

German Prisoner of War Camp.

Sompting:



The location of the Lancing Camp is the area of Rectory Farm Road, Dankton Gardens, Dankton Lane, Millfield Road.

Post code area, BN15. All 3 camps would have been work camps, one camp was most probably an internment camp, and they may have been tented camps. Numbers not known, but around 50 is the usual number of prisoners. All low risk prisoners, the conditions within the internment camp would have been poor by all accounts.

This map published circa 1925.
Locations of the camps, is approximate.
Period 1918 / 1919.

By

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World War I (WWI), also called the **First World War** or **Great War**, was a major war centred in Europe that began on 28 July 1914 and lasted until 11 November 1918.

It involved all the world's great powers, which were assembled in two opposing alliances: the Allies (centred around the Triple Entente) The Triple Entente (**Entente**, meaning a diplomatic "understanding") was as the name given to the alliance among Great Britain, France and Russia after the signing of the Anglo-Russian Entente in 1907 and the Central Powers (originally centred around the Triple Alliance). More than 70 million military personnel, including 60 million Europeans, were mobilised in one of the largest wars in history. More than 9 million combatants were killed, largely because of great technological advances in fire-power without corresponding advances in mobility. It was the sixth deadliest conflict in Western history.

On all sides many thousandths of prisoners were taken, in the U.K most prisoners were taken in large numbers to the Isle of Man, not only did the camps there contain combat prisoners, but many interment aliens, ranging from German shopkeepers, to diplomats, Doctors, and so on. Woman and Children were not interned; Boys over 14 years of age were subject to interment.

There were at least two and possibly three camps in Lancing, location Upper Cokeham, area behind the Ball Tree public house, extending north to the A27 and West ward towards Lyons Farm, precise location approximately the area of the old chalk pit, now an industrial estate, the area of Rectory Farm Road, Dankton Gardens, Dankton Lane, Millfield Road.



Google Earth Image.

(These camps not to be confused by later 2nd World War Camps close by, but not on the same site.)

Two of the camps were German prisoners of War work camps, the other was thought to be an internment camp.

The two prison camps would have been defiantly work camps; precise numbers would have been about 30/50 in each camp. It is not clear what the internees of the internment camp would have done. (Or numbers interned)

These, work camps were set up by the Ministry of Agriculture, and the War Office, to provide extra man power in local areas to carry out work on roads farms orchards and any other work deemed fit.

The main camp was at Pattishall, Northamptonshire ,some 19000 prisoners were assigned to this camp , but at any one time there would have only been around 5000 there, the rest being at the work camps around the country. Pattishall was the base camp for about 20 working camps in Sussex. I have read some reports on conditions in those - generally the prisoners were happier in the working camps as they were given "real" tasks, felling timber or laying railway lines, ploughing fields, working in orchards, and nursery's, rather than just being kept occupied as they were at Pattishall by making model boats or gardening or similar small activities.¹

The Lancing Camps:

The prisoners were used to undertake work on sea defences , as defined at the time by, East Lancing Sea defence Commissioners, plus work on re-surfacing local roads, working on local farms, orchards and nursery's.

Soldiers and Sea defences. 1917

The East Lancing sea defences committee at a meeting in Shoreham, were told that soldiers that were to be employed on sea defence work were no longer available.

Some forty barrows and seventy shovels had been purchased for this work; the committee was told that the soldiers were required for the War effort elsewhere. But prisoners of war where available for this work, the committee would look into this proposal.

Sea Defence Work, Lancing reported February 27th 1918.

When the East Lancing sea defence commissioners met last week, it was reported that the works committee, had considered a suggestion made by Lord Leconfield, the Chairman that German Prisoners should be obtained for the reported work that needs to be undertaken on the sea defences on the beach, instructed the clerk to get twenty or so prisoners if possible. (Lancing Camp.).²

Worthing Gazette, 5th March 1930.

"The mystery surrounding some human bones, which were found in a gravel pit at Sompting (Upper Cokeham) on Friday, was not cleared up yesterday, when the West Sussex Coroner (Mr. F. W. Butler) held an inquest upon them at

Worthing Fire Station.

