

# *Kibble - A Lasting Legacy*

## *The World Wars*



*1859 - 2009*



[www.kibble.org](http://www.kibble.org)

# Introduction

The staff and boys at Kibble were affected by the World Wars as much as the wider population. This manifested in a range of ways, from boys losing fathers and other family members in the Wars to staff and boys themselves playing their parts in the War effort. In a more general sense, like the rest of the population, Kibble had to deal with shortages and rationing.



George volunteered for the Australian infantry and soon found himself fighting in the trenches of the Western Front. He recorded his experiences in documents recently uncovered by family members in Australia who have passed this information to us

# First World War

Kibble's written records document numerous cases of boys and their family members serving during WWI, both on the home front and the battlefield. Many of them joined the armed forces as soon as they were discharged from Kibble. Some were taken as Prisoners of War and others made the ultimate sacrifice, losing their lives.

## Active Service

A 1915 entry in Kibble's Visitors' Book refers to those serving in battle: 'close on 200' from 'this school' serving in the Army and Navy (1915). This number included boys who had been sent to Australia on their release to undertake farm work, and who subsequently enlisted in the Australian forces.

George Kirkhope McPhail was a School Captain and one of the seventeen Kibble boys who were sent to take up farm work in 1913 and 1914. However, with the outbreak of war most of them enlisted in the Australian forces. George volunteered for the Australian infantry and soon found himself fighting in the trenches of the Western Front. He recorded his experiences in documents recently uncovered by family members in Australia who have passed this information to us:

At Posieres he went into the line in a full strength battalion and was the most junior NCO in a platoon some sixty strong. When, four short days later, it marched out, he was in command of the platoon, all his seniors killed or wounded, and of the eleven men who answered the roll call, few remained unscathed. The battle of the Somme had cost Australia 23,000 dead.

One month later, in September 1916, his battalion, the 50th, now too weak in numbers for a front line unit, took its stand in that grim excavation so inaptly titled 'Park Lane', in support of the 13th Brigade and took the brunt of the German five nines. As the day drew on he found himself alone, the sole living survivor in a sea of desolation.

# First World War

Fortunately, George survived the war and went on to live a full life in Australia. He raised a family there and his daughter Judith, grandson Graeme and great-grandson Kieran visited Scotland to join Kibble in its 150th anniversary celebrations in 2009.

Of the seventeen boys who went to Australia, six died in WWI in 1917-18 and were buried in Scotland, England and France. In a very poignant case, one of them, Alexander Simpson, died thirty minutes after Armistice Day (11th November 1918) ended and was consequently afforded a full military funeral near the Australians' Monte Video Camp in Weymouth, England.

Other examples of war service in our records are too numerous to list here but include Robert Hannah who had been promoted to 2nd Lieutenant in 1916. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for highly distinguished courage in the field. In June 1915 the headmaster received news that Thomas MacDonald (Royal Navy), a former School Captain, and William Haslett (Black Watch) had been killed in action. Thomas Cranston, described as 'another gallant lad', was killed in action in early 1916.

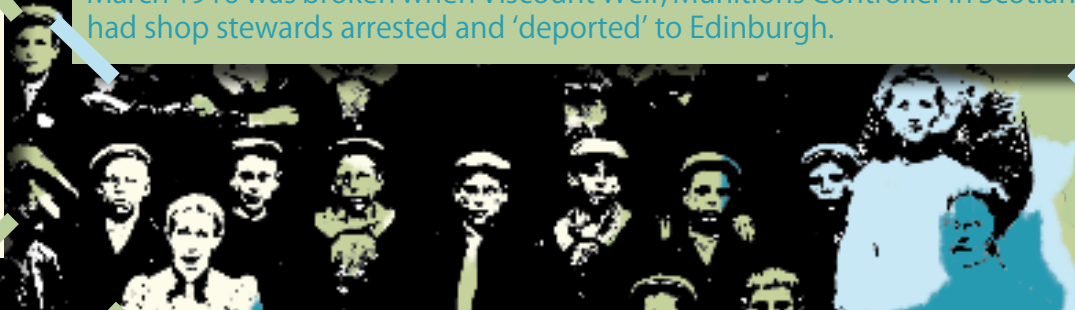


Royal British Legion attend ceremony for Alexander Simpson, 2007

# The Home Front

In response to requests from the Home Office that 'the boys of the Reformatory and Industrial Schools of Scotland should come forward at the present juncture and help the country in active service and in the munitions factories', staff and boys from Kibble also worked in Beardmore's munitions factory. A 1915 report in Kibble's Minutes of the Industrial Committee states that 101 boys and 4 staff were employed there at that time. This included night shift working. This employment of the boys was bitterly opposed by the Labour Party. It contributed to significant industrial unrest and strike action and was part of much wider industrial conflict along Clydeside in particular. The main objections to boys carrying out this work related to the dangerous nature of the work and its consequent unsuitability for children, the drudgery involved, and workforce concerns about the dilution of labour: the increased use of mechanisation, semi-skilled and unskilled labour. The Beardmore's strike of March 1916 was broken when Viscount Weir, Munitions Controller in Scotland, had shop stewards arrested and 'deported' to Edinburgh.

