During World War One, the High Streets looked very different from how they are today. There were no supermarkets or shopping centres. Shops were smaller and the majority were named after the families who actually owned them. To buy the things a family needed meant walking to lots of different shops, e.g. the butcher for meat, the tailor for clothes, the baker for bread and the greengrocer for fruit and vegetables. Often, shopkeepers displayed their goods outside the shop and then brought them indoors at closing time like the fruit and vegetable shop in Fore Street does nowadays.

Sweetshops sold many kinds of hard-boiled sweets such as humbugs, peppermints, aniseed balls and pear drops and these were kept in big glass jars. The shopkeeper would weigh out the sweets and hand them to customers in a little paper bag. Liquorice sticks, toffee, and 'tiger nuts' - sweet, chewy nuts from Spain - were also popular. The first chocolate bars started to appear in shops early in the 1900s but it was quite rare and very expensive.

Shopkeepers in the early 1900s weighed sweets using imperial measurements instead of the metric system we have today. 1 lb (consisting of 16 ounces) is equal to 0.45kg (kilograms).

In the early 1900s, tea was Britain's overall favourite drink but lemonade and ginger beer were popular with children. A tea-time treat came from the 'muffin man', who walked the streets selling bread-like, flat buns, best eaten toasted. He would ring a bell to tell everyone he was around.

For more substantial meals, there were fish and chip shops and pie shops on the streets of many towns. Newman’s had a fish and chip shop in Exeter, at the bottom of Fore Street, opposite the Air Ambulance charity shop.

There were a lot of very poor families who ate only one meal a day. They got by on tea, bread and jam and dripping. They might get a meal with meat (maybe boiled bacon and potatoes) just once a week, on Sunday.

During the First World War there were dreadful food shortages, as we could not import food, and soup kitchens were set up to provide a hot meal for those who needed it.

Imagine lots of posters on walls and notice boards encouraging people to support the war. Every main street had a recruitment office where men could join the army or navy and this was what now is Station Garage in Fore Street. Often, groups of friends from the same town or workplace would join up together. Young (school-age) newspaper sellers would stand on the pavement, shouting the latest war headlines. Horse-drawn vehicles rattled by and on the motor buses women drivers and conductors could be seen in their new, smart uniforms. Fore Street in Topsham wasn’t surfaced with tarmac until the middle of WW1 so previously it would have been beaten earth and stones, which was muddy in winter and very dusty in summer. As darkness fell, the shops closed and gas street lamps were lit. From the start of the war, towns close to the coast, like Topsham, had to be dark at night in case of air raids. All vehicles had to drive without lights and residents had to black out their windows.

To combat food shortages and price rises, people were encouraged to grow their own produce and keep their own livestock in their own gardens, allotments and other areas of land. Many families kept pigs. Most pigs were kept in sties in the backyard. Pigs and chickens were fed on left-overs.