

The YMCA in Fovant 1914-1919

From the YMCA archives kept at the Special Collections Dept. of the Library of Birmingham University

Minutes of the special committee set up at the out-break of war to direct the extra work necessary because of the dense concentrations of young men in military camps.

The aim was to supply a place where young Christian men could gather together for Bible Study and prayer, and to provide what home comforts were possible for all. To this end there were 'Quiet Tents or Huts', huts for writing letters and reading, daily Bibles Study and prayer groups, weekly meetings, occasional missions with outside Missioners, lectures and entertainment supplied both by the soldiers themselves and from visiting lecturers and concert parties. They sold essentials such as writing paper and envelopes, stamps, soft drinks and biscuits, Postal Orders, cigarettes, and many other services which might make the life of camp more bearable. There were letter boxes in each centre.

The YMCA insignia (the Red Triangle) still seen on the downs above Fovant, was newly designed at the beginning of the war. The National Secretary of the YMCA Arthur Yapp, pointed out that 'we need something simple, distinctive, easily recognised and absolutely new.

Eventually there were five YMCA huts at Fovant:

Central Hut (aka Camp 13, East Farm) leader – W.H.Foster (by 1921 James Edwards is leader according to T.S. Crawford in 'Wiltshire and the Great War')

Compton (No. 2 Hut) leader – Mr and Mrs A.K.Skinner

Manor Farm (No 3 hut, Sutton Hut) leader – W.E.Short

West Farm Hut (No 4) leader - T.Short

Hurdcott (Camp 8) leader – T.E.Holland

In 1916 Guest Hut was erected near the Hospital so people visiting sick and wounded soldiers who were patients could have somewhere to stay. All the available accommodation in the village had long been taken by officers' wives and other people loosely attached to the Army.

August 10th 1915 an expenditure of £522.4.6 was approved to erect a hut at No 5 Camp Fovant provided the Secretary was satisfied it was essential.

Nov.16th 1916 Mr F.J.Fedarb (organiser for the Salisbury Plain Area) wrote to ask that the £450 given by Miss Champion for Hut at Hurdcott, should be used instead for a Hut at Camp No.2 at Codford.

March 13th 1916 a letter was received from Mr Pye-Smith, Salisbury, asking for donation towards the expenses incurred by a crippled person as the result of an accident by one of our motor cars in Salisbury. It was agreed to send £1.

March 21st 1916 F. Amery (No 5 Fovant) received £25

April 11th 1916 F.J.Fedarb asked for £125 to complete building No 5 camp Fovant. It was recommended on condition that Mr Fedarb should approach Messrs. Loder, the original donors of the hut, with view to getting them to give a further donation to meet the extra cost.