

# CANTERBURY IN 1914

In 1914 Canterbury had a population of only 184,472 people and 65% lived in towns. The wages were about average for the country with many salaries including food and accommodation. Christchurch was gradually moving from being mostly wooden to brick and stone buildings. Trams were used for transport around the city while Canterbury towns were served by rail branch lines which transported passengers and goods. Shops like Ballantynes were well-established and numerous musical organisations like choirs and orchestras were active in the city.



The south side of Gloucester Street, Christchurch [1910].

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During this period Ngāi Tahu were working on Te Kerēme (the Ngāi Tahu Claim). The government established a Commission of Enquiry in 1914, but this was halted by war. Upon the declaration of war iwi including Ngāi Tahu offered assistance to the government, but the British Government's traditional refusal to use indigenous troops in European conflicts meant that their offer was denied. Ongoing work from individuals from iwi throughout New Zealand finally overcame this reluctance and by 1915 about 30 Ngāi Tahu men from Canterbury had joined the newly formed Māori Contingent and had shipped out to Egypt.

There were a number of major events in Canterbury that can give us a picture of what life was like at the outbreak of war. A new newspaper was launched in February 1914. The Sun was modelled on the London Daily Mail. It gave a bright display of news with lots of illustrations and was very popular. In March 1914 the Deans family gifted 16 acres of land to the city. This was the last area of bush in the Riccarton area and was given to the people of Christchurch on the condition that entry would always be free. A murder in Geraldine distracted the population from the increasing disturbance in Europe in May 1914. Harry Cripps, 27, was arrested and charged with the murder of Adam Stevenson, 70, a ploughman.

The labour movement in Christchurch in 1914 was one of the strongest in the country, both politically and in the workplace. Christchurch working-class political and industrial organisations were increasingly active, protesting the new industrial legislation, new methods of working that undervalued the skilled worker and compulsory military training. The outbreak of war resulted in an immediate rise in unemployment for workers, price rises and increases in the cost of living. There were demands for a planned wartime economy, ensuring adequate employment, food, clothing, and housing for workers and soldiers' dependents.



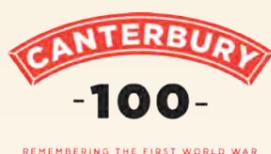
A portion of the Eastern side of Cathedral Square [1913].

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Busy Christchurch: a view in Cathedral Square looking towards the BNZ corner on a hot summer's day [1913].

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# HOW IT ALL STARTED



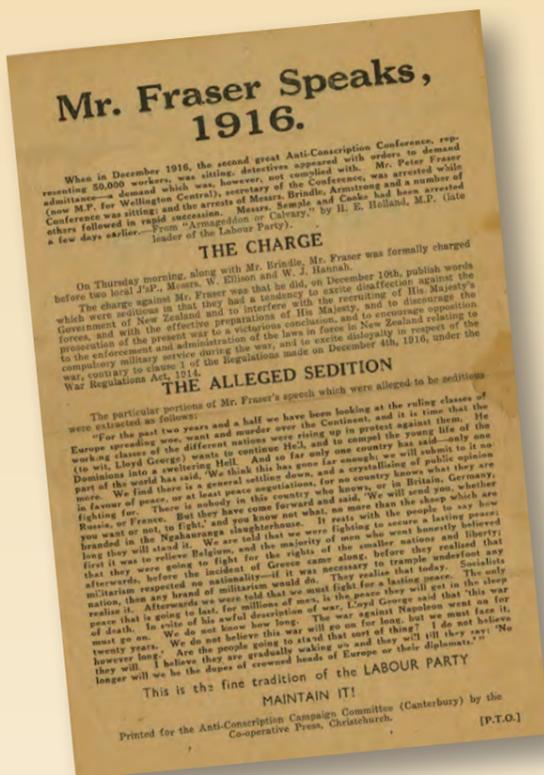
In 1914, there was tension in the Balkans. The Austro-Hungarian Empire wished to assert authority over the much newer Romania, Bulgaria and especially Serbia. The heir to the throne of Austria, Archduke Franz-Ferdinand, was more progressive than his elderly uncle, Emperor Franz Joseph and wanted to build strategic alliances in the Balkans to protect Austrian interests. On 28 June 1914, Franz Ferdinand visited the Bosnian capital Sarajevo with his wife, Sophie.

