

POWs at Sutton Bonington

The First World War began on 28th July 1914 with Britain entering the war on the 4th August. By the time the war ended on 11th November 1918 over 10 million soldiers and 6½ million civilians had been killed. An estimated 7 to 9 million soldiers were taken prisoner during the First World War, 192, 000 of which were from Britain and the Commonwealth. The Hague and Geneva conventions covered the treatment of POWs but there were widespread allegations of cruelty and mistreatment on all sides.

Accommodating Prisoners of War was a huge undertaking for all involved. At the start of the war neither side had systems in place for dealing with POWs. Makeshift camps were hastily erected, either by building from scratch or commandeering existing buildings. In Nottinghamshire the new Sutton Bonington campus of the Midland Agricultural and Dairy College, now the School of Biosciences at The University of Nottingham, was taken over by the War Office as a Prisoner of War Camp in 1915.

The Sutton Bonington camp was used to house German officers, the vast majority of whom were failed escapees from other POW camps. With up to 500 high-risk prisoners being incarcerated in the camp at any given time further escape attempts were perhaps inevitable. On 24th September 1917, 22 men escaped from the Sutton Bonington camp through a tunnel that had been dug to the outside world. They were all recaptured within the week. The Sutton Bonington camp was affiliated to the Prisoner of War camp established at nearby Donington Hall in Leicestershire from where in June 1915 the German pilot Gunther Pluschöw made the only successful escape from Britain in either World War.

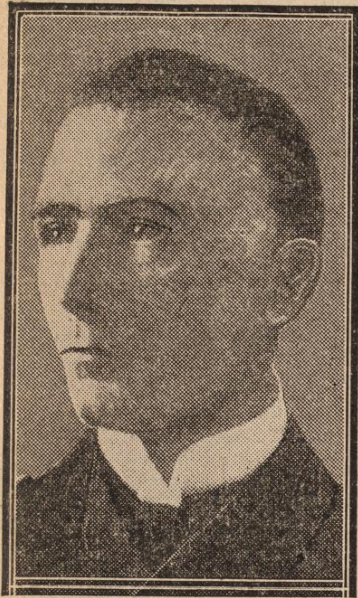
The University of Nottingham collects archival material relating to the history of the University itself and its predecessor bodies, including the Midland Agricultural and Dairy College, the history of the East Midlands, and the research interests of the University. Over three million items are stored at Kings Meadow Campus. For more information on any of the items in the display or to arrange a visit to the Reading Room at Kings Meadow Campus see the information at www.nottingham.ac.uk/mss or email mss-library@nottingham.ac.uk



**Photographs of German Prisoners of War at Sutton Bonington.
Copyright WW Winter Ltd, Derby; c. 1917-1918.
UMP/5/61 and UMP/5/67**

The photograph on the left shows a German sailor standing with his back to the corner of a building on the campus. Lettuces and other plants are seen growing between where the sailor is standing and the building. From the wording on the sailor's cap it seems he had served in a submarine. The photograph on the right shows three German officer prisoners in uniform standing with the front door of the Main Building behind them.

CAPTAIN OF EMDEN AMONG RECAPTURED PRISONERS



Karl von Mueller, the captain of the German raider Emden, who was among the prisoners who escaped from Sutton Bonnington and was recaptured about mid-day near Plumtree.



Trumped the Germans' trick! Inspector John Keast, R.S.P.C.A., Nottingham, and Samson Gunn, farmer, East Leake, who found the two escaped German prisoners, Lieuts. Fritz Boerner and Hans Kraus, playing cards in a ditch on Gotham Hills.

**Front page of the Nottingham Guardian of 26th September 1917 telling of the recapture of German prisoners who had escaped from the Sutton Bonington Prisoner of War camp.
EMSC Not.**

Twenty two prisoners escaped from the Sutton Bonington camp on the 24th September 1917. This article announces the re-capture of the most high profile escapee, Kapitan Karl Friedrich von Muller, a celebrated German naval officer, along with two other escapees whose names are not given. All twenty two prisoners were rounded up over the course of a week. The final four were taken into custody on 1st October, having reached Brimington near Chesterfield.

