

1914-1918 HOUSING IN THE UPPER HUTT DISTRICT

When World War One began the demand on housing in the Upper Hutt district increased. Service Personnel arriving at Trentham were often accompanied by their wives and/or families. This resulted in the overcrowding of boarding houses and many people shared rental properties.

The Upper Hutt Town Board covered the area around and between Ward Street and Ebdentown Street and provided some amenities such as water. The Hutt County covered the surrounding area and had no infrastructure in place.

The conditions of some rental properties and the prices charged were discussed, in letters and newspaper articles written and information came to the attention of Government departments.

Researching this subject fully will take some time.

Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 20 January 1917

More "pore" working men Shylocks who bleed soldier and who moan about the cost of living while they "rack rent" unfortunate tenants have come to our knowledge. One 'poor' toiler who owns a couple of four roomed cottages in the west end of the township has gone to live in town where're he pays 16s for a four-roomed cottage with electric light, water, drainage and every convenience, but he collects 25s from a soldier as rent for a 4 roomed shack on the main road and 20s from a soldier for a 4 roomed cottage in a back street – the "War-rent" of each would be about ten bob a week. Another "pore" toiler charges a soldier and his family 15s a week for a 2 roomed whare in a back street while a loud mouthed trades unionist get 25s a week from a soldier for a 2 roomed partly furnished week-end cottage located further away. "Pore" working men! "Paw" is nearer the mark – paws on the soldier's pay next please.
(Reference Papers past website Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 20 January 1917)

Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 07 April 1917

Two roomed house to let rent 8s Range. Town water. Central Address at Independent.
(Reference Papers past website Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 07 April 1917)

Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 07 April 1917

They Say - That Sandie is one of the chaps who rose the rent in war time. Sandie may be a great MacStraafer but he's not a bad landlord. 11s 6d is a reasonable rent for a decent house in the centre of the township. It's not as much as the War Regulations would permit him to charge. If landlords down the valley were as reasonable there would be no complaints.

That a toiler pitched a tent on another man's land and then charged a working man ten bob a week for it. Some chap says we ought to get our information from the landlords not the tenants. Thanks but we're doing nicely as it is.

That another deal Kerischen Brother down Trentham way is so chockfull of the Love of Gawd and of the poor soldier that he put a window and a door in each of his fowl houses and let the single rooms to soldiers at a pound a week.

That two ex-storekeepers an ex J.P. and an unnaturalised neutral have been running up one and two roomed tin or second class unpainted timber sheds near the camp and charging a pound and more for them.

That the unfortunate tenants have to bury their "dead" near the shacks or visit "my aunt" in the scrub.

That the Town Board Building By-law bars such shacks so the rapacious landlord goes just outside the Upper Hutt Town District and gets permission from the Hutt County to put them up in its territory.

That Charlie Collet thinks ten or eleven bob enough for a four roomed house. Soldiers offered him £1 a week for each of his cottages if he'd turn his tenants out. He refused the offers. He is in a different street to Edward Backstrom.

(Reference Papers past website Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 07 April 1917)

Upper Hutt Town Board

Upper Hutt 13 April 1917

The Chairman

National Efficiency Board Wellington

Dear Sir

Since the Trentham Military Camp has been in operation a large number of the Staff the majority of them married men has been compelled to live in its vicinity also many soldier who are desirous of being with their families before leaving the Country lease houses or rooms and in each successive draft more married men are included fresh families come to the district and the charges made to these soldier fore ham-shackled structures have increased to such an extreme that the Upper Hutt Town Board respectfully asks the Board to intervene.

The rates of pay granted to soldiers does not permit them to meet such exorbitant charges amounting to or ore then thirty per cent of their military pay without drawing upon their saving.

In many instance £1.0.0 per week is charged for Buildings made of second hand material and of no great value than £40.0.0 four and five families are living in an ordinary 6 roomed dwelling washhouses and sheds formerly used for fuel and poultry are now in=habited by families at much as 22/6 per week.

The conditions under which a lot of these people are obliged to live tends to bring about an unsanitary and probably dangerous state of affairs in proximity to the camp as for most part the places mentioned are located between the town district boundary and the camp itself instances are given of cases where night soil has to be buried in immediate neighbourhood of the dwellings a feet distant from them at least three and four times a week.

Accompanying this communication please find photographs recently taken of dwellings referred to herein and with them the details or resent charges for a few of the many places the Soldiers and their families are compelled to live in within the town district and more especially within the Hutt County on the boundary of the Upper Hutt Town District.

I remain dear Sir yours faithful

W E Laney Town Clerk

(Reference Archives NZ Wellington NEB 1 12 463 regarding High rents charged for cottages at Upper Hutt owing to proximity to Trentham Camp)

A letter of reply was sent 30 April 1917 to Town Clerk advising that the letter had been forwarded to the Board of Trade to investigate. A letter of reply dated 02 May 1917 was received by National Efficiency Board from the Board of Trade acknowledging receipt of the letter from the Town Clerk of the Upper Hutt Town Board stating that the Board will make inquiries into the matter.

(Reference Archives NZ Wellington NEB 1 12 463 regarding High rents charged for cottages at Upper Hutt owing to proximity to Trentham Camp)

I have been unable to locate any information from the Board of Trade regarding an investigation or any action taken. It would be wonderful if I could locate the photographs of the dwellings concerned.

Minutes of Board of Trade = No details about soldier housing in Trentham Upper Hutt. Board of Trade Advisory Committee on Commercial Intelligence = No details of soldiers rental housing.

(Reference Archives NZ Wellington ICI 821 Minutes of Board of Trade 01 January to 31 March 1917 & ICI 822 Minutes of Board of Trade 191701 January to 31 March 1917 & AAFZ W5703 412 Box 2 ag. 11/91 Board of Trade Advisory Committee on Commercial Intelligence)

Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 14 April 1917

On the motion of, Comm'r McCurdy the clerk directed to prepare a return giving the names of all owners of property where houses are not connected with the town water-supply. Pursuant to notice Comm'r Brown moved his motion relating to extortionate rents charged the soldiers for single rooms and 2roomed whares in and near the township and unwarranted recent increases in cases. He 'tabled documents giving details and illustrated by photographs of a number of the, shacks for which a pound and more was charged by rapacious landlords. He also referred tenants being compelled to bury 'night soil in close proximity to their dwellings where located outside the town district. He thought the attention of the government should be drawn to the matter. Comm'r McCurdy supported the motion and suggested it's author and the chairman be a special committee to bring the matter before the government and the "Cost of Living" or the National Efficiency Boards or the Public Health Department to, have things remedied. All landlords were not rapacious he quoted Allen, Collett and others who let four-roomed residences in the centre of the town at from nine to twelve shillings per week, though, in some cases, the tenants at these rents were from £5 to £10 in arrear while in constant work. On Comm'r Greig's suggestion it was decided to allow the representatives of the press full access to all documents, and the motion as amplified was adopted unanimously.

(Reference Papers past website Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 14 April 1917)

Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 18 August 1917

15s a week rent for a partly furnished four rooms cottage. To let for six months from the end of August to a good tenant.

(Reference Papers past website Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 18 August 1917)

Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 18 August 1917

A non com on the Trentham camp staff wants to rent a house

(Reference Papers past website Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 18 August 1917)

Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 25 August 1917

The Board of Trade notified it intended to hold a public sitting at Upper Hutt re extortionate rents. As it did not advertise the fact it is doubtful if any advantage will result.

(Reference Papers past website Hutt Valley Independent newspaper 25 August 1917)