Gavrilo Princip, a student revolutionary, supported Bosnian independence. He and several other assassins waited for the royal couple, with weapons supplied by a Serbian secret society, the 'Black Hand'. Princip found himself with an opportunity and was able to shoot both the Archduke and his wife. Princip was arrested but both Franz Ferdinand and Sophie died shortly afterwards, prompting a diplomatic crisis with Serbia.

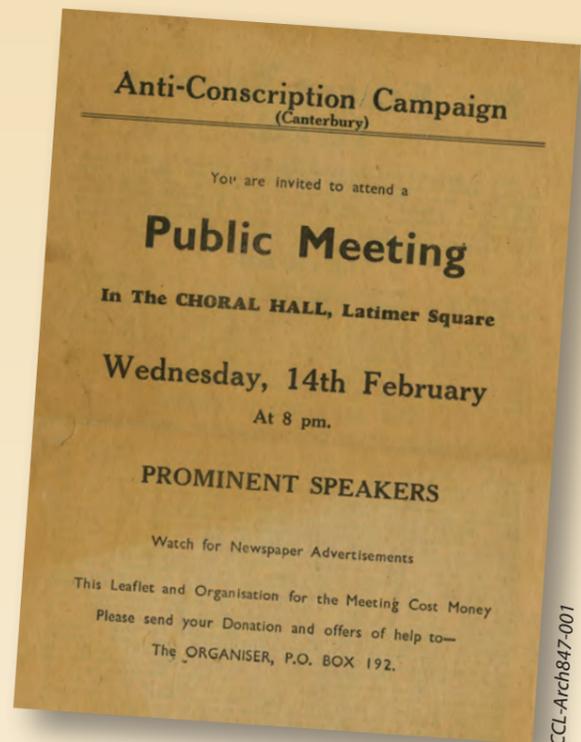
The murder of Franz-Ferdinand in Sarajevo prompted the Austro-Hungarian Empire to issue an ultimatum to Serbia on 23 July 1914. Serbia agreed to most of the terms but refused to allow Austrian troops to enter the country to hunt down those who had plotted the assassination. Austria declared war on 23 July 1914 and Russia mobilised her army in support of the Serbs on 30 July 1914. The long-standing European alliance system kicked in when Germany, in support of Austria, responded to Russian mobilisation by declaring war on Russia on 1 August 1914. Germany then declared war on Russia's ally, France on 3 August 1914 and demanded free passage through neutral Belgium to attack the French. When German troops entered Belgium, Britain and her Empire (including New Zealand) declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914. The First World War had begun, with Germany and Austria-Hungary pitted against Britain, France and Russia.



# WARTIME OPPOSITION IN NEW ZEALAND



Leaflet advertising a public meeting in the Choral Hall, Latimer Square, Wednesday 14 February.

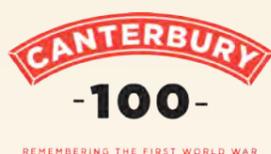


Leaflet advertising a public meeting in the Choral Hall, Latimer Square, Wednesday 14 February.

Newspaper reports suggest that most New Zealanders reacted enthusiastically to the outbreak of war, but many were opposed to it for political or religious reasons. Some pacifist organisations such as the National Peace Council disbanded or suspended their activities during the war, possibly for fear of public hostility, but others suffered for their views. Some conscientious objectors like Archibald Baxter (father of the poet James K. Baxter) were jailed, forcibly taken to the front, beaten and starved. The Socialist Party opposed the war for political reasons while Māori had mixed reactions. Some were willing to fight while others refused to support a British government with which they held long-standing grievances.

In July 1916 the New Zealand Labour Party formed as an independent alternative to the Liberal Party. The party strongly opposed conscription and three of its founding members (Harry Holland, Peter Fraser and Robert Semple) were imprisoned for this opposition during the First World War. In 1918, all three entered Parliament by winning by-elections.

