



Huge numbers of shell baskets were made in the Trent Valley during the First World War, particularly by firms such as Dryad Cane Works of Leicester, Matthew Mills of East Leake, and Crampton & Ward Ltd. of Castle Donington. Here, baskets are stacked for shipping in a yard at Castle Donington. Seven baskets formed one pack.  
Courtesy of Castle Donington Museum.

# Artillery shell baskets

During the First World War, basketwork cases were used to transport artillery shells to the front lines in limbers, attached to gun carriages, or hung on the saddles of packhorses and mules.

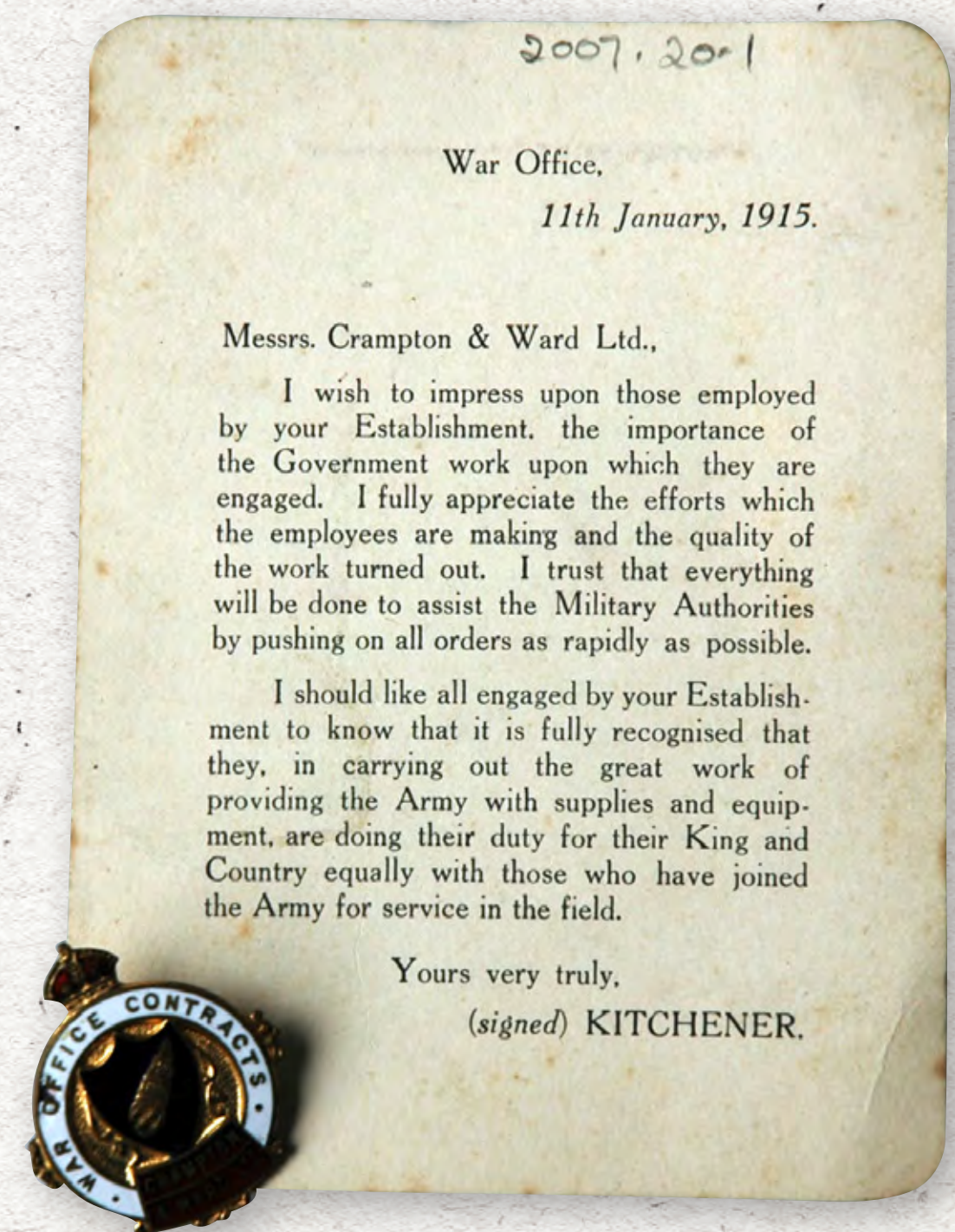
Shell baskets were made from cane, which had to be imported from France and Germany. Imports were organised by the Board of Trade, which registered firms to distribute the cane. The design of the basket varied according to the type of shell and cartridge it was to accommodate. The 1915 *Basket, Skip and Hamper Makers' Federation List of Sizes and Prices for Government Work throughout the London District* gives details of howitzer, lyddite, shrapnel, 18-pounder and 13-pounder shell baskets.

The 13- and 18-pounder shell baskets consisted of a tapering tube, open at both ends and woven on a mould so that it formed a tightly fitting sleeve around the shell. The shell was inserted into the basket at the wide end. Some shell baskets had sections of woven willow, while others had wooden splints. Most shell baskets had a leather cuff at the wide end, and some had additional leather bands in the middle and at the narrow end.

Shell baskets were made in the hundreds of thousands during the war, both by large basketmaking firms and as part of a small cottage industry. Huge numbers of basketmakers were diverted from making willow baskets to making cane shell baskets, which contributed to the decline of the willow basketmaking industry after the war.



An 18-pounder shell basket made by Dryad Cane Works, Leicester. The leather bands were often sewn on to the finished baskets by homeworkers.  
© Leicester City Museums Service.



Basketmaking was deemed just as important to the war effort as serving on the front lines. Workers were given a lapel badge and card to show they were working on War Office contracts and that they did not have to enlist. However, some still chose to join up.  
Courtesy of Castle Donington Museum.



On the Western Front, mutual shelling on both sides often made the terrain impassable for a limber or gun carriage, so shell baskets were hung from the saddles of horses or mules.  
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