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HANES

NEWSLETTER OF THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY
CYLCHLYTHYR CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

ISSUE NUMBER 68

AUTUMN 2014

REMEMBERING THE GREAT WAR (A MISCELLANY)

The European war did not appear to be a very terrible reality to the people of the Aberdare valley during the August Bank holiday. The streets of Aberdare were never filled by a more merry crowd than on Monday evening, while throughout the valley there were gay crowds everywhere. It was true that the war was generally discussed, but there was not the slightest touch of what is generally known as the 'War Fever.'

(From the *Aberdare Leader* of 8th August 1914.)

Even in November, the *Parish Magazine* (Vol. XXVII, No.323, November 1914) commented *The progress of the war does not seem to affect, to any appreciable extent, the ordinary routine of life in Aberdare. 'Business as usual' is a motto of practical value if it is not made a cloak for indifference.*

However, despite these rather laid back comments the edition of the *Leader* immediately following the declaration of war (8th August, 1914) reveals that quite a lot of change and activity had occurred within a very short space of time. The following extracts are taken from that paper.

The War, the first days:

On the Sunday following the declaration of war notices calling up Naval Reserves were posted outside every police station and on numerous other spots as well. The response was excellent, and by Monday afternoon every naval reserve man had left the district. These numbered between 30 and 40, among the first to leave were three Aberaman men, Charles Twitt, Gooseberry Hill, W.Evett, Cwmaman Road and — Randell, Cobden Street. The *Leader* observed that they looked particularly smart in their naval rig.

In addition the Aberdare detachment of the 5th Battalion [Welsh Regiment] of the 'Terriers' [Territorial Army] returned home from camp early on Tuesday. Late in the

afternoon of the same day orders arrived calling them out for further service. No doubt if called upon, the 'Terriers' will give a good account of themselves.

Many other events that week were to affect the town:

The Government announced measures dealing with the control and distribution of food.

The *Leader* reported that most grocers had sold out of flour, and several bakers would have to close until new supplies were obtained.

The Co-operative Society asked people to keep down their orders; and let it be known that more prosperous members had sent in big orders to the detriment of the not so well off. The Committee called for fair treatment for all.

The price of groceries rose steadily in Aberdare on Wednesday; butter, sugar, condensed milk and many other necessities were all dearer. In this connection 'A Housewife' submitted a letter to the paper accusing the local shopkeepers of underhandedness: *'Allow me to draw attention to the selfishness of some of our most respected tradesmen in Aberdare in raising the price of food stuffs before war was really declared. Before buying any more stock the price of tea, sugar, butter, meat etc., have gone up. That is taking a mean advantage of the working man to fill their own pockets. I hope someone else better able to write than myself will show their disapproval'*.

James Windsor Lewis [owner of the Llwydcoed Estate] reduced the rents of his tenants. He also gave instructions that all cases of distress were to be reported to him immediately. Lewis, a Lieutenant in the Welsh Guards and a model landlord, was killed on the Somme in June 1916.

On Tuesday, army reservists received orders to report at their depots without delay. They all responded with enthusiasm. The following day, Wednesday, thirty-eight Reservists left to join the Colours and about thirty Terriers and fourteen Yeomanry proceeded to join their units. When the 'terriers' left for Pontypridd by the 2 pm TVR train, an immense crowd assembled to give them a send off. Some of the women were in tears but generally there was great enthusiasm. Cheers were given as the men left the station, and some cried, 'Go on, boys, and drive the Germans back'.

On Sunday last, prayers were offered in practically all the churches and chapels for peace. This fact was followed by the pertinent observation, 'If we are to take seriously the speeches made by kings and emperors, they have all been doing the same. Yet there is now raging one of the biggest and most frightful wars in history'.

Forty-five persons were sworn in as Special Constables, who would be called upon to act as required.

