

Military Appeal Tribunals of the First World War in South West Wales

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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

Military Appeal Tribunal papers can in themselves give a wealth of information regarding the life of the men who applied for exemption from military service during the First World War.

Regrettably, such a lot of this information has now gone forever due to the fact that the government ordered that the records were to be destroyed shortly after the war due to their sensitive nature. Cardiganshire (Ceredigion) is the only county in Wales and indeed one of the few within the whole of Britain who still have surviving records of that period, which give first-hand information as to the reasons why men could not or did not want to enlist. This dissertation will attempt to build up a picture of what life was like for the men, the tribunal members and also conscientious objectors who made a stand in the name of peace.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Conscientious objector	(CO)
County Appeal	(CA)
Independent Labour Party	(ILP)
Municipal Borough	(MB)
Local Government Board	(LGB)
No Conscription Fellowship	(NCF)
Non Combatant Corps	(NCC)
Rural District	(RD)
Rural Local	(RL)

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Introduction

Between 2014 and 2018 there were commemorations all over Wales to mark 100 years since the beginning and the end of the First World War. Generally speaking the focus during that period was on the major battles that took place, historical information about the servicemen and women who lost their lives, and also the unveiling of new war memorials. During those four years it became apparent that very little light was shed on the period of conscription, a turning point in the war where men would no longer be left to volunteer of their own free will, but were either deemed to have enlisted, or else apply for exemption through their local Military Appeal Tribunal. This dissertation will focus on tribunals, the status within society of the members who sat on them, and consider how fair and unbiased members and the military representative were towards those that applied for exemption. Geographically the area which will come under the microscope will be from the industrial town of Briton Ferry in Glamorgan following the coastal counties of Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and the southern part of Cardiganshire.

To fully understand how and why tribunals were set up it is vital to delve into the political history of Britain prior to war, and especially from 1914-1916, when much debate took place regarding the introduction of conscription. Research will be carried out how the general public perceived the war, how religious bodies and leaders reacted to what many viewed as a just war, and the military recruitment drives that took place together with their successes and failures. The study will look at the work of authors such as Aled Eurig, Simon Hancock and Robin Barlow, who for their Doctor of Philosophy degrees researched different phases of The First World War. While Eurig's two hundred and eighty page research on the Opposition to the First World War in Wales,¹ looks at the attitude of the churches and its ministers, anti-war

¹ Aled Eurig *Opposition to the First World War in Wales* (Cardiff University, 2016).

movements and political opposition, Hancock and Barlow chose to concentrate on two specific counties with the Social Aspect of the First World War in Pembrokeshire ² and the Military Tribunals in Carmarthenshire respectively.³

The third chapter will look at agriculture in Britain before the war, the import of the country's food supplies, the pressure that was put on the agricultural industry during the war, and the way young men were targeted to enlist, despite the fact that they were needed on the land. The increasing demand for a substantial increase in crop production meant that farmers had little option but to employ men who were either unfit or too old for military service to work on the farms, women who volunteered in the Women's Land Army and even school children. Tragically the effect the war had on some farmers or their sons was much greater than many had realised, and their mental health suffered to such a degree that it resulted in death. The question if agriculture was fairly represented on tribunals will be considered, and to what extent were men given exemption, and if the outcome of who should be exempted were consistent.

In reality very little Tribunal records have survived giving information about who the men were and what was the outcome of their appeals. Government orders meant that the majority of records had to be destroyed due to their sensitive nature. The Cardiganshire Appeal Tribunals records ⁴ that did manage to survive gives a wealth of information about the men who applied for exemption within the county, however, as this research only covers a small area of south Cardiganshire, only the town of Cardigan and the surrounding areas will be used. Attention will also be paid to the writings of Herbert M Vaughan

² Simon Hancock *The Social Impact of the First World War In Pembrokeshire*. (Cardiff University, 2015).

³ Robin Barlow, *Aspects of the Great War in Carmarthenshire University of Wales*, (Lampeter, 2000).

⁴ www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/archives/cardiganshire-great-war-tribunal-appeals-records/

High Sheriff of Cardiganshire, who in 1947 was persuaded to put pen to paper and record his memories of the time that he sat on the Cardiganshire Military Appeal Tribunal, where he does not hold back in condemning another members on the tribunal and especially a minister of religion who managed to get his architect son exempted from the Army.

Although Glamorgan had the highest total of identified Conscientious Objectors throughout Wales, Philip Adams, a native of Briton Ferry is the only author who has specifically concentrated his research on the dissent of one town in particular throughout the county. Being a valuable source Adams's research regarding Briton Ferry digs deeply into the background of those that advocated peace and the work those that those who had protested against conscription had done. His work also pays attention to well-known members of the No Conscription Fellowship (NCF) such as Bertrand Russell and Emrys Hughes an enthusiastic Labour supporter who was also the secretary of the Aberdare branch of the N C F. A whole chapter will be devoted to Conscientious Objectors (CO's) who will be divided into three groups, the Non-Combatant Corps, (NCC) the Alternatives and the Absolutes who refused the offer of joining either of the first two groups. John W Graham's work *Conscription and Conscience*⁵ gives a great deal of general information regarding the Military Service Act, the Tribunals, peace organisations and a considerable amount of information regarding British CO's and the treatment they had to endure inside prison walls.

Despite the lack of government records a valuable source of information can be accessed from newspapers of the period that give a good indication as to how military tribunals operated, who controlled them and how tolerant they were to men who came before them. The Carmarthen Journal, the Amman Valley Chronicle, and The Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph, gives first-hand information of what went on within tribunal meetings, with reporters even

⁵ John W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience A history 1916-1919*. (Kelly Publishers New York 1969).

recording disputes that took place not only between the members of the public and tribunals but also between members of tribunals and the military representative who would enforce his views on all and sundry. Despite the fact that members of tribunals were named, which in itself is a valuable record, appellants were more often than not only indicated by where they lived, their occupation and at times their ages. The amount of words permitted in this document does not allow for too much emphasis to be put on one particular chapter, therefore future research could be undertaken by gathering together material from newspapers and comparing them with the Pearce Register Peace Map⁶ making it possible to work out who exactly the conscientious objectors were that came before tribunals and how they were treated by them.

⁶ www.wcia.secure.force.com/peacemapwales

Chapter One

Background to Conscription

When Britain entered into war against Germany in August 1914 it had never had a conscripted army, but had always relied on volunteers enlistments. It had been 13 years since the army had last been in battle, however, even though the training itself had improved it had only around 250,000 regulars ready for action, out of which 78,400 were serving in India. The opposition German Army already had 700,000 regulars and within a week of war being declared the reserves had been called up which amounted to a total of 3.8 million men.⁷ Back in 1902, a meeting was held at the home of the Third Duke of Wellington where it was agreed to create a National Service League which would press for two years military service for all able bodied young men, added to which there would be compulsory drill held in schools.⁸ Despite the fact that the league had three hundred and fifteen thousand members and supporters by 1912, and that five consecutive conscription bills had been discussed in Parliament before 1914, opposition to conscription from within the Liberal, Labour and some Conservative Members of Parliament was strong.⁹

Despite Britain's lack of troops, Herbert Asquith the Prime Minister, speaking just two days into the war declared, 'I do not believe any nation ever entered into a greater controversy with a clearer conscience and a stronger conviction.'¹⁰ The immediate recruitment campaign that was put into action saw the appointment of a rather reluctant and aloof sixty-four year old Lord Kitchener as Secretary of State for War. Despite the fact that Kitchener lacked

⁷ www.spartacus-educational.com/FWWgermanA.htm

⁸ Will Ellsworth-Jones, *We Will Not Fight The Untold Story of World War One's Conscientious Objectors*. (Aurum Press Ltd London 2007) p.19-21.

⁹ www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/spotlights/antiwar.htm

¹⁰ Gerard J DeGroot, *Blighty British Society in the era of the Great War*. (Pearson Education Ltd, 1996) p.8.

any personality, he was nevertheless a popular choice with the British public regarding him as a man who would get things done and civilians into the ranks. According to Chapman,

He was the man who conceived the project and won the British public to carry it out. The masses trusted him and rushed to the standard raised in their midst. When he said he wanted 100,000 they came, when he asked for 600,000 they came, when he asked for a million they came. He said they were necessary and they believed him.¹¹

While the troubled Chancellor David Lloyd George who had opposed the Boer War stated in a letter to his wife on the 3 August, 1914 'I am moving through a nightmare world these days,'¹² he soon changed his attitude with K O Morgan stating, 'he quickly moved into a new mood of almost blithe adventure in meeting the challenges of total war.'¹³ Speaking to fellow Welshmen at the Queen's Hall in London on the 19 September that year his message to them was clear and patriotic.

Wales must continue to do her duty. I should like to see the race that faced the Normans for hundreds of years in a struggle for freedom, the race that helped to win Crecy, the race that fought for a generation under Glendower against the greatest Captain in Europe, I should like to see that race give a good taste of its quality in this struggle in Europe; and they are going to do it.¹⁴

The speech was printed and circulated widely and acknowledged with enthusiasm by the press, with Bentley Gilbert biographer declaring, 'he was in

¹¹ Terry Charman, *The First World War on the Home Front*. (Carlton Publishing Group London, 2014) p.38.

¹² Kenneth O Morgan *Rebirth of a Nation A History of Modern Wales* (Oxford University Press, 1998) p.159.

¹³ Morgan, p.159.

¹⁴ www.archive.org/stream/greatwarspeechde00lloyuoft/greatwarspeechde00lloyuoft_djvu.txt

the midst of a battle to persuade Lord Kitchener, the War Secretary, to allow the creation of a specifically Welsh Army Corps. A strong response to his call for men would be proof that an appeal for Welsh recruits could be made on a national basis.¹⁵ Being a non-conformist Welsh speaker, Lloyd George believed that it was vital to get as many Welshmen enlisting, so they could fight on behalf of the little five foot nations such as Belgium which Wales could wholly identify with. The National Executive Committee met on the 2 October, 1914 to discuss the matter. Eight days later the War Office issued a letter to notify the General Officer Commander in Chief that the committee was authorised to raise a Welsh Army Corps of two divisions. Within four months it had twenty thousand men in its first division known as the 38th (Welsh) Division.¹⁶

Certain authors have noted that many enlisted into the Army to escape their life of drudgery, dirt, low expectations, hard labour, and subsistence wages, which was not that different from life in the Army, but as de Groot points out

as the workers well knew, Civvy Street carried little risk of being shot, familiarity with drudgery might explain why the worker made such a resilient soldier after enlistment, but it cannot explain why he joined. Nevertheless, as with the recruits from the public schools, the worker's willingness to volunteer was based upon an assumption that the war would be neither long nor very deadly.¹⁷

South West Wales had been an area with military links long before the war through its association with the Territorial and Yeomanry Battalions, which were made up from local men and officers coming from well-known landowners such as the Campbell's of Golden Grove and Philipps of Picton

¹⁵ www.imperialglobalexeter.com/2014/09/19/lloyd-georges-greatest-war-speech-100-years-on/

¹⁶ www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/order-of-battle-of-divisions/38th-welsh-division/

¹⁷ DeGroot p.47

Castle. On the 16 October the Welshman carried the following information regarding a speech by Lord Henry Philipps, Picton Castle at a recruitment meeting held in St Clears when he expressed.