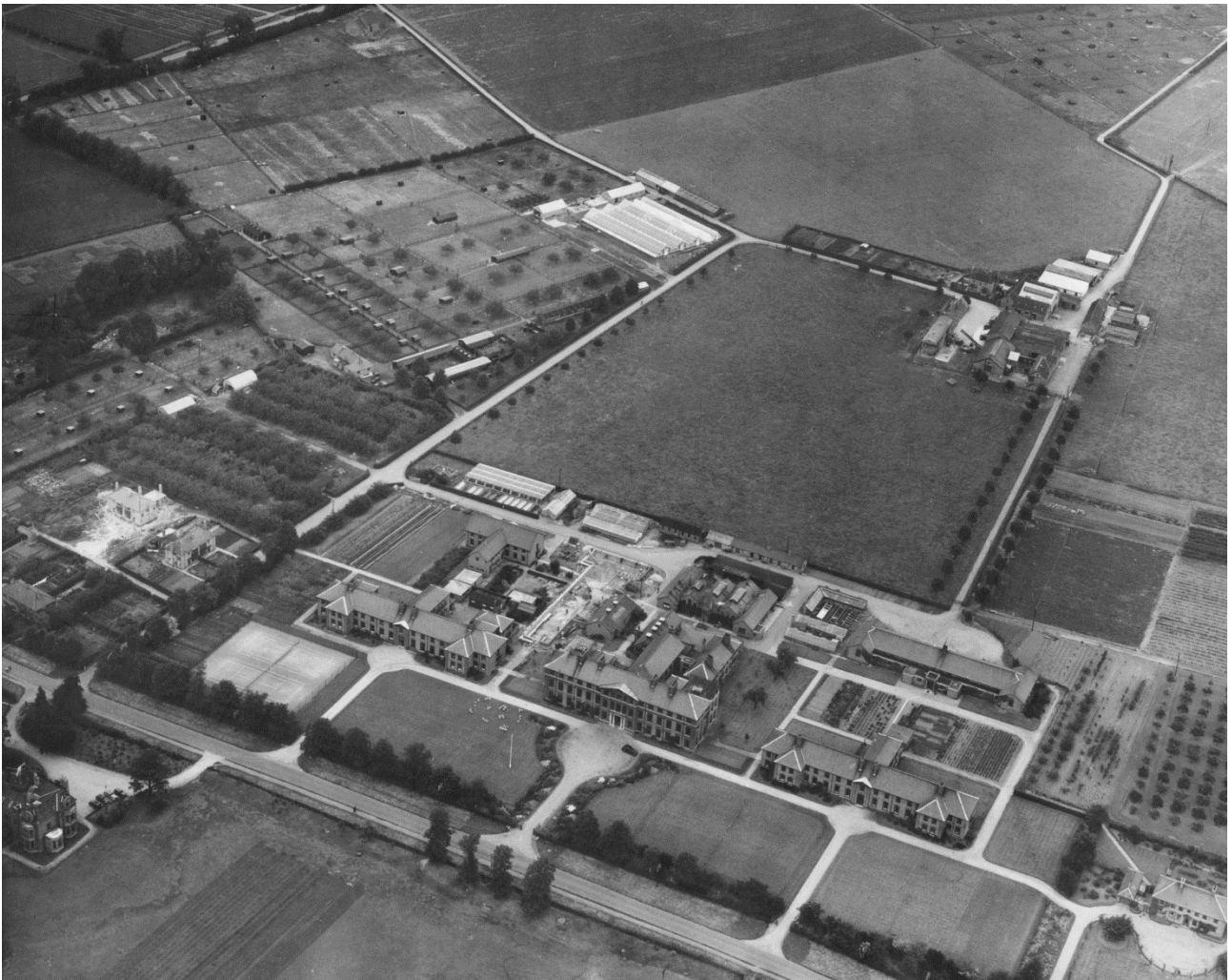


**Photograph of Donington Hall whilst in use as a Prisoner of War camp;
c. 1917.
UMP/5/259**

In the foreground of the photograph is a barbed wire fence with a lookout guard post on the right adjacent to a pathway. In the background is the massive building of Donington Hall.