A report on international affairs informed, 'The French authorities, who are reported to have commandeered coal at Algerian ports, are endeavouring to secure immediate supplies of Welsh coal. The French naval authorities have a contract running with Nixon's Navigation Company for about 125,000 tons but this is spread over 12 months, and the extra supplies required are for immediate shipment. There was also an inquiry for a small quantity of best Admiralty coal for the trial run of a new man-of-war, but no salesman are at the moment in the position to make an offer for the supply.'

War Horses.

Forty horses from Dowlais-Cardiff colliery, Abercynon were brought up [from the pit bottom] last week to be sold to the army for artillery purposes. The following year, 1915, four of Aberdare Council's horses were commandeered by the Government.

When the matter was mentioned at the next Finance Committee meeting some members expressed unpatriotic and mercenary views. These exchanges took place:

The Chairman reported the horses had been valued at £275 and that the money had now been received.

By Mr. J O George, 'Did we have the full value of the horses?'

Mr George Powell: 'They would fetch fully that price and more in a Fair today.'

Mr. George, 'Where were our business men?'

Mr. G. Powell: 'We must accept what we get, even if it's only £5 per horse'

Mr. George: 'I thought we could get our own price with a little mild barter'

(Members, No!, No!)

Mr. L. N. Williams [Cambrian Lamp Works], 'If the War Office came for your business you would have to give it up at their price' (Aberdare Leader June 19th 1915)

Sadly some 8,000,000 horses, ponies and mules were to be killed during the period of the war.

Recruiting.

Premises were 'commandeered' by the War Office for use as a Recruiting Office. These were situated at the corner of Cardiff Street and Station Street and belonged to the Co-operative Society; the building had previously been the HQ of the Aberdare Band Institute. A local wit christened the building the 'booking office to Berlin.' At Mountain Ash the offices of T W Millar, architect, and Herbert George, solicitor, on the corner of Pryce Street were used for a similar purpose. The Aberdare offices were moved first to the Old Reform Club Buildings, and then to the Labour Exchange at Whitcombe Street.

WOMEN AT WAR

In 1916 the local newspaper carried a national advertisement asking women to join the Women's Royal Auxiliary Corps for work with the forces at home and abroad. It stated that 5,000 women were needed every week and that the Royal Flying Corps immediately required 500 sail makers and 150 store keepers. Good wages, uniforms, quarters and rations were offered. Interested females were asked to contact the local Employment Exchange. (AL October 13th 1916)

Note. Sail makers were required to construct aero wings.

Another vital part of the war industry that required female labour was the munitions industry. *Six young women left Aberdare for Birmingham and Coventry to work in munition works.* (AL April 15th 1916)

RECRUITING

The group system under Lord Derby's scheme has been re-opened pending the passing of the Compulsory Military Service Bill. At Aberdare Recruiting Office there has been a brisk response, over 200 men attested on Monday and Tuesday. The bulk of these were young single men. This feature is very satisfactory, for on the general response of single men throughout the country will depend the necessity or otherwise of persisting with the Bill. Judging by the number of armlets, the number of attestations has been very great in Aberdare, and it would seem that but a few young

men employed in non-reserved occupations have refrained from 'grouping.' Teachers and Council officials and employees have attested almost to a man, and it is hoped and believed that the few young men who are still armlet-less will copy the example of their fellows in the course of the next few days, and thus save, so far as Aberdare district can, the country from compulsion. (AL 15th January, 1916)

CONSCRIPTION

Because of high casualty rates and a decline in the number of people volunteering to join the army the British Government were obliged to introduce conscription in 1916. This was introduced in March of that year under the *Military Service Act*; this specified that all men between the ages of 18 and 41 were liable to call-up unless they were married or widowed with children. Exemption was also granted to medically unfit persons, clergymen, schoolteachers, certain classes of industrial workers, and conscientious objectors. In May, liability to serve was extended to married men, and in 1918 the upper age limited was raised to 51. The act provided that men or employers who objected to call-up could apply to a local Military Service Tribunal. In Aberdare this was set up by the local authority that appointed its members. This town's first panel consisted of the High Constable, Charles Kenshole (Chairman), Mrs Rose Davies, William Lawrence, Edmund Stonelake, W. M. Llewellyn, W Rees JP, and others. The military were also represented on the Tribunal, which had the power to grant exemption; this was usually granted on a conditional or temporary basis; its decisions were reported in the press.

