

Presentation made by Pauline Marples at the CBA East Midlands Home Front Legacy Day School on 3 October- Notes to accompany the slides – both reproduced here with kind permission from Pauline.

Clipstone Camp Talk for Archaeology Meeting

1 **Title**

Briefly - Clipstone Camp was near Mansfield, in Nottinghamshire. It was vast wooden hutted military camp which established to train the men of Kitcheners New Army. It opened in **May 1915** and housed upwards of twenty to thirty thousand soldiers at any one time. Some soldiers even wrote home saying there were 50,000 or 60,000 stationed there. There are no official records to quantify this.

First let us go back to the beginning

2 **Map showing Mansfield**

This is the area I am talking about.

3 **Map showing Clipstone**

While many people will have heard of Mansfield, not everyone is aware where Clipstone is.

4 **Map showing where the camp was built -**

This is where Clipstone Camp was on open moor land, land that was owned by the Duke of Portland. Be aware of this triangle.

5 **Plan of the camp,**

After searching various archives both local and also the National Archives at Kew no plans of the camp were found. Then by chance, because of oral history this was discovered, it was in the sideboard of a lady whose grandfather had helped to build the camp.

Note how it all fits into the triangle on the previous map. The road at the top once known as the 'straight mile' is relevant to other slides I will show you.

In the early 1900s the 'straight mile' was where speed trials were held, but that's another story.

6 **Close up**

The plan is a fascinating document, luckily we had a full size copy done before the original was deposited in the National Archives. I say luckily because they can no longer find it.

7 **Close Up**

Each time we look at the plan there is much to discover.

8 **Close up of the Military Hospital**

The hospital is situated on the edge of the camp and a close up reveals the various departments and accommodation for staff.

9 **Camp View**

A bleak looking camp which appears to be sparsely occupied, note the man, possibly a civilian worker feeding his horse.

10 **Huts and bedding**

A busier picture with bed boards and bedding to be seen outside a number of the huts. In the distant background areas of trees can be seen.

11 **Filling palliasses with straw**

This was the way soldiers got fresh bedding

12 **Camp Shop**

This was a useful amenity on such a large camp

13 **YMCA Hut** - inside and out

The three YMCA huts on the camp offered many services such as recreation, concerts, food, writing facilities and post boxes etc. They were manned by civilian workers

14 **Post Office**

Additionally there was a Post office, manned by civilians and soldiers. This was an age when the main form of communication was letters, postcards and parcels. The camp had an enormous impact on the Mansfield Postal services.

15 **Camp view** -

This interesting photo shows soldiers on the parade ground and also a variety of different types of huts. One soldier was keen to point out the hut where he was accommodated. Note also the path markers of white stone, these can be seen on many of the camp photos.

16 **Church Parade,**

This shows a Church Parade taking place - the chaplain can be seen on a raised platform in the centre. Note also some soldiers are in kilts, others have bugles and drums - this picture gives an indication of the vast number of soldiers and regiments that suddenly took over an area that was once just open moorland, much of it covered in heather.

17 **Marching**

This gives an indication of the impact on the local community - suddenly soldiers were everywhere - they were on route marches and training. The once quiet area was suddenly alive with the noise of bugle bands, marching feet, and gunfire as soldiers practise on the ranges. It was all fascinating to young children.

18 **Marching**

In the nearby village of Forest Town, people were more used to seeing coal miners trudging to and from the Mansfield colliery in their hob nail boots than the lines of uniformed men kicking up the dust on the unmade roads.

19 **Marching** - The 17th Middlesex Regiment marching along the 'straight mile' the road I have previously mentioned, note the camp huts on the left.

20 **Women**

Prior to 1918 a limited number of women were to be seen at the camp such as Nurses at the hospital or volunteers in the YMCA, Salvation Army Huts etc. Here we see just some of them

21 **Women**

Things changed however in 1918 when women in uniform WAACs (Women's Army Auxiliary Corp), and the NAACB (Navy and Army Catering Board) were billeted at Clipstone Camp. To date very little information is known about their time there.

22 **Demob**

After the war ended Clipstone Camp became one of the biggest demob camps in the country. Soldiers often travelled great distances in not good conditions just to get their release papers. Some of the worst cases were discussed in parliament and can be found in the Hansard papers.