**Photograph of German Prisoners of War being marched along a street
in Castle Donington; c. 1917.
UMP/5/260**



**Photograph of the Sutton Bonington campus showing the lime avenue;
c. 1950s-1960s.
UMP/1/12/2**

The Lime Avenue on Sutton Bonington campus was planted to commemorate those lost in the First World War. There is said to be a 'Queen's Shilling' buried underneath each tree.

A FURTHER STAGE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MIDLAND COLLEGE.

The formal opening of the new buildings, at Sutton Bonington, on October 27th, 1919, marks another stage in the development of the College. Nearly twenty-five years have passed since the Midland Dairy Institute was opened at Kingston, and when in 1900, the Agricultural Department was transferred from University College to Kingston, the scheme of agricultural education was unified and extended. The demand on the teaching and housing accommodation steadily increased during the following 10 years, so that, when the Board of Agriculture,—under the Presidency of Mr. Runciman,—was able to offer inducements to County Councils to increase their facilities for education in agriculture and allied subjects, the Governing Body had already decided the broad lines of their policy, and quickly produced detailed plans and estimates.

The renting, and subsequent purchase of the Lodge Farm provided excellent building land, near to the station and within a reasonable distance of Kingston. It was possible, therefore, to commence work upon the new buildings in 1914 before the outbreak of war was fully realised, and by the summer of 1916 the greater part of the structure was finished, and the fittings, machinery, etc., delivered. A few weeks afterwards, the College was taken over by the War Department, and served as a Prisoners of War (Officers) Camp until the spring of 1919. The removal of the large number of huts and fixtures,—the camp contained as many as 600 prisoners sometimes,—and the cleaning and painting was quite a formidable piece of work, but it would have been possible to open the College at the beginning of October had not the railway strike supervened.

Some considerable time must elapse before the scheme of education is complete, for no doubt in due course the dairies will be removed from Kingston to Sutton Bonington, and a women's hostel provided. The two main disadvantages at Kingston,—

water supply and sewage disposal,—are absent at Sutton Bonington, and the closer proximity to the railway is a great benefit. Certain other advantages can also be claimed for the new College, and though the architect may not have succeeded in providing a picturesque building, he has, nevertheless, created something which, by its simplicity and good workmanship, provides a most suitable establishment.

If, as seems probable, more support is to be accorded in the future to agriculture, then a good technical, as well as a good general education, must be given to the farmer so that he may be able to take full advantage of modern methods and machinery, and further, that he may have acquired before he begins his career, a balanced judgment and a scientific habit of mind.

It is to foster this progressive farming that the College exists, and whilst the curriculum may change, and some part of the present work be delegated to other centres, the new College (with such additions as experience may show to be necessary) will for many years to come be in a position to provide sound teaching, illustrated and explained by the field trials, experiments, and general practice, which are in operation on the College farm.

Opportunities for the enlargement of the farm have recently occurred, and the Governing Body have availed themselves of the occasions, so that the area of the farm is now slightly more than 200 acres.

WM. GOODWIN.

Article from the Midland Agricultural and Dairy College Magazine announcing the return of the Sutton Bonington site to the College after its use as a POW Camp; 1920. EMSC Periodicals: Not U

The new college buildings were completed in 1916 but were taken over by the War Office before the College could use them. The College finally gained possession in 1919 and the new campus was officially opened on 27 October 1919.