As true Welshmen they must all realise the great crisis which had overtaken us all as a nation and he felt that as gallant Welshmen they would not be behind, but would, as in the past, still maintain the noble traditions gained by them in the great days gone by. He asked the older people to encourage the young ones to come forward and to and to respond to their country's call and join the new Welsh Army Corps.¹⁸

During the early days of the war Swansea saw 'a great amount of hustle and bustle in the town as the Army and Navy Reservists left to join their units having been recalled to help deal with the crisis.'¹⁹ The Carmarthen Journal also described how Carmarthen was 'afire with enthusiasm,'²⁰ despite the fact that only two days into the war the Royal Navy's HMS Amphion which was built in Pembroke Dock was sunk in the English Channel leaving one hundred and fifty families to grieve, one of which included the family of Chief Stoker William Bowen aged 41 years from Carmarthen.²¹

By September 1914 local newspapers were making an urgent appeal for recruits, adding 'Recruiting offices have been opened in some of the most populous centres, with Llanelli as headquarters, and young men desirous of offering their services to this country at this critical juncture cannot do better

¹⁸ The Welshman, 16 October, 1914.

¹⁹ Bernard Lewis, *Swansea in the Great War*. (Pen and Sword Books Ltd, Barnsley South Yorkshire, 2014) p.12.

²⁰ Carmarthen Journal 7 August, 1914.

²¹ Steven John, *Carmarthen in the Great War* (Pen and Sword Books Ltd, Barnsley South Yorkshire, 2014) p.19.

than make an application without delay’²² With Kitchener rising to the challenge of creating his New Army recruitment meetings were held throughout South West Wales in quick succession of one another, often during different times of the same day with speakers moving from area to area. While small villages held their meetings at schools or village halls, towns such as Carmarthen would put on a far more elaborate shows, with open air meetings like the one held on fair day in front of the Guildhall on the 14 November, 1914. The meeting which was promoted by the West Carmarthenshire Joint (Liberal and Unionist) Recruitment Committee under the chairmanship of the town’s mayor Alderman John Lewis, would include prominent speakers such as the Mr John Hinds the Member of Parliament for West Carmarthenshire, Lieutenant –General Sir James Hills-Johnes, V.C., G.C.B., Col W Gwynne-Hughes and other local dignitaries. Raising the enthusiasm of bystanders which would include many young men who would flock into town on fair days would be a parade by Boy Scouts beforehand.²³

By the end of January 1915 recruitment campaigns had managed to get 1,342,647 men into the colours; however, February saw the figures taking a downward spiral with less than 22,000 coming forward per week, a figure it would only have taken a day and a half to achieve back in September the previous year.²⁴ Recruitment posters written in both Welsh and English had already begun to appear, making sure that the message of enlisting got through to all corners of Britain. The government additionally started putting pressure on family members, wives, sons, sweethearts and even children, by producing propaganda posters such as The Women of Britain say go. Is your best boy in khaki? What did you do in the war Daddy? According to Karyn Burham, ‘the general public were being whipped into a patriotic frenzy where any man out of uniform was viewed as a shirker, a slacker and a coward. So powerful were the

²² John, p.30.

²³ Carmarthen Weekly Reporter 13 November, 1914. p.3.

²⁴ DeGroot, p.92.

messages given out by the authorities and the press, that people became blind to any fact other than the lack of uniform.’²⁵

Although denominations such as the Baptists and Congregationalists had been connected with the Peace Society and pacifist movements in the nineteenth century, and had viewed war as a barbarous act, once the war was announced the reaction to the war among nonconformist denomination were tremendously supportive with Aled Eurig commenting, ‘even the most foremost pacifist leaders of the churches have surrendered. As for the rank and file of the ministers, they too are recruiting agents and the church and school recruiting stations.’²⁶ There is no evidence to suggest that South West Wales had it equivalent preacher to the Rev, John Williams, Brynsiencyn, Anglesey, a close friend of Lloyd George, who stood before his congregation in his military uniform while at the same time wearing his clerical collar. In Tenby the Rev, Bickerton C Edwards the Anglican vicar scorned the delusion of the pacifist, while the Rev, W F Phillips of the Presbyterian Church was of the opinion that ‘every able-bodied man should do his bit. If the Germans got to England they would do greater harm since they hated the British more than the Belgians’²⁷ When the South Wales Calvinistic Methodist Association met at Dinas near Fishguard in November, 1914 it let it be known that it ‘deeply regretted the war although they nevertheless thought it was a righteous cause, that of liberty, fairness and freedom.’²⁸

While some vicars and ministers were ready to advocate recruiting and did their best to get men, especially those of their congregation to enlist, others took their duty much further by enlisting themselves. Admired in the press in the hope

²⁵ Karyn Burnham, *The Courage of Cowards. The Untold Stories of First World War Conscientious Objectors* (Pen and Sword Books Ltd, Barnsley South Yorkshire, 2014) p.19.

²⁶ Aled Eurig p.49.

²⁷ Simon Hancock, *The Social Impact of the First World War In Pembrokeshire*, 2015. pp. 283-284.

²⁸ Hancock, p.282.

that it would bring more Christians forward was the Rev James, A Howell, Rector of Gumfreston who volunteered as Chaplain at the front in April 1917,²⁹ and the Rev John Wesley Howells a Tenby born pastor, of the Victoria Hall Wesley Methodist Church in Yorkshire, who became attached to the 7th Lancashire Fusiliers, who had acknowledged 'I'm in this for the real business-not patriotic employment but active service...as a Christian and a parson I'm joining the ninety lads from my church on this sacred enterprise.'³⁰ He was killed through accident in Palestine in 1917.³¹

During the early months of 1915 servicemen in the Army and Navy together with civilians had lost their lives during attacks in the Dardanelles, Dogger Bank and the sinking of the Lusitania off the coast of Ireland. The Liberal government came under attack for its mishandling of the war through the munitions scandal, when claims were made that the British Army were being hampered by insufficient shells, leading eventually to the resignation of Admiral John Fishers as First Sea Lord in May 1915.³² Following on from this Asquith had little option left but to form a coalition government, however whilst the Liberals continued to hold the most important posts, the new cabinet also included nine Conservative and one Labour member.³³ With the loss of lives increasing throughout the year with the Second battle of Ypres and the battle of Loos when Britain suffered in total some sixteen thousand loss of lives, the call for conscription was raised once more in Parliament, with The Times newspaper arguing that the voluntary system has its limits and that we were fast approaching it.³⁴ Lords Lansdown, Curzon, together with Boner Law and Chamberlain threatened to resign from the cabinet if conscription were not

²⁹ Hancock, [p.285](#).

³⁰ Hancock, p.285.

³¹ Hancock, p.285.

³² www.liberalhistory.org.uk/history/the-liberals-and-the-first-world-war/

³³ In December 1916 the Conservatives resigned due to their refusal to serve under Herbert Asquith.

³⁴ DeGroot, p.93.

proposed, while Churchill and Lloyd George went even further by stating they would resign if conscription was not brought in. Referring to that period Cyril Pearce is of the opinion that.

The matter did seem to have reached the critical point where, if only out of fatigue at the repetition of the same old arguments, a conclusion would be reached, and the only clear conclusion would be for conscription. Asquith resisted. Concerned to take the country along with him, his final ploy was the Derby Scheme.³⁵

To those that favoured conscription Herbert Asquith was looked upon as a leader who stood on neutral territory, despite this Trevor Wilson gives a far clearer indication on where Asquith stood on the question 'for the truth was that Asquith although claiming to have an open mind on conscription detested it and believed that he represented his party in doing so.'³⁶ The National register of all men and women between the ages of fifteen and sixty-five years taken on the 15th August, 1915,³⁷ would be able to calculate how many men of military age had still not enlisted. Throughout South West Wales most newspapers carried information about the register and advice on how the forms should be filled in.³⁸ During mid-September the evidence collected had shown that over five million men were not in the ranks, out of which there were just under two and a quarter million still single, with the rest made up of married men. Despite the fact that large recruitment rallies still carried on the evidence that came

³⁵ Cyril Pearce *Comrades in Conscience The story of an English community's opposition to the Great War* (Francis Boutle Publishers London 2001) p.143.

³⁶ R.J.Q Adams, *Journal of British Studies* 1986 p.245.

³⁷ Previous to this in November 1914 the British public were asked to fill in a Household Return by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee. The forms were to find out how many men were eligible and willing to serve.

³⁸ Unlike a census which was filled in by the head of the household, each man and woman would be given their own individual forms, granite blue for men and white for women.

about with the national registration made little difference especially in Pembrokeshire. During October of 1915 recruitment figures were a great disappointment to the organisers when the following information was revealed

Haverfordwest and Fishguard two recruits each, Milford Haven six recruits, St David's, Solva, Letterston, St Dogmaels and Kilgerran no recruits and in Maenclochog the meeting did not even take place as no-one attended. It will, therefore, be seen that the net result of the nine meetings, held in different parts of the county, was ten recruits.³⁹

Reflecting on the failings of Haverfordwest in particular, Major Eaton-Evans was of the opinion "if they did not want conscription, and wanted to still see the land free, they would have to come forward without compulsion"⁴⁰

At the beginning of October, 1915 Lord Derby who had previously played a leading role in raising volunteers especially for the King's (Liverpool) Regiment was appointed as Director General for Recruiting. Within days of starting work he had created a programme which came to be known as the Derby Scheme. The scheme encouraged men between the ages of eighteen and forty one to come forward and attest their willingness to volunteer on the understanding that it would be the youngest men would be taken first with all single men taken before those that were married. Despite a two week extension for men to come forward the end result showed that just over one million men

³⁹ Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter for the Counties of Pembroke, Cardigan and Carmarthen, Glamorgan and the West of South Wales. 6 October, 1915. p.2.

⁴⁰ Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter for the Counties of Pembroke, Cardigan and Carmarthen, Glamorgan and the West of South Wales. 6 October, 1915. p.2

disregarded Derby's appeal, therefore the likelihood of conscription was becoming inevitable.

When the Military Service Act was eventually passed by Parliament in January, 1916, all unmarried men and widowers without children between eighteen and forty one years were deemed to have enlisted and were transferred to the Reserves, unless they decided to appeal against their call up papers and appear before a military tribunal.⁴¹ Appeals for exemptions could be made under the following categories.

On the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that the man should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work in which he is habitually engaged.

On the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that the man should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work which he wishes to be engaged.

If he is being educated or trained for any work, on the ground that it is expedient in the national interests.

On the ground that serious hardship would ensure if the man were called up for Army service.

On the ground of ill-health or infirmity.

On the ground of a conscientious objection to the undertaking of combatant service.

⁴¹ By May 1916 the second Military Act had been passed with all married men between eighteen and forty one year's being conscripted.

