

# The National Kitchen

In January 1918 a National Kitchen, making use of local produce, was opened in Marlow. This communal kitchen was initially very successful and attracted attention from across the country.

## Getting Started

To make best use of the food available and to improve the health of local people, a communal kitchen was opened in Marlow in January 1918. Located at 55 High Street, which is now the clothes shop Whistles, two paid staff and a number of voluntary female helpers provided meals between 12 noon and 2pm.

The kitchen, which used the produce of local tradesmen and allotment holders, was designed to have broad appeal across the town and to be self-supporting and affordable. Being the first in the County it was considered something of an 'experiment', which would, if successful, be copied by others.

## Success!

The kitchen opened on a good note with all 420 portions being sold out in half an hour on the first day. This level of success continued during 1918 and within a couple of months the Ministry of Food was referring to Marlow enquiries from other towns about setting up communal kitchens. Throughout 1918 the local newspaper reported enthusiastically on the impact of the kitchen locally and its success at attracting all classes of the local community.



The shop in Marlow where the National Kitchen used to stand  
With kind permission of Andy Ford



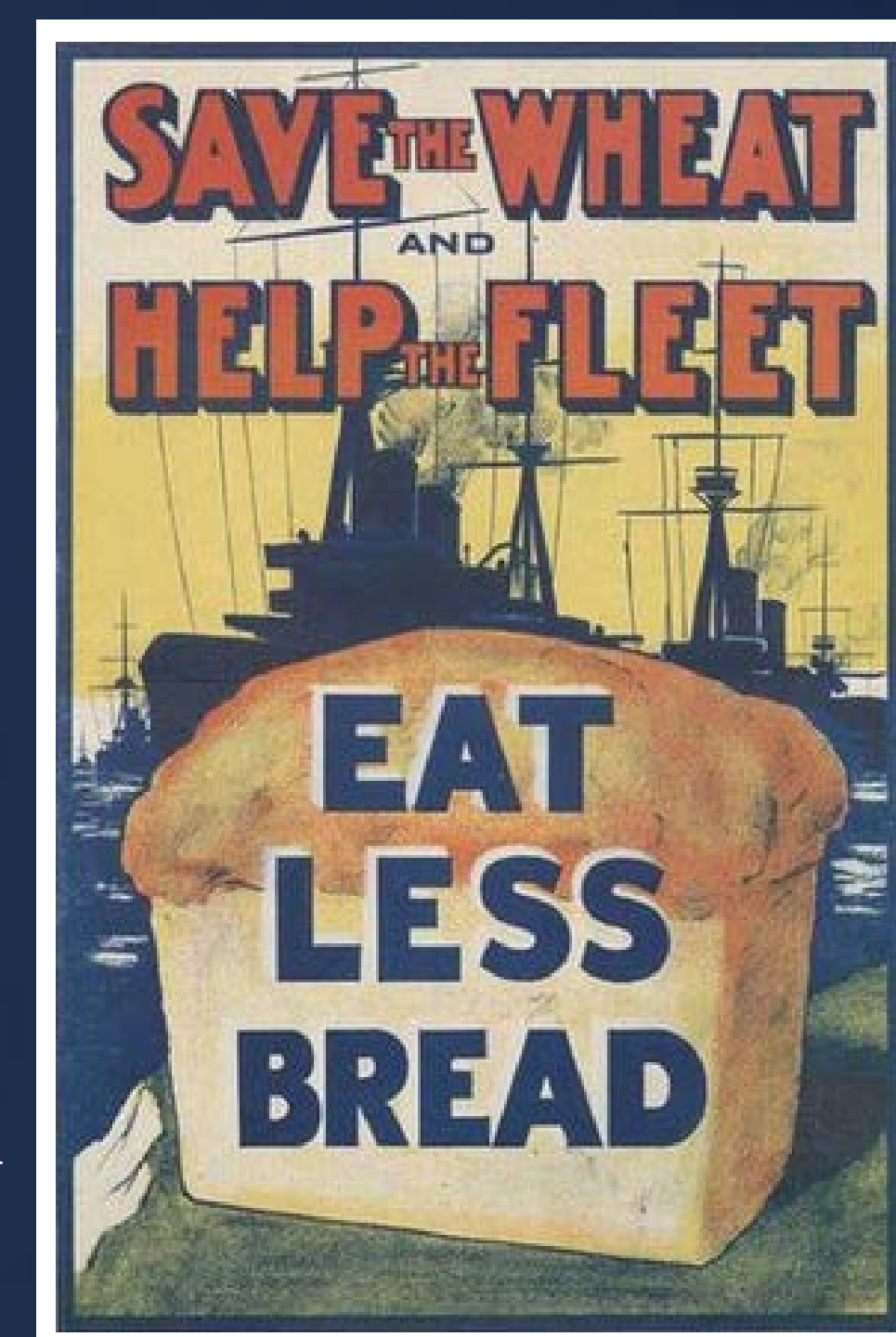
A national kitchen in operation in London during the war

The kitchen was able to obtain supplies of food such as currants which were difficult for the general public to buy and this helped its success. Also from April 1918 gas and coal were rationed which encouraged people to use the kitchen as they had to economise on fuel.

The idea of a national kitchen spread rapidly across the country and, by August 1918, 623 were operating.

## Closing Down

Marlow's National Kitchen was never entirely successful commercial venture, however, even though it regularly broke its own sales targets. In December 1918 it applied to the Ministry of Food for an interest-free loan of £100 to meet some capital costs and once fighting ended in November 1918, sales reduced rapidly. In January 1919, as a result of continued financial losses, the kitchen was closed.



Such posters were used to discourage people from wasting food