As the war continued, price rises and the continual loss of loved ones contributed to a growing sense of war weariness in the country. Despite Government efforts at control, prices increased by more than a quarter during the course of the war. The National Peace Council, which drew membership from both the growing labour movements as well as pacifists, pounced on the growing war fatigue to bolster their anti-conscription efforts.



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# GALLIPOLI

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*A view of Beach V, one of the initial landing points for troops, Gallipoli Peninsula [1915].*



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*Graves of officers of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps on the Gallipoli Peninsula [1915].*

On 25 April 1915 New Zealand troops engaged in action on the Gallipoli Peninsula in a failed attempt to relieve the stalemate on the Western front. For the first time the Māori Contingent was allowed to engage in active combat as reinforcements from their base on North Beach, subsequently known as "Māori Pa". Plagued by poor planning and lacking sufficient resources, the campaign made little impact against a seriously underestimated Turkish enemy defending a rugged landscape. For eight months, soldiers from New Zealand, Australia, Britain and France battled in horrendous conditions in an inhospitable and impenetrable landscape.

In August 1915, Allied forces at Gallipoli launched an offensive in an attempt to break the deadlock on the peninsula. The assault started on 6 August and aimed to seize the high points of the Sari Bair range, including Chunuk Bair, in order to remove the Turkish troops' advantage of higher ground. Chunuk Bair was held for a short period by the Wellington Battalion led by Lieutenant-Colonel William Malone. Overall, however, the attacks were largely a failure and resulted in heavy casualties. Losses were so great that the Māori Contingent was separated and split amongst the infantry battalions.

With the failure of the August offensive and winter approaching, authorities in London began plans to evacuate the Gallipoli peninsula. The withdrawal was to be undertaken at night to avoid alerting Turkish forces. Considerable planning went into the evacuations and on the nights of 19 and 20 December the New Zealanders left Suvla Bay and Anzac Cove. The last British troops evacuated during the nights of 8 and 9 January 1916. By that time, more than 120,000 men had died; 2,721 New Zealanders and 80,000 Turkish soldiers among them. After eight months of battle, Turkish forces still held the peninsula. Despite this and the heavy casualties, the campaign captured the national imaginations of both Australia and New Zealand and is still a focus for debates about national identity today.



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# THE WAR AND WOMEN

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1918 Lady Liverpool, from the Shuttleworth Collection. Kete Christchurch.

1918 Lady Liverpool, Akaroa Branch.

New Zealand women travelled to war from the start of hostilities with six going with the troops to German Samoa in 1914. With reluctant permission from the government 50 nurses travelled to Egypt during the Gallipoli campaign to work in the hospitals in Alexandria, Cairo and Abbassieh. The success of this venture resulted in nurses being part of New Zealand military hospital staffs for the duration of the war including on hospital ships. As the war continued nursing staff were stationed closer to the front at casualty clearing stations.

For many women there were limited options for contributing to the war effort. The New Zealand government refused to allow the formation of a voluntary wartime service for women unlike their British counterparts who were able to join the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) or First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY). The Victoria League was an organisation that provided an avenue for women to support the war. Founded in 1910, it promoted "mutual understanding, help and intercourse between all citizens of the British Empire, and the cultivation of reciprocity of the Imperial sentiment". The Lady Liverpool League, Canterbury Patriotic Fund, Halswell Patriotic Committee and groups from Little River to Kaiapoi all offered support ranging from knitting socks to collecting old linen for bandages and fundraising.

In 1917 Ada Wells became Christchurch's first woman councillor. Born in England in 1863 she arrived in New Zealand aged 10 and married in 1884. She worked closely with Kate Sheppard as the chief strategist in the Women's Christian Temperance Union's campaign to enable women to vote in parliamentary elections. During the First World War she belonged to the National Peace Council which helped conscientious objectors. She served as a Christchurch City Councillor until 1919 and died in 1933.



# TRENCH WARFARE

as we will have a good many fatigue parties when we move back, and I will not get another such bed in a hurry. Yesterday we had our first experience of the Miniswerfer or German sausages. They are fired high in the air out of a trench mortar, and you can see them plainly, tumbling over and over and wavering a bit, so that you can't tell where they will land. They are certainly "some" bombs, but too hard to range accurately.

Cecil Malthus collection.  
Letter to Hazel, 11 June [1916]. Page 4.