On the ground that the principal and usual occupation of the man is one of those included in the list of occupations certified by Government Departments for exemption.⁴²

Welsh Liberal members of Parliament showed very little opposition to conscription apart from a small minority who voted against the two Military Service Acts. Amongst them was the Liberal member for East Denbighshire E T John who defected shortly afterwards to the Labour Party, and W Llewelyn Williams member for Carmarthen Boroughs who although a pacifist supported the war back in 1914 went on say,

I thank, in spite of my heavy heart at the horror of war that I have lived to see the nations of the British Empire standing up, heart by heart, as one man in this spiritual war: it is a war against war: a war to end all war. I never loved war but I say that this war is just and inevitable.⁴³

A close friend of Lloyd George, Williams's attitude towards conscription was described as thus, 'he revolted fundamentally against conscription and developed henceforth an overwhelming, almost pathological hatred for Lloyd George, long his close ally. Henceforth Llewelyn Williams was a powerful pacifist recruit to the critics of the war.'⁴⁴

Condemning Williams for the stand he was taking Mr, T R Ludford, editor and proprietor of the Llanelli Guardian wrote in the paper in early 1916.

⁴² www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Military-Service-Tribunal-survey-Dec-2015-copy.pdf Viewed 28 March, 2020.

⁴³ Aled Eurig p.46.

⁴⁴ K O Morgan, Peace Movements in Wales 1899-1945. Welsh History Review /Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru. Vol. 10, nos. 1-4 1 January 1980 p.412.

It is full time that a public, protest should be made against the attitude of the Borough Member, whose views on Conscription, and the ill-timed and insistent manner in which he is trying to force them upon the Government, are regarded locally with great indignation. Not only does Mr, Llewelyn Williams' championship of the slacker arouse deep resentment in this town, but it gives a false impression throughout the country of the part taken by Llanelly in the defence of the Empire, as people are prone to believe that a Member of Parliament usually voices the opinions of the majority of his constituents.⁴⁵

Whilst the majority of the people of Britain were in favour of conscription, during April, 1916 over two hundred thousand people showed their opposition to the Military Service Act in a rally which was held at Trafalgar Square in London. Despite this show of solidarity just a month later the Derby's Scheme's promise to married men was revoked when they were added to the list of men who would be called up.

⁴⁵ The Carmarthen Journal and South Wales Weekly Advertiser. 7 January, 1916
(Second Edition) p.3

Chapter Two

The Tribunals and its Members

Reflecting other Tribunal across Britain those that were appointed to sit on Tribunals in Wales had their names put forward to the War Office by Town, Borough or County Councils. The Conservative Walter Long who was elected as President of the Local Government Board (LGB) in the coalition government recommended that former members of the old Derby tribunal should be invited to sit on the new tribunals with other names added which could be up to a maximum of twenty-five members. Whilst the list of new members put forward was generally accepted, the names from the Cardiganshire Appeal Tribunal were met with opposition before its initial meeting as Herbert M Vaughan himself a member recalls.

This tentative list contained the names of four or five dissenting ministers, whilst the remainder was to consist of prominent local Liberals with only one exception. This was, to put it mildly, a most one-sided and unsuitable selection, and the Lord Lieutenant of the county, Colonel Herbert Davies Evans of Highmead vigorously protested at headquarters. As a result of his protest, considerable changes were made in the personnel of the Tribunal. The dissenting ministers were rejected (with the exception of the Rev John Williams of Cardigan, who owned a strong political pull) and a different element was introduced in their place.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Herbert M Vaughan The Cardiganshire Appeal Tribunal March 1916-November 1918 p.171. Wales Number 25 1947 www.journals.library.wales

The men and occasional women who sat to decide the fate of those before them were ‘civilian, middle class and public-minded’.⁴⁷ Coming from backgrounds such as landowners, magistrates, doctors, religious leaders, business owners, and more often than not County Councillors who had an allegiance to a political party. Always present at each tribunal would be a military representative who may have been a retired servicemen or recruiting officer. Guidance and procedures as to the running of tribunals was sent out regularly through pamphlets and booklets from the L G B, however, as McDermott rightly points out, ‘it took some time before Local Authorities and the public generally were able to understand the machinery of the scheme, and it was not surprising, therefore, that applicants, and at times the Tribunals failed to interpret rightly the regulations and instructions.’⁴⁸

Right from the early days that tribunals met, not all members were in harmony with one another. Writing an account of his time as a member of the Cardiganshire Appeal Tribunal Herbert M Vaughan recalls that out of the 11 members five were county council member and one was the council’s clerk who already were plotting preconceived plans of who would be the tribunal’s chairman.

I was staying at Highmead for the opening session of the tribunal in the middle of March 1916 and my cousin and host Colonel Davies-Evans impressed on me the importance of proposing Sir Laurence⁴⁹ as Chairman as soon as we were seated. The County Council clique however went one better than this, for the name of Mr Jones

⁴⁷ Eurig p.207

⁴⁸ James McDermott, *British Military Service Tribunals 1916-1918*. (Manchester University Press, 2011).p.11.

⁴⁹ Referring to Sir Laurence Jenkins, Cilbronau Mansion.

Cwmere was proposed and seconded before even we had occupied our chairs.⁵⁰

Having received form W3236 from the recruiting offices all men of military service age except those that were married or widowers with children were requested to join up or else to seek an exemption from a Military Service Appeal Tribunal. Initially all men seeking exemption would go before their local tribunal, only to appeal further to the County or Central Tribunal at Westminster, if they or the military representative were unsatisfied with the outcome. By March 1916 there were 1,805 local tribunals set up throughout England and Wales, with a further 281 in Scotland. On a local level there was a strong possibility that many of the men that sought exemption already knew tribunal members, with some possibly even employed by them. Having looked into the background of those that sat on tribunals K. O. Morgan is of the opinion that the members were 'loaded in favour of privilege and position with not a labourer or working man in sight of the bench.'⁵¹ Taking a completely opposite view to Morgan, Barlow maintained that 'the reality was often quite different' but in doing so, that he only gives one example where two members of the working class sat, namely the Kidwelly Municipal Borough (MB) tribunal in Carmarthenshire.⁵²

Of all the members who sat on tribunals it was the military representative who was the most outspoken of all. Existing tribunal papers show that in a large percent of cases where exemption was given, be that absolute, conditional, or temporary, the military representative would nearly always appeal against the cases. Interestingly military representatives were expected to give of their services voluntarily at the local appeal tribunals, but received payment for all

⁵⁰ Vaughan, p.172.

⁵¹ [Robin Barlow www.cambridgescholars.com/download/sample/61617](http://www.cambridgescholars.com/download/sample/61617) p.10.

⁵² [Barlow](#) p. 10.

county appeals, therefore, it was to their financial benefit to appeal in as many cases as possible. Military Representatives were fortunate in having the aid of the Advisory Committees, which had been set up by the War Office in all areas to investigate into the background of cases given exemption. In the document of instructions number 1930 sent out to military representatives from the Army Council it stated 'it is of the utmost importance to secure the assistance of Advisory Committees in preparing contested cases coming up for hearing before the tribunals, in most cases, it is hoped that member of Advisory Committees will be able to render valuable assistance in securing the necessary particulars. Thus the information given was used as in the case when a Whitland farmer appealed to the Carmarthen Rural District (RD) Tribunal for exemption for his farm servant, to which the military representative commented 'This farmer owns his farm and can afford to pay for labour, and I think he should sacrifice some money in a national emergency like this. The appeal was refused.'⁵³

Newspaper reports of the period noted on discussions that took place during sittings, showing how obnoxious the military representatives could be. At the meeting held at the Carmarthen RD Tribunal during March 1916 a Rhydargaeau farmer who applied for exemption for his farm servant was informed by Captain Margrave 'get out of that armchair in the chimney piece and do something on the farm.'⁵⁴ A Llanpumpsaint farmer who showed the tribunal a medical certificate for his son became a target once more for Captain Margrave when he was told 'I don't believe in these certificates, they are only waste paper to me.'⁵⁵ According to John Rae 'the military representatives believed almost to the point of obsession, that if they did not take a tough line on claims for exemption the army would be cheated of the recruits it needed.'⁵⁶

⁵³ [Barlow](#), p. 17.

⁵⁴ Carmarthen Journal 24 March, 1916.

⁵⁵ [Barlow](#) p. 17.

⁵⁶ Barlow p.15.

While there was conflict between those that were appealing and the military representative, there were also times when arguments arose between tribunal members and the Military Representative. Miss Jane Evans who sat on the St Dogmaels Rural Local (RL) Tribunal, being one of the only three females that were members of a tribunal throughout South West Wales appealed on behalf of her farm worker. Though the appeal was rejected, feeling aggrieved Miss Evans started arguing with the Lieutenant Lewis the Military Representative, resulting in both threatening to report the other to the LGB and Army Council, with Miss Evans resigning her post before storming out.⁵⁷

Writing in March, 1916 S O Davies described the influence that military representatives could have over the tribunal members.

At present, the members of the tribunals willingly connive at the combination the military representative. This individual is almost invariable the dominate personality, whose opinion or recommendation becomes absolute law. He is allowed to badger, bluster and sneer at the applicant generally the military representative is a man of some education attainment who very rarely fails to score at the expense of the uneducated and unaided applicant.⁵⁸

The role of tribunal members depended on integrity and making sure that the right decision was made towards every man who appealed. Regardless of this, tribunals were far from consistent in their decision making, as in the case of a

⁵⁷ Cardigan and Tivy-Side Advertiser, 12 May, 1916.

Miss, Evans did return to her duties on the tribunal the following month when her name turns up as a member sitting on the tribunal.

⁵⁸ Barlow, p.16.

farmer's son who farmed thirty six acres. According to the military representative who sat on the Carmarthen RD Tribunal 'people with thirty six acres are very unpatriotic if they can't send their sons to fight. It is absurd that this man should put in an appeal at all.'⁵⁹ On the same day, in front of the same tribunal, an un-named tribunal member whose farm had only twenty five acres appealed on behalf of his farm servant who was granted total exemption while the Military Representative made no objection.⁶⁰

Being in a position of authority certain members were more than ready to take advantage of their position. To support an application for the temporary exemption of his chauffeur, Mr, H L Pritchard, Chairman of the Gower Tribunal who was not in attendance, wrote to his fellow members pointing out the indispensability of the man, and the hardship it would be to himself in consequence of the shortage of labour, which would ensue if his chauffeur was called up. Commenting on the correspondence Captain, D Harold Williams was of the opinion,

that letter doesn't do Mr, Pritchard any justice as a public gentleman. If Mr, Pritchard was here I would advise him to withdraw the appeal and not allow it to come before public bodies to waste time. I want that man badly.⁶¹

When Alderman Sketch, chairman of the Pembrokeshire Appeal Tribunal sought exemption for his lorry driver/collector in his mineral works he insisted that he was unable to fill the post, until a fellow member asked him directly, 'would not a respectable young woman do the collecting,?'⁶² The application

⁵⁹ Cardigan and Tivy-Side Advertiser, 12 May, 1916.

⁶⁰ Cardigan and Tivy-Side Advertiser, 12 May, 1916.

⁶¹ The Cambrian Daily Leader 19 July, 1916 p.5.

