

Buriton and the First World War through local eyes.

Doug Jones, Lynette Watson and Paul Turrell have provided an indescribably effective and moving picture of Buriton at a moment in time - or at least over a four year period of momentous upheaval, when all values and traditions were thrown upside down. Their work is truly stunning, with an amazing amount of research into the impact of the First World War on life in a small parish, and the detail of the lives of the young men who became a part of the conflict.

They used diaries and letters and accounts of events written during the war and soon afterwards, and they used innumerable illustrations to give authenticity to everything they wrote. There are local and national photographs when photographs of ordinary people were rare, and there are formal and informal pictures alongside the written records of so many of the Buriton inhabitants juxtaposed with propaganda photographs and paintings and postcards showing the humour as well as the tragedy of war.

The book deals chronologically with the villagers at home and abroad, setting the scene at the outbreak of war, explaining the way of life of a farming community in a small village, and at the same time telling of the events leading up to the war. This contrast between national and local events gives the book enduring interest, as the innocence of the villagers in 1914 is replaced by a more cynical view as the war progresses. From a population of 770, 193 men enlisted and are named on the Roll of Honour in the village hall, so inevitably the parochial view of villagers in 1914 had changed by 1918, and this book explains these changes clearly and comprehensively. The impact of laws brought about by events in a war which seemed so far away, but which was brought so forcibly into this small village month by month shows how life changed throughout the years. We are introduced to individuals who enlisted early in the war and we are shown how the war impacted on them, and at the same time we are told how the war affected the nation as a whole. The details of the war and the lives of the men are paralleled throughout the book, but there are also other fascinating details interspersed, like the pages about the war horses, about the reality of lives in the trenches, about the way the postal service worked for the men at the front, the role of the Royal Navy and the Royal Flying Corps, of prisoners of war, and of the army which ended up in Russia after the war had formally been brought to an end.

The details and the research involved are mind blowing, and the entire book brings to life a generation of villagers who endured changes impossible to comprehend, yet it presents a village with a community spirit which survived all the vicissitudes, and which still survives, a hundred years later.

G Clarke