At the first hearings at Aberdare exemption was granted to a baker, a butcher's salesman in sole charge, a slaughter-man, and a baker and confectioner. The deputy clerk and accountant of the Aberdare Urban District Council were also exempted from military service. An Aberdare architect wrote in appealing for postponement because he had important contracts on hand. The military authorities assented to the exemption of a Cwmbach cowman who also acted as milkman. A Trecynon tram conductor, who also assisted his mother in a business, and was in ill health, was refused exemption subject to medical examination. The following cases were also refused — that of an Aberaman furniture dealer who applied on behalf of his son who was in charge of a pawnbroking business in Gadlys, and in the case of a wholesale confectioner. The Vicar of St Fagan's applied for the exemption of a lay reader but it was held that a lay reader was not a minister or clergyman within the meaning of the Act. A lay reader was an amateur (laughter). It was then stated that the applicant intended entering college and offering himself for ordination. A one-month adjournment was granted, on the grounds that college students could be granted exemption. An Aberdare hairdresser's assistant, whose three brothers had already joined and who was now the sole support of a widowed mother, appealed, and total exemption was immediately given. Published reports of the findings of a Tribunal could sometimes be highly embarrassing to the applicants as many financial and personal details were revealed; others caused amusement. Two examples are given below:

Iltyd Hurst, a young man employed as an assistant baker and confectioner by Messrs Miles & Sons, applied on personal grounds — sole support of parents. It was pointed out that there would be no financial hardship, the grants made being equal to his wages, less his own keep. Postponed one month final.

(AL 23rd September, 1916)

In November 1916 Alderman Rees Llewellyn JP, applied for the exemption of Arthur Charles Abbott, [his] chauffeur, married and 28 years of age.

Mr Llewellyn appeared and said he had been unable to find a substitute for this man. He (Mr Llewellyn) was High Sheriff of Breconshire, and this man was indispensable to

him, and during the Assizes at Brecon his services would be required to drive the judge from the station. If the Tribunal would deprive him of Abbott's services he was afraid the judge would have to walk. 'Perhaps it would do him good', remarked an unnamed member of the Tribunal. The next Assizes would be held next week — The application was refused, Major Gray remarking that he would not be called up for a fortnight which would cover the period of the current Assizes.

(AL 4th November 1916).

Doing their bit.

A proud Mr and Mrs. Barnes of 9 Tanycoed Terrace, Abercwmbai wrote to the *Leader* stating:

We have seen in the weekly papers about sons serving in the army. Now, we have five sons, three sons-in-law, and one grandson in the services. Five are in the Royal Field Artillery, three in the infantry, and our grandson is a trumpeter in the Royal Horse Artillery. Four of them are in France and the remainder will follow in due course, no doubt.

(AL 29th August, 1914)

The old proverb 'Birds of a Feather' etc. could scarcely be better exemplified than by the fact that in Kingcraft Street, Mountain Ash, there are 48 houses, and there are 21 men from that street serving their King and country.

(AL 31st October, 1914)

A letter from the front.

Many hundreds of letters written from the trenches were submitted to the *Leader* throughout the course of the war. Some were funny even if of the gallows variety of humour. *Hanes* has selected this example:

