

# Health and Housing in Marlow

There was a lot of concern about the state of housing in Marlow before the First World War. That concern grew during the War as properties fell into disrepair and the extra people moving into Marlow put pressure on the housing supply.

## Condition

The repair of housing suffered during the First World War as a result of labour shortages and disruption to supplies and, although the Council issued statutory repair notices to landlords, for instance concerning houses in Cambridge Road, these were often not complied with.

According to the local newspaper, problems with labour supply also restricted the Council's ability to undertake and follow through on housing and sanitary inspections around the town. For instance, the local Medical Officer reported four cases of mild scarlet fever in October 1918, resulting in the patients being removed to hospital and their houses disinfected. He also reported on a property in Portlands that was in a ruinous condition and dangerous, recommending that it should be immediately demolished.

## Supply

Concerns in town about overcrowding developed during the early part of 1918 as a result of people wanting to escape German air raids in London. In February 1918, the local paper reported that the anti-aircraft guns defending London were heard 'very plainly' in Marlow.

An influx of Londoners was matched in the spring of 1917 with refugees fleeing from Eastern Europe, in particular Russians escaping from the recent Bolshevik revolution. On 22 March that year, the paper reported that houses and apartments in Marlow were being 'eagerly snapped up' and that 'prices showed a marked tendency in an upward direction.' The town was now as full as at the height of the river season before the War. To manage the congestion on the railways the Great Western Railway Company restricted ticket sales to Marlow, Maidenhead and Henley.

With all these extra people residing in the town, the Council's primary concern was the risk to public health resulting from overcrowding. In April 1918, it did however, report to the Local Government Board that 'the influx of aliens owing to London air raids...have been much exaggerated.' The 38 Russian and 14 Greek refugees lodging in twelve different houses was deemed to be no risk to the public health, in part because, in the view of the Council, the refugees were 'not of the lowest class.'



Dean Street, Marlow, c.1910. One of the areas that caused concern about the quality of housing



A World War 1 Zeppelin



Marlow's councillors in 1896, with Dr Dickson, Marlow's medical officer during the war, third from the left, top row