⁶² Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General weekly Reporter for the

was refused. Public condemnation for both men's actions would certainly be forthcoming, however, at times wire pulling came into play especially when it involved a close family member, resulting in anger being displayed from the public. The Rev, John Williams the minister for Bethania Baptist Chapel, Cardigan, readily used his influence to ensure that his son was kept out the services. Working as a self-employed architect and school governors clerk Teifion Williams appeared before the Cardigan Borough Appeals (BA) Tribunal on more than one occasion applying for exemption and was successful each time. Speaking out against the actions of Rev, Williams, Vaughan was of the opinion that he 'was an astute and clandestine worker on his son's behalf, and though he retired from the tribunal during the hearing of this domestic application, he had carefully manipulated the whole matter of exemption beforehand, much to the disgust of the military representative.'⁶³

Figures that were revealed after the 1911 census showed that there were 977,366 Welsh speakers throughout Wales with the largest percentage living in the counties of Monmouthshire, Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire. Out of this figure just under two hundred thousand were monoglot Welsh.⁶⁴ Whilst some of the younger generation who came before tribunals could speak basic English, many of their parents or employers who were of the older generation may have found it very difficult to express themselves through the English language especially in a situation such as important as a military tribunal. Speaking out in reference to this the Rev, J D Hughes who attended the annual missionary meetings held at Bethsaida Baptist Chapel St Dogmaels in early 1916 explained that a tribunal had been appointed for Pembrokeshire but, how, where and when he did not know. Having made enquires not one of the members was a Welsh speaking Welshman if there was one indeed any who understood Welsh. Now

Counties of Pembroke, Cardigan, Carmarthen, Glamorgan and the Rest of South Wales.

⁶³ Vaughan, p.175.

⁶⁴ www.comisynyddgymraeg.cymru/English/publications%20List/A520statistical%20overview%20of%20the%20Welsh%20language.pdf pp.10-11.

some father and mothers would not be able to set out their cases in English and he appealed for fair play for these.⁶⁵

Less than a month later the Rev Hughes raised the matter once more at the quarterly meeting of the St Dogmaels RD Council in Eglwysrw, where he made a spirited protest against the present constitution of the Pembrokeshire Appeal Tribunal for the unfair way that not all areas of society were represented, and drew attention to three points in particular. The lack of Welsh speaking members, no representation from the farming community, or from the northern area of the county where the Welsh language was strongest.⁶⁶ A month later Captain T James, Dinas, declared the names of members of the County Council who were responsible for appointing members of the tribunal, in which he added 'it was a fact that one of them was keenly prejudiced against Welshmen.'⁶⁷ Within days of the Rev J. D. Hughes raising his objection the Pembrokeshire County Appeal Tribunal met in Eglwysrw, in which a compromise regarding the language was reached.

The Chairman at the outset said that they had deemed it proper to hold a meeting at Eglwysrw because there were such a large number of appeals from the district. They had been led to believe that there would be difficulty on the question of language. If there was, Mr, D J Edwards had put his services at their disposal as interpreter so that the difficulty would be overcome. If any appellant had any difficulty in that way, he hoped he would do his best to assist the Tribunal, which, in turn they would do their best also.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Cardigan and TivySide Advertiser 17 March, 1916.

⁶⁶ Cardigan and Tivy-Side Advertiser 11 February, 1916.

⁶⁷ Cardigan and Tivy-Side Advertiser 14 April, 1916.

⁶⁸ Cardigan and Tivy-Side Advertiser 24 March, 1916.

Giving of their time voluntarily, apart from travelling expenses or the cost of an overnight stay, tribunal members faced a demanding workload, as was the case on the 23 of February, 1916 when Carmarthen RD Tribunal had five hundred cases to deal with. On the 2 March, Llanelli MB Tribunal had over one hundred and fifty cases, and by the end of September, Llanelli's workload had increased in size that they had to split the tribunal into two groups so that they could cope with over 200 appeals each. From 15 March the Cardiganshire Appeal Tribunal had to meet either weekly or twice weekly to keep up with the demand of applications.⁶⁹ Many found the experience mentally exhausting even to the most active of members as Vaughan points out.

I remember the late Sir D C Roberts, himself a most energetic personality, telling me that after a two days' session at Aberystwyth lasting from morning till night on each occasion, he felt so fagged out on the following day that he could only sit quietly in an arm-chair by the fireside and rest his brain-indeed, I think we all felt continuous strain at times very severely.⁷⁰

For many being a tribunal member was regarded as their civic duty, however, others viewed it as a burden with one member of the Carmarthen RD Tribunal admitting, 'I have been sentenced to twelve months hard labour at the tribunal.'⁷¹ Whereas it is understandable that hearing so many individual cases was indeed trying for members, appellants or their representatives were only given a few minutes in which to present their cases. The LGB had recommended that a period of five minutes should be allowed for each hearing, however while some tribunals were ready to adhere to this, or even in some cases allowed extra time if needed, some tribunals were not even ready to give

⁶⁹ Robin Barlow 2014 p.11. Viewed 29 March, 2020

⁷⁰ Vaughan, p.176.

⁷¹ Barlow p.12.

the applicant their allotted time. Many were to criticise tribunals on this matter especially as they often gave the military representatives due consideration to voice their opinions.⁷² Hancock identified how the St Dogmaels Tribunal when meeting in mid-March, 1916 heard 215 cases between 11.00 a.m. and 9.40p.m in one day, resulting in a brief three and a half minutes per case.

Between January 1916 and Armistice some two and a half million Britons either joined the colours, or had no option as their appeals were turned down by the tribunals. According to Mc Dermott.

The task entrusted to the tribunals was laborious and formidable, especially to men who, as a rule had many other claims upon their times and energies. It called in a high degree for the exercise of patience, sagacity and impartiality. [...] The last thing a man ought to do who cares for personal popularity, it to become a member of a local tribunal. In the nature of the case he has the opportunity of making many enemies and very few friends.⁷³

⁷² Pearce, p.161.

⁷³ McDermott p.218.

Chapter Three

Farmers and the Military Appeal Tribunals

Newspaper reports regarding those that appeared before Military Tribunals show that a vast number of men who sought exemption were from rural areas being either the sons of farmers, or the workers they employed. When the war broke out in 1914 Britain relied on sixty per cent of imports to feed the nation, added to which other commodities such as fuel and fertilisers were also brought in from overseas. The decline in Britain growing its own food, depending far more on imports can be traced back to the 1870s, especially where cereal was concerned. By 1901 there were just twelve percent of the male working population of Britain involved in agriculture, reflecting how imports were affecting the industry. Four years later a report from the Royal Commission on the Supply of Food and Raw Materials in War Time had recommended ‘it may be prudent to take some minor practical steps to secure food supplies for Britain.’⁷⁴ Government opinion not only at that time, but up to the beginning of the war was that the Merchant Fleet and Royal Navy would be able to keep the shipping lanes open and had disregarded any recommendations. Within two weeks of Britain declaring war on Germany the government asked farmers to increase the country’s food production, in particular the land which produced wheat and cereal. By putting farmers in such a situation they were then obliged to commit to what was at the time ‘a more intensive and financially precarious production system without any support or protection.’⁷⁵

By 1916 there was a real threat to food shortages, especially as tropical storms and hurricanes had hit the countries surrounded by the Atlantic and Caribbean which Britain were trading with. The same year the efforts that British farmers were putting into food production was brought to the attention of the country when Colin Campbell the President of the National Farmers Union declared,

⁷⁴ www.nfuonline.com/nfu-online/about-us/the_few_that_fed_the_many_web/ p.2.

Viewed 18 February, 2020.

⁷⁵ www.nfuonline.com p.5. Viewed 18 February, 2020.

however much agriculture has been neglected in the past that is not likely to be so in the future. It is coming to the front, and it is being recognised that it is one of the principal industries, if not the principal industry of the country.⁷⁶

Farmers had previously seen many of its young farm workers going off to war, being targeted by recruitment officers especially when they visited agricultural events. They had to relinquish their horses early on in the war, and there was also the lack of adequate machinery, however, unlike mining and munitions the government were reluctant to give essential status to agriculture. Asquith's administration up December 1916 when he resigned,

saw the continuance of a pre-war laissez-faire attitude towards agriculture, reflecting the political temperament of government, optimism that the war would be of short duration and uncertainty as to how formal direction might be imposed upon an extremely individualistic industry.⁷⁷

Speaking out on the fact that the government did not act quickly to secure the country's food supply the National Farmers Union wrote

The outbreak of war should have prompted a change in attitude towards food security. However, the Government remained confident in the Royal Navy's ability to keep the shipping lanes open and committed to imports to reduce costs to the exchequer. History shows that this strategy came dangerously close to costing Britain the war.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Joe Stanley, *Agriculture was fundamental to victory in First World War*. (Farmers Weekly; Sutton Vol. 170, Issue. 9 Nov 9, 2018) p.28.

⁷⁷ McDermott, p.95.

⁷⁸ www.nfuonline.com/the-few-that-fed-the-many-ww1-report/ Viewed 18 February, 2020.

Despite the need for farmers to increase its production of crops, farm workers were persistently targeted as potential servicemen as the Carmarthen Journal reveals.

Major Delme Davies-Evans, has left his regiment on the east coast and will be at Carmarthen for a little while with the object of getting recruits for the Pembrokehire Yeomanry...The call for men in all branches is as well-known as it is urgent, but we fear that a large number of young men who are more suitable for this branch of the service are still partly blind to the urgency. They mostly belong to a class-agriculturalist-who would be among the foremost and the worse sufferers if by any unhappy but quite possible turn of fortune if the Prussian heel gained a footing on our soil.⁷⁹

Within a week of Major Davies-Evans arriving in Carmarthen he wrote despondently regarding the appeal for men to come forward.

The response has been most disheartening seventy per cent of recruits are English boys who have been working on Welsh farms. For the honour of Wales he implored, do not let it be said that our young men are afraid to prove Wales still has the old spirit.⁸⁰

Most tribunals throughout South West Wales were hearing appeals by March 1916; but, tribunal members had been given guidance's in early of February when the L G B had sent out a circular to all local registration authorities on the constitution and procedure of the how the local tribunals should be run. At

⁷⁹ The Carmarthen Journal & South Wales Weekly Advertiser, 2 October, 1914. p5.

⁸⁰ Carmarthen Journal 9 October, 1914.

around the same time experts in agriculture were stipulating how important it was to have enough manpower within the agricultural industry. The Cardigan and Tivy-Side Advertiser carried a report on one meeting in particular, which was held in Penparc School when agricultural expert Professor Bryner Jones, of the University of Wales came to talk to local farmers regarding how a greater production could be had from the land to meet present day needs. The President of the Board of Agriculture Lord Selbourne had already sent out a strong appeal to farmers at a time when it had never been more difficult to employ farm labourers. Professor Jones stated that there was thousands and thousands of acres of land throughout Wales that was still used for pasture which could be ploughed, to which he added, 'it was not just by joining the army that they could do their duty, they could be just as good perhaps more good by remaining on the land.'⁸¹

With tribunals split up into urban and rural districts, it was the latter that had the greatest number of farmers appealing for exemptions. One of the earliest of the district tribunals to meet was the one for St Dogmaels and Cardigan, on the 9 February, 1916 at the Guildhall, Cardigan, with all of its thirteen members present. Describing the gathering of Derby and non-Derby men, the local newspaper reported 'the passages of which were rendered impassable during the greater part of the day, by men who patiently awaited their turns to give evidence before the members'⁸² Two weeks later when the tribunal met again over two hundred appeals were heard, most of which were farmers appealing on the hardship it would cause them if their sons or workers were conscripted. Of all the cases heard that day only one who worked as a mason was given an absolute exemption as he had unfulfilled contacts to attend to.⁸³ The following month at the quarterly meeting of the St Dogmaels RD Council the Rev J D Hughes brought up several objections regarding the Pembrokeshire County Appeal Tribunal, one of which was that even though they had representatives

⁸¹ Cardigan and Tivy-Side Advertiser, 4 February, 1916.