Evidence was given by Police-constable Abbott, that the bones were found by a man named Dunk about two feet under the ground. The police had made extensive inquiries in the district, but could not form any conclusion as to how the bones came to be there. A German prisoner's internment camp was in a meadow adjoining the pit in 1917 and 1918, but Police records showed no prisoners as having escaped from this camp, and two who escaped from a similar camp nearby were recaptured. They could not ascertain that any prisoner had died and been buried there, and no person had been missing and unaccounted for in the neighbourhood for the last 40 years, one man who disappeared having been found a week later. There was no information available as to how the remains came to be buried.

Dr. W. O. Pitt, who examined the bones, said they were the remains of two human beings, probably a man and a woman. Their state showed that they could not have been buried for more than ten years, because had they been ancient bones they would have been well preserved or would have crumbled on being handled; actually, they only partly crumbled. One of the jawbones had been fractured, and he believed it to be an old injury, which might have been caused by a blow.

Dr. Pitt added that it would be interesting to have the view of an expert like Sir Arthur Keith.

The Coroner said there was nothing to show the cause of death, or how the bones came to be buried, and made an order for burial. This, it was stated, would probably take place in Sompting Churchyard."

There are few surviving reports or photos of this period showing the prisoners working, or indeed of the camps themselves, if anyone has any further information about these camps or anything else about the first World War in Lancing area, I would be grateful for the information.



This photo comes from a private postcard collection, it is very well posed! Says it's a photo of German prisoners of War working in a quarry (gravel pit on the South Coast).

As there were very few such locations along the South coast which had Germans working in such a place, except Lancing, which had its camp around a gravel pit, it looks if this is Lancing.

The area today is an industrial estate built within a gravel pit. Between Rectory Walk and Rectory Lane.

List of WW1 German P.O.W. Internee Camps Sussex.1914/1919.

1914-1919 Prisoners of War "Working Camps" documented as being in Sussex "Camp" is a misleading title as most were requisitioned or loaned country or large houses where detained German internees or POWs were based doing agricultural or similar work, even after the Great War had formally ended, prior to being repatriated or otherwise released.



Photo The Illustrated War News 1917.

Official Camp, Name, Dates when open, 1917/19 Official Postal Address Current where known.

Angmering Dec 17.1918.

Blairfield May 18, Oct 18 Chichester.

Brighton General. Hospital. January 1918.

Eartham May 18, Jan 1918 Slindon, Chichester.

East Grinstead May 18, Jan 19 18 London Road RH19 1HF/Y (v).

East Preston May 18, Jan 1917 Angmering.

Hailsham May 18, Jan 1917 Roseneath, George Street BN27 1A.

Haywards Heath Oct 18, Jan 1918 Summerhill.

Henfield Oct 18, Jan 1918.

Horsham Oct 18, Jan 1917 28 North Street RH12 1RQ (v).

Hove May 18, Jan 1918 Brooker Hall, 19 New Church Road BN3 4AB (v)

Lancing Jan 1918 BN15.

Lewes Dec 17, Jan 18, May 1918 North Street BN7 2P.

Midhurst May 18, Jan 1918 North Street GU29 9D.

Northiam Oct 18 TN31.

Peasmarsh Oct 18, Jan 1917 Rye TN31

Robertsbridge May 18, Jan 1918 TN32

Sandgate May 18, Jan 1917 Storrington

Sompting Dec 17 Worthing 1918

Steyning May 18, Jan 1916 BN43 6TQ (v)

Uckfield Jan 19, Apr 1918 The Grange TN22 4HH?

Wisborough Green May 18, Jan 1917 The Workhouse, Billinghamurst RH14 ODU (v)

Research into above camps is ongoing

Web site.. <http://sussexthegreatwar.wordpress.com>

¹ Information from, Prisoners of War information Bureau, published in 1919 now out of print.

² Worthing Gazette.

Lancing Parish Council Committee reports.

East Lancing Sea Defences committee reports.