23 **Groups 1919/1920**

Many soldiers' battalions continued to be stationed at the camp until 1921. Here are just some of them

24 Huts sold

In 1921 Adverts appeared in newspapers far and wide notifying people of the forthcoming camp sales. Most of the huts etc were gradually sold and became village and church halls, schools, even living accommodation. A few were retained to house miners and their families as the sinking of Clipstone Pit took place.

25 Map overview

As the Clipstone Colliery was sunk, in the years that followed a mining village was built on bottom area of the camp (as we see it on the map). It was a large housing complex with various amenities. Then over the past 10/15 years more private development has gradually taken place, and it is still expanding.

26 Vicar water & Buildings

Apart from these housing estates there are still other venues to be found that were associated with Clipstone Camp?

During the years of the camp soldiers spent their leisure hours in the local villages and Mansfield Town. Some walked, others had their own transport, or they took advantage of taxi services local entrepreneurs had set up.

While some of the places they visited have now disappeared others do remain - such as:

Vicar Water, This is where bathing parades for soldiers took place, sadly some soldiers drowned there despite the fact there was always soldiers on safety patrol. Today this venue is Vicar Water Country Park

Forest Town Welfare, had and still has excellent sports facilities which were well used by soldier. The building has changed beyond recognitions but the sports track is still there - it is now called Forest Town Arena

Mansfield Town Hall, this was used as a recruiting centre. The market square is in front and there are many pubs in the area that soldiers would have frequented.

The Old Meeting House Chapel (Unitarian), this is just one of the local churches that held social events for soldiers and is recorded in their minute books.

27 St Alban's Church Forest Town

, the nearest church with a burial ground to Clipstone Camp. It is where 28 soldiers and one nurse were buried. They are all have standard Commonwealth War Graves with names ages regiment date of death, but none mention Clipstone Camp, however the burial register confirms all but one soldier was from the camp.

28 **Ada Elizabeth Young's** grave is separate from the soldiers because she was a civilian nurse. It is inside the church on a memorial to Nurse Young that we finally find a mention of Clipstone Camp.

29 **Trenches** - Part of the soldiers training was digging trenches as John Cheshire wrote to his wife on the 31 July 1915

...the night operations consisted of digging ourselves in the moor in the dark. Our company had the first line of trenches with the three others behind, ours was by far the best trench, we had finished in about 40 minutes and when the alarm went we lined the trenches with fixed bayonets.'

Some trenches can still be found today - two father and son military enthusiasts helped us discover the ones in the bottom picture.

30 **Artefacts**

These two enthusiasts or 'on the ground' researchers have also discovered many artefacts in what were the camp dumps. These slides shows just some example of their finds, which add greatly to the wider picture of the occupants of the camp.

31 **More artefacts**

However some artefacts are not to be collected -

This week in the CHAD Mansfield's weekly paper there is a report of some WW1 stick grenades being found locally and blown up by the Bomb Squad - it seems to have been kept low profile so if it has any connection to Clipstone Camp this is unknown.

32 **Blocks**

In March 2014 our 'on the ground ' researchers took us to show one of their discovery areas, and this was the first thing we discovered, concrete blocks that huts stood on. When you have spent years looking at documents and photographs etc, discovering this type of thing is really good and helps you to look at things in a new light.

33 **Walk**

So when in August this year we were made aware that more building was taking place, we decided to investigate. As you can see we found another large housing complex going up.

34 **Walk**

Armed with the Camp overview map seen on the first slide we followed a road round the back of it and eventually came to the 'straight mile road'

35 **Looking left**

Across the fields, to houses and the Clipstone pit headstocks, this was once where the camp and soldiers was.

36 **Looking right**

To what is now a forest.

37 **Blocks and concrete**

Looking closer we found what we believe to be remnants of the military hospital among the overgrown foliage

38 **Foilage**

Walking on the paths through the trees, brick and stone can be discovered - we need to go back when the bracken and plants have died down to see things more clearly.

39 **Book etc**

This final slide shows some of how Clipstone Camp has been recorded so far. A book that came out in September 2013 (price £10), and an exhibition in October November 2014 in Mansfield Museum. Additionally last year it was in the BBCs 'WW1 At Home' series and as a result is to now be featured in the "WW1 At Home" free BBC educational e-book. There are also pages on ourmansfieldand area, and our nottinghamshire.

So what next? I have got as far as registering on the **Home Front Legacy map of all the UK sites** but then got stuck - so maybe today will help.