, would find war very profitable. The divisions between rich and poor grew creating much social disaffection and a bitter battle for reform was fought. As arguments raged over conscription, taxation, the economy and the housing of enemy aliens, the personalities of the period came to prominence. The unprecedented scenes of direct action and several dramatic court cases are brought to life in this account of how the island began its path to progress.

The Isle of Man played an important role in World War One, supplying troops and vessels and running special camps for the internment of enemy. 8,261 men enlisted in the armed forces, which was 82.3% of the Isle of Man's male population of military age. Of these, 1,165 gave their lives and 987 were wounded.

The experience of war significantly impacted on the Island, from the initial enthusiasm for sorting out the German Kaiser in time for Christmas 1914, to the gradual realization of the enormity of human sacrifice the families of the Isle were committed to as the war stretched out over the next four years.

The Great War affected everyone. At home there were wounded soldiers in military hospitals, refugees from Belgium and later on German prisoners of war. There were food and fuel shortages and disruption to schooling. The role of women changed dramatically and they undertook a variety of work undreamed of in peacetime. Extracts from contemporary letters reveal their heroism and give insights into what it was like under battle conditions.

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