⁸² Cardigan and Tivy-Side Advertiser, 11 February, 1916.

⁸³ Cardigan and Tivy-Side Advertiser, 25 February, 1916.

for labour there was no direct representative for agriculture as a member of the Tribunal.⁸⁴ By the end of the year although Mr, J Howard Griffiths had been appointed as the representative member for agriculture on the county's Tribunal he complained to the Pembroke County War Agricultural Committee of the way he was treated, especially by the chairman and clerk of the Tribunal. 'I am not allowed to give the facts. I am told by the clerk not to argue, and I am stopped by the chairman. Very often the chairman doesn't give me the opportunity of saying a word. [...] I have been treated as an obstacle from the beginning.'⁸⁵

The neighbouring county of Cardiganshire fared only slightly better with only one farmer on the tribunal, Mr, Joseph Evans of Lampeter.⁸⁶ The appeal papers for different area of Cardiganshire which total some 8,897 documents, gives a picture of local life within different areas of the county, and who were exempted and for what reason. Cardigan RD Tribunal totalled 948 documents where the largest number of men who appealed for exemption came from the farming community. Of these nearly everyone who was either exempted or given a temporary or conditional exemption were appealed by the military representative who believed that the county tribunal should turn the decision around. In some cases this certainly did happen, but there were also cases where the County Tribunal took a far more sympathetic approach and went with the local Tribunals original decision. The lowest figure of appeals within Cardiganshire came from the district of New Quay with just fifty eight applications. Despite this low figure inconsistencies showed up clearly, even though C Hope of Pidgeonsford the military representative appealed on nearly every application that was exempted even for a short period.⁸⁷ When a farmer/butcher appealed for absolute exemption he was given two months

⁸⁴ Cardigan and Tivy-Side Advertiser, 14 April, 1916.

⁸⁵ The Amman Valley Chronicle and East Carmarthen News 14 December 1916.

⁸⁶ Herbert M Vaughan. p.172

⁸⁷ www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/archives/cardiganshire-great-war-tribunal-appeals-records/ Viewed 2 April, 2020.

exemption, a draper a three month exemption while another draper was given a much longer exemption of seven months.

As with most agricultural appeals the majority were only given a temporary exemption ranging from a few weeks to several months, nevertheless Tribunals were often at odds with the military representatives on how farm workers should be perceived. The Gower Tribunal under the Chairmanship of Mr, H. L. Pritchard noted that agricultural workers in their area who had been starved were 'terrified of receiving a yellow form calling them up for service'⁸⁸. Critical of the way that the men were treated the chairman added 'it seemed extraordinarily hard that in this season, when farmers were working so hard, these men who had been starved by a body that was acquainted with agricultural interests should be taken.'⁸⁹ Major Jessel the military representative in answer to the chairman's remarks replied, 'these orders are issued from headquarters, and we have very little power. We simply act on our orders.'⁹⁰

Having so many men who worked on farms coming before them the Cardiganshire Appeal Tribunal soon had their regular set of probing questions already prepared regarding the amount of land a farmer owned, the number of sons they had working on the land, the amount of livestock they looked after, and the amount of acres that were under cereal and roots. Casting his mind back to the time that he spent on the Cardiganshire Appeal Tribunal, the county's High Sheriff Herbert M Vaughan was saddened by the questions that were asked, however, he found each appellant to be honest in the answers they gave the tribunal.

I was greatly impressed by the truthfulness of the witnesses; never once did I detect a deliberate lie. Of course some of the farmers were reticent and sometimes inclined to fence with the questions put

⁸⁸ Herald of Wales and Monmouth Recorder 1st April, 1916 p.4.

⁸⁹ Herald of Wales and Monmouth Recorder 1st April, 1916 p.4.

⁹⁰ Herald of Wales and Monmouth Recorder 1st April, 1916 p.4.

to them, but never sought to deceive; and adroit patient enquiry would in due time reveal the salient circumstances in each application. Personally I could feel nothing but sympathy and sorrow for these poor men, especially for the elderly old-fashioned farmers whose quiet, orderly, useful existence of work and habit had thus been so rudely broken into, and their intimate private affairs retailed in public.⁹¹

Alas the prospect of his only son being enlisted when his appeal was turned down was simply too much for one farmer to tolerate as Vaughan recalls.

The only son (I think the only child) of parents living at Tanygroes, near Aberporth, pleaded for exemption and this case was pressed hard by the military. For myself I have always been strongly opposed on the principle to the forcible conscription of only sons, and I believe exemption in such circumstances was at that time customary in some continental nations; but in the end the boy was handed over to the military. As the result of our decision the boy's father immediately committed suicide. However we may judge his act excusable or blameworthy, this instance of deliberate 'felo de se' certainly had the effect of obtaining the youth's eventual exemption, for he was never sent to the Army.⁹²

Tragically the prospect of being enlisted or already a member of the armed services accounted for many other suicides within South West Wales. During the month of November, 1916 two men died by their own hands. Gunner John Evans of the Royal Garrison Artillery was found hanging from a tree at Morfa Farm Johnstown. Having previously appealed to his local tribunal he was

⁹¹ Vaughan, p.174.

⁹² Vaughan, p.175.

refused exemption. Harry Evans a colliery worker from Furnace in Llanelli committed suicide after receiving his call up papers for military service. Leading to a great deal of worry about having to join the army resulted also in the suicide of William Daniel of Llangendeirne in January, 1917, who was found hanging from a chain in a stable. The coroners' involved all came to the same conclusions that the three men had died whilst of unsound mind.⁹³

Tribunal hearings were normally held in public which contributed to a lot of interest within communities. At one particular meeting held at Burry Port during June, 1916 so many people attended that a large number failed to enter. Recording the tribunal meeting the Carmarthen Journal declared,

viewed in the light of the crying scarcity of labour, the crowds of young men come in from the country to listen to appeals before the Carmarthen Rural District Tribunal provide a curious commentary on the question of exemptions. At each sitting the room is crowded with lusty young agriculturalists, many of whom have no business there apart from the fact that they have come to hear the appeals, yet they have all had temporary, if not absolute exemptions on the ground that they are indispensable on the farms-which they say-could not be carried on without them.⁹⁴

Regardless of the fact that the country was dependant on farmers to keep up the productions of crops, an article in the local press from Lord Selbourne the President of the Board of Agriculture acknowledged.

⁹³ Barlow, p.20.

⁹⁴ Barlow p.12.

Agriculturists have their own part to play in the war by maintaining and increasing wherever possible the production of the soil. I would however; impress upon farmers that they are not exempted even by this duty, from the obligation that rests upon them to release all the men they can for service with the Army. I am aware that Wales has caused for pride in the manner in which her sons have come forward to swell the ranks, but the need for more men is great and the men must be found. My special appeal to the farmers of Wales is that they employ women in all possible cases to do the work of the men and they do not keep back men on any plea who are not entirely indispensable.⁹⁵

By August 1916 the Board of Agriculture had announced to aid struggling farmers they had decided to release some twenty seven thousand soldiers to assist with the harvest. By January 1917 the South Wales Argus printed an Appeal to the Women of South Wales urging mothers, wives and sweethearts to help their brothers, sons and husbands in the trenches by undertaking some kind of war work.⁹⁶ It cannot be denied that for many women working outside the home would be a new experience, despite this, women in Wales had been accustomed to working on farms spanning back centuries. By the 1850s there was a staggering seventy thousand women involved in the industry throughout Wales, but, even though the numbers had dwindle significantly by the dawn of the twentieth century, women were still an important part of daily life on farms. Up to the beginning of the war women were undertaking all manner of work which included tasks such as tending and cleaning out the livestock, planting and digging potatoes, hoeing turnips, loading dung carts and had always been involved in dairy work. In a report printed in October 1918, the Administrative

⁹⁵ Cardigan and Tivy-Side Advertiser, 5 May, 1916.

⁹⁶ Thomas David George, *Women's Work in Industry and Agriculture in Wales during the First World War* (Cardiff University 2015) www.orca.cf.ac.uk/74416/1/2015georgetdphd.pdf p.45. Viewed 30 March, 2020.

Inspector for the Women's Branch of the Food Production Department emphasised the importance of women's work to the operation of many farms in Wales. She found that at the outbreak of War, it is likely that on average there were as many, if not more, women doing agricultural work in Wales in comparison to any other part of the United Kingdom.

The reason for this is that Wales is a land of small holdings... Owing to the fact that there is little co-operation in buying and selling, the farmer has to spend a considerable time away from his farm attending markets and fairs. This he can do without much loss to his farm, the women folk taking entire charge of milking and dairy work, and the feeding of young stock.⁹⁷

While taking into account the work that women did George however takes the view that, 'before the war women's work was defined according to established standards of feminine roles and behaviour, and was consistently undervalued in relation to men's work.'⁹⁸ During the war there were thirty seven workers from the Women's Land Army based in Carmarthenshire. Speaking out regarding the dedication the women were putting in Mrs, H Jones Davies a committee member of the WLA for the county stated.

The excellent work of the girls on the farms was worth a large sum to them in addition to their wages. They had come to fill the most important vacancies on the land and take a big part in assisting the country by the production of food. [...] As women land workers their firing line was the farm, and it was there they could best assist

⁹⁷ George, p.62.

⁹⁸ George, p10.

the soldiers to conquer the enemy. As substitutes for the soldiers they should try to emulate the good qualities of the soldiers.⁹⁹

With more and more refusals of exemption given to farm workers, employers started using school children as extra pairs of hands. During the summer of 1916 boys from Haverfordwest had shown practical patriotism by volunteering to work throughout the summer on farms. By the autumn of 1916 fifty seven local authorities had relaxed bylaws to allow pupils to be released from school, with five hundred and sixty-two children employed in Wales as cheap labour. As with other counties, serving soldiers who were unfit for active service and the occasional German prisoners of war were also used on farms and in agricultural work in Pembrokeshire. It has been estimated that nationally there were 84,000 soldiers taking the place of regular farm workers by November, 1918. Pembrokeshire had been allocated 375 soldiers, however, Hancock refers to the farmer's lack of enthusiasm despite having extra workers, 'farmers were not sparing of criticism of their ineptitude and ignorance of their khaki-clad helpers.'¹⁰⁰ By the end of the war, despite its lack of male workforce, farmers have managed to produce an additional 915,000 tonnes of oats, 1.7 million tonnes of potatoes and 830,000 tonnes of wheat had been grown to avoid the county being starved into submission.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ The Carmarthen Journal and South Wales Weekly Advertiser, 11 January, 1918. p.2.

