

Kibble's War Effort: the Home Front and Active Service

Kibble contributed to the war effort, both at home and on the battlefield during both World Wars.

During World War I, boys from Kibble worked in Beardmore's munitions factory. Their presence there was contentious due to concerns about young people working in such an environment and because of Labour movement frustrations about the dilution of labour. These issues contributed to strike action taken by munitions workers in 1916 and further serious industrial unrest in 1917.

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.



World War II again saw many former pupils enlisting when discharged from Kibble. Sadly, as in WWI, many would be injured or killed in action. Some were held as prisoners of war and many were honoured with medals. Peter Gardner, who would go on to become head teacher of the school when his father, George, retired in 1952, was also taken prisoner. Peter was commissioned into the 2nd Lothians and Border Horse tank regiment and posted to North Africa. He was wounded at the Battle of Kasserine Pass, Tunisia and taken prisoner to a camp near Parma, Italy. Despite a shrapnel injury to his leg, he escaped from the camp in October 1943, trekking more than 300 miles in winter over the Alps to Switzerland, and eventually into Allied lines. By the end of his Army service he had attained the rank of Major.

George Bickerstaff, former Kibble boy, sent to Australia to take up farm work in 1914. Joined Australian Imperial Force in 1915/16
(Image courtesy State Library of South Australia, Ref. B46130/240, 1916)

The impact of the world wars on families is reflected in Kibble's admissions records; many boys admitted to Kibble during both world wars are recorded as having fathers and/or brothers serving overseas, held as prisoners of war, or killed in action. Also, many of them are listed as having family members, often females, working in munitions factories.

George Kirkhope McPhail, former Kibble School Captain, sent to Australia to take up farm work in 1913. Joined 74th Battalion of Australian Military Forces, then the Australian Imperial Force in 1915

(Image from Roger Freeman, Hurcombe's Hungry Half Hundred: A Memorial History of the 50th Battalion AIF, 1916-19, Peacock, Adelaide, 1991, p. 58)

