



How Did Britain Handle Its Biggest Wave of Refugees Ever?

In association with BBC Radio 4's drama series Home Front

The rape of Belgium, 1914 - Page 1 of 2

Presented by Rachel Shelley, Actor

CONTINUITY ANNOUNCER:

This is BBC Radio 4

Clip from *Home Front*:

RALPH:

So, these the first of the Belgian arrivals, Dorothea?

DOROTHEA:

Arrived by dinghy this morning. Poor wretches are simply terrified.

RALPH:

They don't look in the best of health, do they?

DOROTHEA:

What kind of people would treat others so brutally, Ralph?

RACHEL SHELLEY:

Home Front is a BBC Radio 4 drama that focuses on the story of a group of characters in Britain during World War One. I play Dorothea, the vicar's reclusive wife who comes out of her shell, helping Belgian refugees who started pouring into this harbour in Folkestone.

It's estimated that over a quarter of a million arrived in Britain during the course of the war. And just in the first few months, tens of thousands arrived in the town of Folkestone.

They came with stories of humiliation and atrocities at the hands of the German Forces who were taking a short-cut through Belgium in the hope of a speedy victory over France.

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They needed, food, housing, health care, jobs and of course many of them spoke only Flemish.

The people of Britain were already bracing themselves for fighting a war on the continent.

But they assisted the refugees and many like Dorothea felt compelled to open up their houses and take in these displaced people.

Clip from *Home Front*:

DOROTHEA:

Well, if the state of these poor people is anything to go by, we are going to have our work cut out for us over the coming months. Please, can somebody see to that poor woman over there?

RACHEL SHELLEY:

Nobody knew that the war would go on not for months but for years.

This is the story of what happened to those Belgian refugees and how the tolerance of their British hosts began to wane as the war went on.

Photographs courtesy of Alan Taylor, Folkestone & District Local History Society.

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