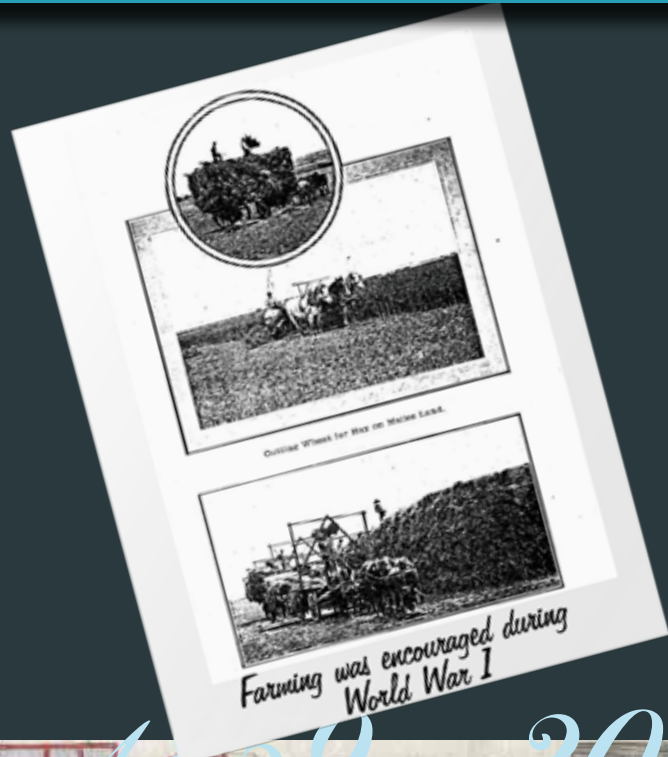
October 1916 letters from Paisley Trades and Labour Council to Mr Love, headmaster of Kibble, shed more light on Labour Movement concerns. They refer to the issue of boys' employment at munitions work and list the Trades Council's objections in the strongest terms. They bluntly refute Mr Love's defence that the boys were 'doing their bit to help their country in her extremity'. They argue that although the boys may claim to enjoy the work this is due to their naiveté and feeling that they are 'grown up and at work', as well as the 'inducement of extra pocket money'. Furthermore, they believe that the work 'is barren, in that it is subjectively unproductive and that it is a blind alley (dead end) occupation'.



# The Home Front

Wartime austerity is another issue reflected in Kibble's records. The Home Office wrote to the school in April 1915, requesting details on farm and garden production on Kibble's farm. Kibble's Industrial Committee records show that during this period acreages given over to oats and potato production were steadily increased, while hay acreage was reduced. This would have been in response to wartime food shortages and Home Office requests to increase food crop output. A 1917 entry in these records says that 'This is the first year we have ground our own oats for meal for the use of the school'.

Industrial Committee minutes also highlight the difficulties caused by the War, especially to the farm, saying, 'It will take a year or two to bring the Farm Department back to the condition it was in'.



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# Second World War

As with WWI, Kibble's archive records cases of enlistment and War Service. These include references to the war experience of Peter Gardner. Peter's father, George, was headmaster of Kibble from 1928 – 1952 and Peter was a teacher in the school before being appointed Head in 1952.

## Active Service

Peter Gardner was commissioned into the 2nd Lothians and Border Horse tank regiment and posted to North Africa. Wounded at the Battle of Kasserine Pass in Tunisia, he was taken prisoner to a camp near Parma, Italy. He escaped in October 1943 and, despite being injured by shrapnel, he trekked more than 300 miles across the Alps to Switzerland in winter, and eventually into Allied lines. His sister, Jean, told us that this was a very worrying time for the family, as they were informed that he was 'missing from operations' in North Africa in February 1943 and had to wait months for news of his whereabouts. By the end of his Army service, Peter had achieved the rank of Major. He was awarded an MBE in the King's birthday honours of 1947, in his capacity as Headmaster of Kibble Approved School. He said at the time that he regarded the honour as a recognition of the services he represented rather than a personal award.