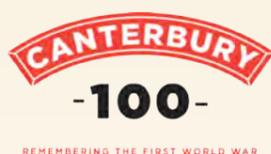
[Fracture] 11 June  
My dear Hazel,  
I got a nice letter from you this morning, dated exactly two months ago. Really we have no cause for complaint here: the mail is behaving itself beautifully. You don't seem to receive my letters very regularly though. I send them singly at intervals and you receive them in batches. Perhaps you can give me some idea why that is so. Do those in green envelopes take longer to reach you? We have a suspicion that they are held back for a week or two, but no one knows for certain. If it is so, I will avoid using the green envelopes except for special occasions. But perhaps, by the time I get a reply from you, I will be on the way home - after the war.  
We are in the trenches again, this time for a longer term, but it is a very easy life. In my present shelter there is actually a four-poster spring bed, and picture prints of distractingly pretty girls round the walls. What do you think of that, within two hundred yards of the Hun? There is seldom any strain or excitement - in spite of the casualty lists, which you must remember are very small in proportion to our numbers now. Of course we are only in the front line part of the time, but it is really the best place,

Cecil Malthus collection.  
Letter to Hazel, 11 June [1916]. Pages 1 - 3.

After a period of rapid movement and fighting, from September 1914 static lines of defences formed in France and Belgium. These consisted of trenches that were spontaneously dug as a defence against the artillery fire coming from the enemy wherever soldiers halted long enough to do so. Both sides did this and it resulted in the 'Western Front', complex lines of trench systems topped by barbed wire. These trenches stretched from the Belgian coast across France to the Swiss border. This trench warfare would become symbolic of the conflict.

Patrols into the "no-man's-land" between the trench lines involved dangerous exposure to enemy artillery. Raids were the only real form of engagement between the armies embedded in the trenches. These involved hand to hand combat and were both brutal and swift. Those which succeeded rarely resulted in more than 15 minutes in the enemy trench. The hoped-for result was usually intelligence, prisoners and intimidation of the enemy. Poisonous gas attacks were also a feature of trench life for both sides, so soldiers carried with them increasingly sophisticated gasmasks while in the trenches.

Disease in the trenches was a major problem. Food waste, body waste and unburied corpses resulted in infestations of flies and lice along the western front. Trench fever was a virus spread by the lice and trench foot was a problem starting with cold, wet feet that could result in amputation. Measures were taken to reduce incidents of both these afflictions and troops would generally only spend up to five days in the trenches before being rotated out to large rest camps behind the lines.



# CANTERBURY MOUNTED RIFLES

At the outbreak of war, the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) included one brigade of mounted troops. To establish this brigade, each of the four military districts supplied one mounted rifles regiment. On 12th August 1914 men started to report to the mobilisation camp at the Addington Showgrounds. Many had brought their own horses and where suitable these animals were taken into service by the government and then re-issued for use to their former owners. Many more reported than were taken into the regiment and



*The officers of the Canterbury Mounted Regiment, Addington, Christchurch [1914].*

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the medical test was a significant reason for large numbers to be turned away.

The regiment was equipped and trained at Addington and Sockburn until 23 September 1914.

In the early hours of the morning the Canterbury Mounted Rifles left the mobilisation camp for the last time and rode to Lyttelton. Their route took them across the Avon where they watered their horses, on over the Heathcote Bridge, Ferry Road and through Sumner to the transport ships. They were taken first to Wellington and in October that year they sailed for Egypt via Australia and Sri Lanka.

The Canterbury Mounted Rifles formed part of the NZ Mounted Brigade and served in Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine. On 23 June 1919 the last of the regiment left Egypt for good and returned to New Zealand. For a variety of reasons including quarantine rules only 4 of the more than 10,000 horses that were shipped out of the country for war use (some by the Canterbury Mounted Rifles) were brought back. 340 men of the regiment were killed during the First World War.



*Troops watering horses in the Avon River near Carlton Bridge, Christchurch [23 September, 1914].*

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*Members of the B Squadron of the Canterbury Mounted Regiment crossing the Heathcote Bridge, Ferry Road, on their way to Lyttelton [23 September, 1914].*

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