¹⁰⁰ Hancock p.92.

¹⁰¹ www.nfuonline.com/about-us/history-of-the-nfu/farming-and-the-first-world-war/ Viewed 22 February 2020.

Chapter Four

Conscientious Objectors

Out of the 16,100 Conscientious Objectors (CO) throughout Britain some 885 identified CO's appeared before Tribunals in Wales. Prior to the New Military Service Act being passed in January, 1916, Robbins rightly declares 'up until this point, if one led a quiet life, being an opponent of the war was largely a matter of private conviction without public significance.' *Now it became a matter of general concern to the state.*¹⁰² Just two days before the war a mass peace rally was held in Trafalgar Square, London where ten thousand people congregated together to hear pacifist speakers, one of which was the former Member of Parliament for Merthyr Tydfil Keir Hardy a staunch pacifist and social reformer. Speaking out for peace Hardy declared, 'men and women of Britain, you now have the unexampled opportunity of showing your power, rendering magnificent service to humanity and to the world...Send messages of peace and fraternity to your fellows who have less liberty than you.'¹⁰³

Once the New Military Act had been passed, David Cleaver describes the CO as a 'new category of person,'¹⁰⁴ and in many ways this was true, nevertheless as soon as war had been declared in 1914 there were men from all over Britain who had expressed their determination never to enlist, be that voluntarily or by conscription. Since its inaugural meeting in November, 1914 plans had been underway by the No Conscription Fellowship (N C F) to try and abort any plans by the government to bring in a Conscription Bill. Under its founder the philosopher Fenner Brockway who also became its first National Chairman of the organisation Clifford Allen, a Monmouthshire born journalist, those that joined the Fellowship would have been only too aware on where they stood if

¹⁰² Pearce, p.157.

¹⁰³ www.campaignforsocialism.org.uk/articles/2015/8/31/keir-hardies-anti-war-stance-still-resonates-in-the-uk-today

¹⁰⁴ David Cleaver, *Conscientious Objection in the Swansea Area*.p.48 Transaction of the Glamorgan. Local History Society Volume 28 1984.

conscription was ever to be introduced, as the Fellowship's Statement of Faith clearly shows 'an organisation of men 'who will refuse from conscientious motives to bear arms, because they consider human life to be sacred and cannot therefore assume the responsibility of inflicting death.'¹⁰⁵ By the beginning of 1915 the Fellowship had 300 members, with local branches being created all over Britain. Just as CO's came from all walks of life, some had different reasons for being against what they viewed as an unjust war. The NCF manifesto which was published during the Spring of 1915 points out the importance of solidarity and world peace.

We have been brought to this standpoint by many ways. Some of us have reached it through the Christian faith... Others have found it by association with international movements; we believe in the solidarity of the human race, and we cannot betray the ties of brotherhood which bind us to one another through the nations of the world. All of us believe in the value and sacredness of human personality, and are prepared to sacrifice as much in the cause of the world's peace as our fellows are sacrificing in the cause of the nation's war.¹⁰⁶

During June of that year the South Wales Branch was formed when a group of like-minded young men from Carmarthen over to Cardiff met together at Briton Ferry, a place 'with a great deal of civic pride where things happened: socially, industrially, religiously and politically.'¹⁰⁷ In due course the town would attract speakers on pacifism from all over Britain. Despite their pacifistic beliefs the

¹⁰⁵ www.menwhosaidno.org/context/context_ncfIntro.html Viewed 2 April, 2020.

¹⁰⁶ www.peaceandjustice.org.uk/conscientious-objection-in-the-first-world-war/ Viewed 2 April, 2020.

¹⁰⁷ Adams, *Not In Our Name War Dissent in a Welsh Town* (Adams, Ludlow Shropshire, 2015) p.29.

chairman and secretary of the newly formed branch addressed those present by saying,

however profoundly the fellowship might feel on the matter of participation in actual war, it was well to remember that the large majority of those who had joined the colours had done so because they conscientiously believe that they were doing their duty, and they were to be honoured and commended for their sacrifice. Their action was a matter of pure devotion to conscience just as was the action of the members of the Fellowship.¹⁰⁸

Opposition towards the war was found to be the strongest in area where there as a substantial membership of the Independent Labour Party, therefore men from all over Wales travelled to Briton Ferry to hear pacifist speakers such as Ramsey MacDonald, who was one of the three founders of the Labour Party, Sylvia Pankhurst who worked tirelessly behind the scenes for the NCF,¹⁰⁹ and Charles Trevelyan who was the Founder of the Union of Democratic Control, and previous Parliamentary Secretary for Education under Asquith.¹¹⁰ The town had many focal points where social, political and religious matters were discussed, one of which was Jerusalem Baptist Church, where its minister the Rev, Rees Powell, was chair of the Briton Ferry Council against conscription while his wife was involved in The Women's Peace Crusade. According to Philip Adams, 'the chapel promoted the plethora of guest speakers from parliament, the trade unions churches and universities. From August, 1917 the church launched a series of peace meetings and according to its Centenary Booklet the chapel 'chose what was then the very uneasy course of making a

¹⁰⁸ Llais Llafur, 19 June, 1915. p.3

¹⁰⁹ As an all made organisation women were not allowed to become members, but Sylvia Pankhurst and Mrs Fenner Brockway worked in an administrative role.

¹¹⁰ Charles Trevelyan resigned from his post in protest against the war, and founded the Union of Democratic Control an all-party organisation rallying opposition to the war.

stand for peace, with much bitter opposition and hostile abuse was aroused'.¹¹¹ Within Briton Ferry itself, apart from Jerusalem Chapel most of the chapels supported the war, and were against the anti-war movement that existed in the town, which caused a friction within congregations, leading to members such as Joe Branch who died in 1954 to leave their spiritual home. Adams recorded

During World War One Branch was a staunch pacifist and, in 1916 was prosecuted for handing out anti-war leaflets outside Briton Ferry's Bethel Chapel. It is necessary to record here that the pastor of the chapel, the Rev, James Llewelyn, and its deacons, gave evidence in court as a result, after the court case Branch never again attended Bethlehem. At Joe Branch's funeral, significantly and appropriately, the Rev, Trevor Evans of the pacifist Jerusalem church officiated.¹¹²

Whilst men that opposed war were all classed under the banner of Conscientious Objects, each man had to delve into their own conscience as to where they stood, and into which of three categories they belonged once they came before the military appeal tribunals.

4.1 Non-Combatant Soldiers

The Non-Combatant Corps (NCC) was set up in March 1916 as a clause put into the Military Service Act as a means of getting men who appealed against carrying arms or killing a fellow human being into the army. In many ways these soldiers were useful to the army especially as they would free up soldiers who were doing manual work so that they could take up front line positions. Referred to as Privates they were expected to carry out squad drill, but would not be armed or trained to kill.¹¹³ The decision as to who would be entitled to

¹¹¹ Philip Adams, p.29.

¹¹² Adams, p.198.

¹¹³ www.menwhosaidno.org/context/context_ncc.html

hold Exemption certificates to combatant duties would have been up to the discretion of local tribunals, and more often than not this is the first choice given to the CO's when coming before tribunals. Those that joined the NCC would be expected to serve on the Home Front as well as in Europe. Twenty one units served in Britain mostly involved in manual work such as in the production of timber and stone. Geographically the units were as far north as North Berwick in Scotland right down to the east coast of England in Gravesend and Canterbury, however there was not a company based in Wales itself, the nearest being across the border in Oswestry, Shropshire.¹¹⁴ Although being ready to wear a uniform and being a part of the British Army, these conscientious objectors nevertheless came under abuse with the NCC often referred to as the No Courage Corps. The Globe during March 1916 carried the following piece written by an unknown writer

a kind of 'we don't want to fight' branch of the army ... a manifestation of War Office humour ... what are to be the duties of the peaceful brigade we cannot say ... [it is] to meet the scruples of those curious creatures who, at the last moment, discovered consciences which forbade them to take up arms. After a short time in the NCCs, we feel sure they will become glad to become soldiers, for they can expect little sympathy or appreciation from either their combatant comrades or the sensible public.¹¹⁵

The first NCC's who were sent to France left England on the 22 April, 1916 and were part of the 1 Easter Company, working at quarries, at Rinxent. During the following two months a further seven companies were sent over to

¹¹⁴ www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-non-combatant-corps-2/ Viewed 16 March, 2020.

¹¹⁵ www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-non-combatant-corps-2/ Viewed 16 March, 2020.

Europe, however as there are no existing records left it is believed that the men of the units carried out labouring work, which was a year before the formation of the Labour Corps.¹¹⁶ Enlisting into the NCC did not come without its dangers with 34 men of the Corps losing their lives during the war, one of which being Private number 65 John Oliver Thomas, of Western Company NCC who died on 18 September 1917 aged thirty two years. Having been exempted by the local tribunal at Llanelli on 9 March 1916, he died as a result of an accident when he fell while working as a shunter on a railway and was crushed beneath a locomotive. He underwent emergency surgery, but died six days later.¹¹⁷

4.2 Alternatives

Into this category came the men who found that their conscience would not allow them to join the NCC, but were willing to undertake work which was seen as being of National importance. Set up by the Board of Trade on the 28 March, 1916 The Pelham Committee was appointed to try and find work for CO's who came under the alternative group. Similarly to other government organisations of the time, public opinion regarding CO's demanded that they in no way were cosseted and given an easy option, leaving the chairman of the committee T.H.W Pelham to announce 'in agreement with the view that men should be placed in situations that demand some definite sacrifice from them it is their practice to place men at some distance from their homes.'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-non-combatant-corps-2/

Viewed 16, March, 2020.

www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-non-combatant-corps-2/

Viewed 16, March, 2020. According to the monthly analysis contained in Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War (War Office, 1922), the NCC in France reached a peak of 3,219 men in August 1918 but it remained at 3,000 or more during the period from March, 1917 to February 1919 inclusive.

¹¹⁷ www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-non-combatant-corps-2/

Viewed 16, March, 2020.

¹¹⁸ www.lewishamfww.wikidot.com/pelham-committee Viewed 18 March, 2020.

One alternative CO Mr T.E. Harvey, who was a Quaker, alleged that the fact that he was forced to work so far from home was nothing more than victimisation, to which he added.

The Clerk and the chairman of the local tribunal have done their best to prejudice my case that is evident or they would have mentioned that I am the only son at home helping a widowed mother and a little brother 12 years old. I stated all these facts of domestic responsibility to them in my original appeal. They are anxious to penalise me for the uncompromising attitude I have taken up on the Militant question on platforms, and in the press.¹¹⁹

Described by some as Wales' greatest peace campaigner, George Maitland Davies who was an alternative CO worked as a shepherd, but was imprisoned due to the fact that he was preaching as to the undesirability of war. According to his biographer Dr, Jen Llywelyn from Ceredigion she described life for Davies behind bars. 'The system was appalling and you weren't allowed to communicate with anyone and that could mean making eye contact. If you transgressed, you were put in solitary confinement. He was never the same again, it wrecked him mentally. There were comparisons with how some conscientious objectors came out of prison. They had the same post-traumatic stress disorder that soldiers came home with. It was devastating.'¹²⁰

In total the number of men who came under the Pelham Scheme in Wales was 207, out of which 133 men came from the areas under question in this research. Glamorgan ninety-nine, Carmarthenshire twenty-six, Cardiganshire six, and Pembrokeshire with two.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Eirug, p.248.