Sir — Kindly allow me a small space in your valuable paper of which several copies find their way to France. We, the 8th Battalion, South Wales Borderers, have been in action a few times and are about getting used to Fritz and his shells, which we can hear whizzing about the village where we are now resting after having been in the trenches for several days. Between all the companies of the battalion there are about forty boys from sweet Berdare, and a nice little party we are, you bet, all anxious to have a fair go at our old pals, the Germans. We have had a few warm periods since we are out here, and not one of us has been touched yet. Our artillery consists of several Aberdare boys, including F Vaughan, Steve Barnes and Bombardier J Z Williams, and they don't forget to let Fritz know what part of Wales they come from. Also T Jenkins and Lew Davies of Aberaman, commonly known as 'White-nob', and 'needle-pusher'. Also Taffy Chowles and D T Taylor, known as Dai Bach y sowldiwr, and W Dennis the knut clerk [a knut was a man about town]. Also D George of Aberaman known as 'Dai spurs', and D Howells of the machine gun section, known as 'Dai the riddler'. We hope to have a speedy return to the old town — Yours etc. A member of 'A' Company, 8th South Wales Borderers.

(AL 23rd. October, 1915)

If any reader is aware of the identity of any of the above named, please contact the Editor.

White Feather Nuisance at Mountain Ash

Sir, - I'm afraid that the seriousness of the struggle in which we are engaged is not appreciated by all. There is a little thing, not of infrequent occurrence, which causes necessary pain to many. There are a few young ladies in Mountain Ash who persistently offer 'white feathers' to young men whom they pass; this usually occurs at night. In a few instances the feathers have been given to young men who have been refused permission to join by the colliery authorities. These young ladies would be much better employed in useful work than in walking the streets late at night in order to insult young men who cannot be spared from their employment. I thought all this nonsense had died out, especially as it has been vigorously condemned by the highest in the land. Or, perhaps, the young ladies are so ignorant of what is passing in the world that the idea of a 'white feather' is new to them.

I am etc., 'Middle Aged'

(AL April 17th, 1915)

I have been unable to find any Aberdare 'white feather' incidents but no doubt, the practice was common.

On Furlough

Nurse Alice Evans of Glannant Street arrived here from France on Wednesday last. She has been doing yeoman service to the wounded at the Somme and Messines engagements. She has been abroad for fourteen months. Before she took to the nursing profession in London, Nurse Evans was on the staff of the Hirwaun Girls' School. We wish her success in her noble work. (AL 1st September, 1917)

A letter of thanks (for a watch) has been received by the 'Blighty Boys' from Nurse Louisa Amos, daughter of Mr and Mrs Daniel Amos, 29 Penybryn Terrace, Penrhiwceiber who is serving with the Red Cross in France. (AL 17th November, 1917.)

An appeal to the inhabitants of Mountain Ash, Penrhiwceiber, Abercynon and Ynysybwl.

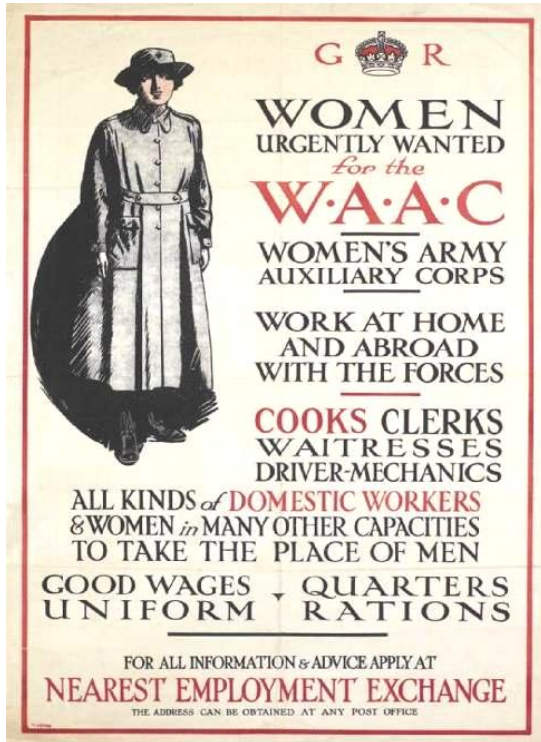
You have all heard of the formation of a Welsh Hospital for the front. Every individual or district subscribing £250 can have a bed named after the person or district. We have sent a large contingent from Mountain Ash to the war. We cannot expect them to escape without casualties, and if a Mountain Ash boy is nursed in a Welsh Hospital, I believe you would all wish him to be placed in a Mountain Ash bed. I appeal to all men, women and children in the district to give gold, silver or pence for this purpose, and I do not think I shall appeal in vain. I remain, Yours faithfully, [Lord] Aberdare.