Kibble was kept informed of the whereabouts of boys fighting in the war by their families, by visits from former boys while they were on leave, and occasionally by letters and postcards from them. There are many such cases in our records but it is possible to mention only a few examples here. In April 1940 one former boy sent a letter to the Headmaster from 'somewhere in France, appreciating his treatment in the school'. Another was reported in 1943 as being still at sea. He had 'been round the world and been torpedoed once'. Yet another was 'reported by his family as being a Prisoner of War in Germany. One boy sent a letter in 1941, when he was a POW in a German Stalag, asking for cigarettes. A former pupil visited Kibble in 1945 and told them he had been a POW in Poland; he was recorded in Kibble's records as being 'not now physically fit'.

# Active Service

Many more of the boys who went from Kibble to the war were wounded or killed in action, as recorded in our archive. These included one who was reported killed while trying to escape from an Italian POW camp. Another was more fortunate, surviving a torpedo attack in the Atlantic while serving as a ship's cook on the King Gruffyd.

One Kibble boy wrote on a bible in Church in 1933:  
'Came -27/3/29, Leave - 10/9/33  
Time done - 4 years, To do - 6 months.  
Full Time - 4 years and 6 months of Hell and Misery'.

This same young man visited Kibble in May 1944. By that time he was an SAS parachutist with service in China, Singapore, Burma, India, Persia and Egypt. He had been awarded an 8th Army Medal. Despite his harsh words in 1933, his return visit ten years later suggests that he retained some attachment to Kibble.

William Orrock was discharged from Kibble in June 1933. He first worked as an apprentice plater then joined the Royal Navy as a submariner. His Kibble record has a press clipping attached. This reports that he was killed in the sinking of the submarine HMS Thetis. His death, however, occurred much closer to home than the others' and was due to a tragic accident rather than to enemy action. The Thetis disaster happened in 1939, just forty miles from Birkenhead where it was built, costing the lives of ninety-nine men. A combination of factors brought about the disaster. During her maiden voyage, a first attempt to dive failed because, for some reason, the submarine was too light. When the decision was taken to allow seawater into the torpedo tubes to increase the vessel's weight, it was without the knowledge that the outer torpedo doors were already open and filled with water. Due to a fault with a test tap, they believed that it was safe to open the inner doors. Of course, water immediately rushed in, causing the submarine to nose-dive. Bad luck, bad timing and poor judgement conspired to thwart rescue attempts. The bodies of those who suffocated, including engineers from Cammell Laird shipyard, remained on the submerged vessel for four months before she was salvaged from the bottom of the bay.

# The Home Front

War shortages and rationing were highlighted in Kibble's records and minute books during and after the WWII period. Minutes of the Approved Schools' (Scotland) Association from 1943 refer to proposals to have (ration) coupons allocated six-monthly or annually 'so that favourable opportunities of purchasing might not be missed by reason of restriction on the supply of coupons immediately available'.

In 1944 the Association expressed concern about 'difficulties of staffing' experienced in all schools. Staff recruitment and retention would have been challenging because so many men were away at the war. In the same year, they recorded that clothing coupons were to be issued in three instalments.



# The Home Front

Building work at Kibble was also affected by the war, as it was in the wider community. The Approved Schools' Association acknowledged in 1945 that the overriding national demand for houses meant that education building programmes could not be as complete as was desirable. This was an issue because, following the 1944 Education Act, the school-leaving age was raised to fifteen. The provision of school kitchens and new premises to provide for the additional school population in mainstream schools were recognised as 'inescapable priorities'. The Association therefore conceded that the prospect of extensive building for Approved Schools was very poor, although 'some adaptations and alterations may be possible'.

At the end of the war, the Headmaster's Report for the quarter ending 30th June 1945 alluded to 'a distinct wave of unsettlement since Armistice Day and the V. (Victory) holidays'. It highlighted that the school roll was over the 'emergency number of 150' and attributed this to factors such as 'a slowing up of the call-up to the Services of registered boys' and the 'lack of employment caused by the transition period', both of which relate to the ending of World War II.

# The Home Front

Kibble contributed to, and was affected by, the war effort in various ways. Many of the boys admitted during both wars were listed as having parents and siblings engaged in active service or employed at munitions production. The fathers of some boys had been killed in the wars. These factors may have contributed to the behaviour and activities that led to them being sent to Kibble. Perhaps the saddest aspect is that so many young men left Kibble, having been there for several years, to go straight to war. Many lost their lives in the process, never having had the opportunity to enjoy a carefree adolescence and young adulthood.





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If you are interested in finding out more about the World War history of Kibble, or perhaps you would like to contribute to it by telling your own story, please contact:

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The logo for Kibble, featuring a stylized green leaf icon to the left of the word "Kibble" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.