¹²⁰ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-35685687

¹²¹ [Eirug, p.215.](#)

4.3 Absolutes

In July, 1916 Lloyd George referring to men of this category was of the opinion

With that kind of man, I, personally have absolutely no sympathy whatsoever. I do not think they deserve the slightest consideration. With regard to those who object to shedding blood, it is the traditional policy of this country to respect that view and we do not propose to depart from it; but in the other case I shall only consider the best means of making the path of that class as hard as possible.¹²²

Of all the conscientious objectors these were the category of men that proved to be the most problematic for the tribunals and government to deal with. Having refused non-combatant roles and work of national importance, their strength of character and belief meant that they eventually ending up being arrested, appearing before magistrates, fined and then handed over to the military. In general CO's were ostracised by society, unfairly portrayed in the press and at times had to endure being banished by their families due to the disgrace they felt. Referring to the society in general Aled Eurig states, 'the conscientious objector was seen by the pro-war press and a large majority of the public as 'shirking, lazy, spineless, un-Christian, unpatriotic and un-English/un-British. Moreover, sometimes he was perceived of as womanly and sexually undesirable to women or was suspected of sexual inversion.'¹²³

Writing in his 'Journal of a Coward' Emrys Hughes, the son of a nonconformist minister was of the belief that

¹²² John W. Graham, p.221.

¹²³ Eurig, p.18.

not one of the members had apparently given a moment's thought as to why anybody that came before them had taken up this line of conduct, but acted on the assumption that he the conscientious objectors were the people for whom the conscription act was specially created. They were cowards, the shirkers, absolutely the most detestable social type that existed and it was the special duty of the tribunal to see that they received the treatment they deserved.”¹²⁴

While Emrys Hughes and other absolutes had to endure not only prison life but being beaten up, being put in a straight jacket and malnutrition many also suffered from verbal abuse by tribunals long before they ever reached the prison cell. When an applicant admitted to being a conscientious objector Colonel Pearson the military representative for Swansea asked the applicant if he had ever been in a lunatic asylum and went on to state that the applicant was ‘only fit to be on the point of a German bayonet.’¹²⁵ Referring once more to the tribunals Hughes maintained ‘The Tribunals were the means the government adopted to democratise the administration of the conscription law, and having no knowledge of the act and a wholehearted hatred of anybody who opposed the popular point of view, they fulfilled their function admirably so far as the conscientious objector were concerned.’¹²⁶

Most absolutes were kept in prison for the duration of the war, with many feeling aggrieved that many other members of the NCF did not take the absolute route of protest. Alternative members such as Morgan Jones, the South

¹²⁴ Anthony Mor-O-Brien, *Conchie Emrys Hughes and the First World War*. Welsh History Review. Vol 13 Nos 1-4. 1 January 1986.p.339.

¹²⁵ David Cleaver, *Conscientious objection in the Swansea area*. Transactions of the Glamorgan. p.48.

¹²⁶ Anthony Mor-O-Brien p. 338.

Wales Representative believed that alternative arrangements such as the Home Office Scheme should be accepted, whereas the NCF chairman Clifford Allen, Fenner Brockway, and Mansel Grenfell of Gorseinion believed that no CO should be made to compromise with the Government.¹²⁷ Ithel Davies who had served more than two year in prisons being moved around from places such as Mold Military Prison, Wormwood Scrubs, and Shrewsbury Prison speaking for himself and other absolutes was of the opinion

We felt as those who had refused alternative service, that the rest had betrayed us somewhat and that it made it easier for the Government to keep us in prison. We felt that if everyone had refused and had demanded unconditional freedom, it would have been more difficult for the Government to keep us in prison.¹²⁸

Back in early 1916 the Local Government Board had sent out a circular to every local tribunal that stated

While care must be taken that the man who shirks his duty to his country does not find unworthy shelter behind this provision every consideration should be given to the man whose objection generally rests on religious or moral convictions. Whatever may be the views of members of the Tribunal they must interpret the Act in an impartial and tolerant spirit. Difference of convictions must not be bias judgement. The local authority in making their appointments to the tribunal should bear in mind that the tribunal will have to hear among the applicants those made on the ground of conscientious objections. Men who apply on this ground should be able to feel

¹²⁷ Eurig, p.249.

¹²⁸ Eurig, p.250.

that they are being judged by the tribunal that will deal fairly with their case.¹²⁹

Of the sixteen thousand CO's throughout Britain over one third of them went to prison at least once. It was 1919 before they were all released, not before a letter signed by Hugh Cecil, J A Murray MacDonald and J C Wedgwood together with over one hundred signatures of Member of Parliament was sent to the Prime Minister asking for the release of CO's. It stated,

We are persuaded that nothing is gained for the state or for the Army or for any good cause, by punishing men for faithfully adhering to sincere though mistaken scruples. It is clear to us that according to both Christian teaching and to common-sense, if a man sincerely believes any action to be wrong, for him it is wrong however innocent or laudable it may be in its true character. [...] Therefore, we earnestly represent on behalf of ourselves and all those members of parliament to have expressed to us similar feelings, our earnest hope that the Government will bring the punishment of conscientious objectors promptly to a close.¹³⁰

Speaking out in sympathetically in favour of one such appellant Vaughan wrote.

One of these applicants interested me greatly; he described himself as a Christadelphian and he was the only member of that religious sect I have ever come across. He was a nice young fellow, and I am

¹²⁹ Ann Kramer, *Conscientious objectors of the First World War. A Determined Resistance*. (Pen and Sword Books Ltd Barnsley, South Yorkshire. 2014) pp. 40-41.

¹³⁰ The Pioneer, 12 April, 1919. p.3.

sure his abhorrence at the mere motion of having to kill his fellow-men even his enemies was deep-rooted and genuine. But our Christadelphian friend carried his convictions rather further than the direct us of lethal weapons, for he was strongly averse even to having such things in self-defence. We duly considered his case, and after some arguments we offered to have him allocated to a labour battalion at the front, which would only be equipped with shovels and other trenching tools and with this decision on our part this young objector seemed fully satisfied.”¹³¹

Conscientious objectors were viewed by their supporters as heroic martyrs who not only were prepared to endure prison life, but were willing to accept the death penalty for a cause they felt so strongly for. In his own words Emrys Hughes described his view of how tribunals operated

The Tribunals were the means the government adopted to democratise the administration of the conscription law, and having no knowledge of the act and a wholehearted hatred of anybody who opposed the popular point of view, they fulfilled their function admirably so far as the conscientious objector were concerned.¹³²

¹³¹ Herbert M Vaughan. p.177

¹³² Anthony Mor-O'Brien, p.338.

Conclusion

During the First World War some 280,000 men from Wales joined the colours, be that voluntarily prior to January 1916 or were conscripted. In 1921 the Government issued instructions that all tribunal appeal documents were to be destroyed owing to their sensitive nature, apart from the records for Middlesex, and Lothian and Pebbles which were to be retained as a benchmark for possible future use.¹³³ As a result of this decision it is impossible to know for certain how many men appeared before tribunals, however, McDermott informs us that ‘of the 1.2 million single men of military age who were deemed by the Military Service Act 1916 to have enlisted, approximately 750,000 sought exemption. Official statistics compiled after the war also gives a snapshot total of 779,936 men made up of both married and single holding exemption certificates as of 30 April, 1917.’¹³⁴

Consistent with John W Graham when he describes tribunals as being ‘painful places,’¹³⁵ numerous newspapers give information that show how the chairman of tribunals who spoke on behalf of the other members, and especially the Military Representative did not always give men the courtesy and respect that they deserved, especially the conscientious objectors who was subjected to ridicule and insolence. Barlow gives the following examples of what ordinary men and women who were appealing on behalf of their family or workers had to endure when they came before tribunals in South West Wales.

At the Kidwelly MB Tribunal in March 1916, Mrs Rees of Park Forge applied for exemptions for her son, and also another blacksmith, who were both essential employees of her business. The

¹³³ www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/conscription-appeals/

¹³⁴ McDermott , p.218.

¹³⁵ Graham, p.70.

Tribunal retired and “after a considerable time spent in discussing the matter, exempted one of the employees but left Mrs Rees to decide who it should be. Llandeilo R D tribunal heard the case of a farmer from Llanfynydd who applied for exemptions for his two sons, aged nineteen and twenty-one. The farmer was asked by the chairman of the tribunal, which is the best boy on the farm? The farmer replied I cannot answer that. The tribunal decided to exempt only one son, and the father was to decide which one it should be.”¹³⁶

While tribunals were within their jurisdiction to come to such conclusions they were nevertheless avoiding their responsibilities and trying to clear their own consciences by passing the decision over to others, who must certainly have found themselves in an impossible and heart wrenching position. Be that as it may, the vast number of tribunals actually gave temporary or conditional exemptions in most cases during the applicant’s initial appearance, much to the disapproval of the military representative and Stuart Wortley M P, who, after visiting the area announced to the House of Commons on the 16 March, 1916.

I have been in Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, and Cardiganshire for ten days, and I am thoroughly disgusted with what I have seen and heard of the recruiting. They are exempting everybody. I cannot mention names, but one public character who attests people and pays them 2s 9d tells everyone to “get an appeal paper at once and see so-and-so, and he will help you to fill it in”. You would think it was an election day to see them running about looking for influence to get out of serving their country the whole of the Nonconformist

¹³⁶ Barlow, p.19.

ministers are working against the Act, and, if attested, using influence to get exemption.¹³⁷

Many non-conformist ministers and their congregation certainly backed the war, however, according to Eurig

Lloyd George's contribution was critical in raising recruits for the Army, and his success in persuading Nonconformist ministers as well as Anglican prelates to become recruiting officers was key to the flow of getting young men from Wales into the Army from the autumn of 1914 onwards.¹³⁸

Despite the fact that in 1913 the Union of Wales Independents was of the opinion that every war was contrary to the spirit of Christ, by the time of its first annual conference in 1915, the first one to be held after the war was declared, it had taken a contradictory perspective when it declared that while regretting the increasing sale of newspapers on Sundays the denomination was overjoyed that so many young men had joined the armed forces. The following year it condemned the harmful influence of the cinema and the trade in alcoholic spirits, but delighted in the creation of the Welsh Army under the command of the nonconformist Welsh speaker Brigadier Owen Thomas, admired the heroism of those who had joined the Army.¹³⁹

The Union of Wales Independents certainly did not speak on behalf of all its members or ministers. Individual preachers became actively involved in the

¹³⁷ Barlow, p.19.

¹³⁸ Eurig, p.46.

¹³⁹ Eurig, p.49.