(AL 26th September, 1914)

Mrs Pankhurst's Appeal.

Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst addressed a 'fairly large audience mainly composed of women' at Aberdare on the subject of the prosecution of the war. She appealed to the women to consider whether they could not, in some capacity or another, do some useful national service under the auspices of the W.A.A.C. One of the objects of this movement was to enrol women for various forms of work in the army, and thus release non-combatants for combatant service.

(AL 15th December, 1917)



Llwydcoed does its bit.

Two young women from the village served in the WAACS [The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps formed in 1917], others were engaged in munitions work. (AL 8th August, 1921)

Aberdare Nurse in Egypt

Nurse Allen, formerly of Abernant Road, now of the R.A.M.C. and stationed at Cairo, writing to her parents, who now reside in Cardiff, says that she had an adventurous voyage out on the *Mauritania*, the ship being escorted by four destroyers. Nurse Allen is attached to the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Staff Reserve and was at Aldershot for nine months before leaving for the front. She went out with sixty other nurses and four thousand Irish troops, some of whom have since died in her hospital.

In her letter home, Nurse Allen says the Egyptian climate is very warm, and the mosquitoes are very troublesome indeed. She hopes she will be able to stand the intense heat in order that she may assist in nursing back to health those good, noble fellows who are a credit to their country. Nurse Allen is at present attending to some members of the Scottish Regiment.

(AL 18th September, 1915)

Clippies.

In December 1915 the Council's Tramways and Parliamentary Committee resolved to appoint twelve female conductors to replace men called up for military service. Appointments were to be made subject to the following conditions: (a) That the appointments be made by the manager as and when required, and that the whole number be not called for service together. (b) That 12 be appointed (3) Age not be under 21 or over 35 (c) Wages to be similar to those of men, pro rata, half wages to be paid for actual time worked during period of learning. Question of war bonuses to be considered. (d) Applicants to be residents of the Urban District of Aberdare. The following January, nineteen women applicants were given trials; seven passed the tests and were appointed conductors. It was announced that others would be taken on as and when required. (AL, 18th December 1915 and 15th January 1916)

The Belgian Refugees.

A stark and tangible reminder of the war occurred in November 1914 when eight Belgian refugees, symbols of the conflict, arrived in the town to take up residence here. They were warmly welcomed on their arrival at the TVR station by a deputation. The group consisted of four ladies, two men and two children — a boy and a girl. They were presented with flowers and other gifts and then driven to their accommodation in motor cars provided by Dr. Banks, J W Hurt (fishmonger), and T Lloyd (grocer); the route through the town had been colourfully decorated with flags and bunting; many Belgium flags had been hoisted on shops and public buildings and the streets were lined with well-wishers. The Belgians, the first of a number who settled in the town during the war, came from Tirhegen, a small town with a population of 4,000 near the city of Malines. Their home on Gadlys Road was provided by Cllr. T. Lewis. The two men had been proprietors of small brick-works.

(AL 31st October, 1914)

A few days later, a further group of fourteen refugees arrived and took up residence in New Scale's Houses, Llwydcoed, properties owned by James Windsor Lewis.

(AL 7th November, 1914)

SEE HANES No. 29 (WINTER 2004) FOR AN ARTICLE ON THE FIRST CHRISTMAS OF THE WAR.

It is with great regret that we record the death of Mrs. Denise Jones. A full report and appreciation will be published in the next edition.

Published by The Cynon Valley History Society.

www.cvhs.org.uk

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Registered Charity 510143

Printed by Dial-A-Print, Penrhiwceiber (01443 474822)