Fellowship of Reconciliation with the foremost member being the Rev, Thomas Rees, the Principal of the Bala Bangor Theological College in Bangor, North Wales together with lecturers and students from the college. Writing to the Welsh Congregationalist weekly newspaper *Y Tyst* in September 1914 Rees pointed out

We have as a denomination, the tradition of Henry Richard, S R, and Gwilym Hiraethog to uphold, we have the gospel of the Cross and Love to preach, and there is greater need today than ever before to preach peace. It will not be easy to preach peace after driving people to war.¹⁴⁰

Whereas CO's found that society on the whole were not tolerant of their unwillingness to serve, those that sought exemption for reasons of hardship or already doing what they deemed to be work of national importance were given support, not only by word or deed, but by physical support when they came under threat of those in authority. One unique incident was reported in the *Llanelli Mercury*.

On September 11, 1916, two police officers, Sergeant H. Lewis and P C D Davies, went to Llansaint to arrest a conscript who had failed to report himself. The man, instead of coming quietly as was expected, showed fight, and being a powerfully built man, the struggle for some little time was between the officers and himself, but soon others of the inhabitants joined in against the police, who were very badly treated, the Sergeant receiving a nasty blow on the head which particularly stunned him and several kicks on the body.

¹⁴⁰ Eurig, p.62.

P C Davies received a nasty cut on the face and several bruises. The prisoner was rescued and the police had to retire beaten.¹⁴¹

As a politician who believed in conscription Lloyd George in a statement he made in Manchester made it clear that

there was nothing anti-democratic in conscription; on the contrary, every great democracy had resorted to it in times of national danger, as a fit and proper democratic weapon for self-defence, and if necessity arose we ought without hesitation to apply the same weapon ourselves in this present conflict.¹⁴²

In his memoirs written some seven years before his death Lloyd George recalling the war wrote felt that mistakes had been made which may have altered the course of the war.

Looking backward, there is no doubt at all that we should have been able to organise the nation for war far more effectively in 1914 and bring the conflict to a successful issue far more quickly and economically, if at the very outset we had mobilised the whole nation, its manpower, money materials and brains on a war footing and bent all our resources to the task of victory on rational and systematic lines. Towards the end, something approaching this condition was in fact reached, but here had intervened a long and deplorable extravagant prelude of waste and hesitation. But a

¹⁴¹ Barlow, p.19.

¹⁴² David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, Volume 1*. (Odhams London 1938). p.430.

majority of the cabinet opposed conscription not only as inexpedient, but because at that time they were strongly antagonistic to it on principle and there was no pressure from the conservative opposition to apply conscription.¹⁴³

Despite all the animosity that was felt toward the CO's society eventually had a change of heart regarding those that remained faithful towards the cause of peace. After the war Fenner Brockway was elected as the Labour Member of Parliament for Leyton East in 1929. Clifford Allen served as Chairman and Treasurer of the ILP from 1922-25 and Director of the Daily Herald from 1925-30 and also sat in the House of Lords as Lord Allen of Hurtwood. Emrys Hughes returned to his political activities and in 1946 was elected a Labour Member of Parliament for Ayrshire in Scotland, a seat he held up until his death in 1969. In *Journal of a Coward* he hoped that lessons would be learnt and stated 'It is well that the next generation should understand things as they were in the Great War, it will learn to loathe the stupidities of its fathers and rectify their results.'¹⁴⁴

During 2014 at their yearly conference in Bridgend the Welsh Independents apologised for the way that their previous congregational ministers had persuaded young men from all over Wales to join the army during the First World War. Speaking on behalf of the West Carmarthen Association of Independents the Rev Aled Jones stated, 'of course we shouldn't forget the people who fell in World War One, but acknowledge from the great travesty of that period that we have now an opportunity to build'.¹⁴⁵ They noted how the Methodist Minister the Rev, John Williams Brynsiencyn was a perfect example of one who had enthusiastically preached in favour of the war and enticed so

¹⁴³ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, Volume 1*. (Odham's London 1938). p.428.

¹⁴⁴ www.wciavoices.wordpress.com/2016/03/07/emrys-hughes-2/

¹⁴⁵ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-28031787 Viewed 30 March 2020.

many young men to enlist. Having previously discussed the subject, they stated that they were disgraced to remember the words and deeds of some of its Independent minister of the time, who were pro war and recruiting appellants. In a statement issued later the Union declared

Ymddiheurwn o waelod calon am bob gwyrddod o neges Iesu wnaeth osod tanwydd ffres ar goelcerth y Rhyfel.[...] Ychwanegodd eu bod yn mynegi edmygedd o'r heddychwyr gafodd eu gwawdio a'u carcharu am wrthod mynd i ryfel.¹⁴⁶

We apologise from the bottom of our heart for the distortion of the message of Christ which gave extra fuel to the pyre of war. [...] We admire the courage of the pacifists who suffered ridicule and imprisonment by not going to war.

According to the Quaker John W Graham in March 1916 the Tribunals settled to their work. 'Whilst success was impossible, they need not have failed as badly as they did. In few cases did they obtain the confidence of those whose destiny they decided'.¹⁴⁷

For some conscription was viewed as an intrusion into civil liberties, whilst to others the action was total ineffective.

Compulsory service did not achieve its alleged purpose of providing more men for the army. On the contrary it kept them out. Munitions workers and coal miners could not be prevented from succumbing to patriotic emotion when enlistment was voluntary. The military authorities had to reject them once conscription went through. Instead of unearthing 650,000 slackers, compulsion

¹⁴⁶ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-28031787 Viewed 30 March 2020.

¹⁴⁷ Graham, p.68.

produced 748,587 new claims for exemption, most of them valid, on top of the million and a half already starred by the ministry of munitions.¹⁴⁸

In reality it is impossible to know for certain how unbiased and unfair the tribunals really were, due to the fact that so much historical evidence was lost through the destruction of so many records.

¹⁴⁸ Adams, p.19.

Appendices

Cardiganshire Appeals Tribunal

Rt Hon, Sir, Laurence Hugh Jenkins KCIE, Cilbronnau, Cardigan.

Retired Chief Justice of Bengal, a magistrate and landowner.

Sir, (then Mr,) David C Roberts, Aberystwyth. Magistrate, County Councillor and former High Sheriff.

Mr R J R Loxdalde, of Castle Hill, Llanilian. County Councillor and landowner.

Mr, Joseph Evans, Llainfawr, Lampeter. Farmer.

Mr John Jones. Farmer. Chairman during 1916 of the County Council and Magistrate.

Rev, John Williams minister of Bethania Baptist Chapel, Cardigan and also a Prominent Liberal politician.

Mr, E Lima Jones, Aberaeron. Chemist.

Mr, R R Nancarrow, Pontrhydygroes. Manager of the Lisburne Lead Mine, a Cornishman who represented industrial and mechanical interests on the tribunal and proved himself a very useful member of the tribunal. Later appointed a Cardiganshire County Councillor.

Mr, Herbert M Vaughan. Llangoedmor, Cardigan. Landowner, magistrate and later appointed High Sheriff of Cardiganshire.

Mr, Evan Evans, Aberystwyth. Solicitor, Clerk of the County Council and the Secretary of the Tribunal.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Vaughan p.172

Carmarthenshire Appeal Tribunal

Mr Henry Evan Blagdon-Richards, J.P., Castle House, Carmarthen.

Mr Walter William Brodie, Cheriton, Llanelly.

Mr David Evans, J.P., Manordaf, Whitland.

Mr William Griffiths, Yr Wyddfa, Goring Road, Llanelly.

Mr John Williams Gwynne-Hughes, Tregyb, Llandilo.

His Majesty's Lieutenant of Carmarthenshire. John Lloyd, J.P., of Penybank, Abergwili.

Mr Thomas Morris, J.P., Brown Hill Villas, Garnant.

Mr Joseph Roberts, J.P., of Goedwig, Lakefield Road, Llanelly.

Mr David Williams, J.P., Glesin, Old Road, Llanelly.

Mr Francis Dudley Williams-Drummond, D.L., J.P., Cawdor Estate Office, Carmarthen.¹⁵⁰

Carmarthen Local Borough Tribunal

Mr, R T P Williams (Chairman).

Mayor, R Sinnett.

Alderman, T H Thomas.

Mr, W G Rowlands.

Mr, T Randle Dawkins.

Mr, C C Sais.

Mr, G H Llewellyn,

Mr, T H Morgan,

Mr, Jacob Lewis,

Major, W G Eaton-Evans (Military Representative).¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter for the Counties of Pembroke Cardigan Carmarthen Glamorgan and the Rest of South Wales. 22nd March, 1916 p.4

¹⁵¹ Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter for the Counties of Pembroke Cardigan Carmarthen Glamorgan and the Rest of South Wales. 22nd March, 1916 p.4

Carmarthenshire District Tribunal

Mr, J Jones, Chairman.

Mr, Llywelyn Morgan, Llanginning.

Mr, T Davies, Conwil.

Mr, W Brazell, Llanarthney.

Mr, W Williams, Abergwili.

Rev, J Herbert, Llandyfeilog.

Mr, M J Evans, Meidrim.

Mr, John Lewis, Llangyndeirne.

Mr, J Jones, Laugharne.

Mr, J Saer, (Clerk).

Captain Margrave, Military Representative.¹⁵²

St Dogmaels Rural Local Tribunal

Miss, J Evans Cidygill, Blaenffos.

Mr, Benjamin James, Bayvil.

Capt, T James, Dinas.

Mr, Thomas Lewis, Newport.

Mr, Urias Richards, Cilgerran.

Mr, John Davies, Fountain Hill.

Mr, David Thomas, Ffynonaugleision, Boncath.

Mr, Tom Joseph, St Dogmaels.

Mr, William Evans, Pantyderi, Boncath.

Mr, Peregrine assistant clerk.

Mr, Daniel James, Pwlleregin, Moylegrove.

Mr, D G Griffiths, J.P. Henllys.

Mr, Arthur Davies, Boncath.

Mr, G B Bowen, J.P. Llwyngwair, Newport.

Mr, David Davies Clerk ¹⁵³

¹⁵² Carmarthen Journal & South Wales Weekly Advertiser, 10th March, 1916. p.4

¹⁵³ Cardigan and Tivy-Side Advertiser, 11 February 1916.

Kidwelly Municipal Borough Tribunal

Mr, Thomas Reynolds, Mayor and Alderman of the Borough, overseer at the Munitions Factory at Pembrey.

Mr, David Anthony Farmer and Alderman of the Borough.

Dr, Thomas Griffiths, Doctor and also the Medical Officer of Health.

Mr, John Morgan, Farmer and Councillor.

Mr, David Thomas, Schoolmaster and Councillor.

Edmund Cole, Colliery and Carpenter.

Mr, David Rowlands, Tinsplate Worker.¹⁵⁴



The grave of Private John Oliver Thomas's at Mont Huon.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ www.cambridgescholars.com/download/sample/61617 The Great War: Localities and Regional Identities. Edited by Nick Mansfield and Craig Horner. Military Tribunals in Carmarthenshire, 1916-1917. p.10

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¹⁵⁵ www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-non-combatant-corps-2/

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