

Aberdare School Log Books
World War 1
Identified Themes

Supporting the War effort. From the autumn of 1914 schools took up the challenge of supporting the war effort with enthusiasm. Initially their efforts were directed towards practical activities including making “comforts” for soldiers and raising money for local and national charities – including support for Belgian refugees, the first civilian casualties of the war in Western Europe.

“A half holiday was granted the day before because there was a carnival held in Aberaman Park, the proceeds of which were devoted towards providing winter comforts for the prisoners of war in Germany.” EA1/5 Aberaman Girls’ School

“One of the refugees from Belgium, Mr de Metz, paid a visit to the school. He spoke a few words to the children who were greatly impressed and thanked them for singing the Belgian National Anthem. Mr de Metz was present for 24 hours at the bombardment of Antwerp. He was on the last boat which left the city before the entry of the Germans.” EA11/4 Abernant Boys, Mixed and Infants.

“Very nice letter of thanks accompanied by a certificate signed by the Bishop of London has been received from the Serbian War Relief Fund to whom we sent £20 – proceeds of concert.” EA15/6 Cwmaman Girls.

“Selling flags for the Welsh Flag Day, Sat 13 March. Some of the girls will be dressed in Welsh costumes and also as fisher girls and ambulance maids (War Concert costumes).” EA16/1 Glynhafod, Cwmaman.

“Tomorrow flag day – proceeds to go to comforts for Welsh soldiers.” EA11/4 Abernant Boys, Mixed and Infants.

Schools often made strong and ongoing links with military hospitals in their area.

“From the hospital received a letter of thanks about the eggs sent by our girls to wounded soldiers.” EA15/6 Cwmaman Girls

“Some of the wounded soldiers Australian, English and Welsh paid a visit to the school. We had half an hour’s singing.” EA15/6 Cwmaman Girls.

Aberdare did not follow the example of local authorities, such as Merthyr, that encouraged schools to raise funds for specific projects (e.g. in Merthyr this took the form of the Lord Mayor’s Appeal for funds to provide an Ambulance Car for the

Front). However, the authority was an active supporter by 1917 of the national campaign to set up a War Savings Associations in each school. National campaigns, including the visit of Tanks to towns in south Wales in the summer of 1918, were also used to encourage and promote the purchase of War Savings Certificates. By and large the schools responded very positively to the campaigns. There is no evidence in the log books that Aberdare followed the practice in Cardiff of offering additional holidays to the schools that collected the most money.

“ Commenced a War Savings Association with Headmaster as Secretary and Miss Williams, Girls Department, as Treasurer. This will be known as National School War Savings Association and will serve for the Boys and Girls Departments. “ EA9/1 Aberdare, National Mixed.

“Dd Gwynne Griffith is the first boy from this school to buy a War Savings Certificate. I have made this known to each class so as to induce other boys to do likewise.” EA23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boys’ School .

“Letter appealing for the school to contribute to the war effort and war savings as the need of the country is so great. Explains high demand as the cost of war is so great.” EA23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boys’ School .

“War time savings in this school amount to £49-6-4 up to date (April 1917)” EA23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boys’ School .

“315 War Savings Certificates have been taken up by the scholars in this school during the year 1917.” .” EA23/10 Aberdare Park Council Girls’ School .

“School closed all day. “Tank “ day in Aberdare. The school War Savings Association purchased 309 War Savings Certificates and one £5 bond.” EA9/1 Aberdare, National Mixed.

Life in school. There is no mention in the log books of schools in Aberdare being requisitioned for use as military hospitals as in Cardiff. However, schools and particularly boys’ schools staffed almost entirely by men, were hard hit as staff volunteered or were called up for military service.

“Mr John Howells called this morning to let us know he would be unable to attend school for some time as he had been ordered to join his regiment at Pontypridd.” EA9/1 Aberdare Town National Mixed

“Mr R D Davies left without notice having been accepted for Kitchener’s Army (Royal Engineers).”EA7/3 Aberdare St Fagan’s, Trecynon Boys

*“Mr G Parry left on Friday for Oxford as 2nd Lieut in the Army.” EA1/9
Aberaman Boys*

“Copy of report on school visited in 1917. Owing to the enlistment of six male teachers with the Colours and the subsequent changes in staff the school has recently been conducted under great difficulties.” EA15/5 Cwmaman Boys.

Throughout the war the Board of Education kept up the pressure for all male teachers of military age to enlist in the armed forces or, if unable to do so, to join local volunteer organisations.

“ A circular was received from the Board of Education and War Office. They hope that all male teachers of military age will/would join the Regular Forces either as Officers or Privates. Teachers are already committing a public service so they are not necessarily needed to attend active service. Any teacher who does however enrol in the Volunteer Training Corps will be subject to being called up to active service. The War Office hopes that the teachers will give their service in an emergency.” EA23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boys’ School .

“ A teachers’ corps has been set up due to the war. The head teacher attended a drill session at 6.30 on Thursday and also on the evening of this particular day. All the other male teachers attend except for Mr H Williams who suffers from eczema on his feet.” EA23/5 Park Boys

“Headmaster absent from school being on duty at Cardiff last night in company with other men of 2nd Battn Glam Volt Regt viz Guard Duty at Roath Docks.” EA11/4 Abernant Boys, Mixed and Infants.

“ The master left school at 3.45 to take up guard duty in Cardiff.” EA19/6 Cwm-Bach Mixed.

All teachers were expected to “do their bit” to support the war effort both through giving their time for additional work and supporting the war effort through financial contributions.

“A letter from Jack Thomas who was Secretary of the Aberdare Association for the NUTIt stated that all teachers would be helping with the clerical work with the pink registration forms at the Education Office from 6.30-9 each evening. The head teacher has written down all the names of the teachers involved and when they were expected to attend.” EA23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boys’ School .

“Circular received from the War Agricultural Committee regarding volunteers for farm work during the holidays.” EA12/3 Aman Mixed School.

“Mr D G Davies has been selected as one of the ambulance men to attend to the wounded who would be brought in by tram that afternoon. He did that work from 2 until 3.” EA23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boys’ School .

“Miss Morris away engaged upon food rationing cards.” EA25/4 Robertstown Mixed.

“War loan vouchers will be on sale to teachers each voucher being 5/-. They can either purchase them through their head teacher or they can purchase them directly from the Post Office.... A leaflet has been circulated amongst teachers called “Silver Bullets will win the War.”” EA23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boys’ School .

The war forced a shift in the status and opportunities afforded to women in schools . Although often seen as a temporary measure, women were increasingly employed in boys’ schools. In addition, it was accepted that to meet the chronic shortage of trained teachers dispensation be given for married women to continue to teach for the duration of the war. In other areas women were increasingly taking leading roles on the home front for example in the munitions industry.

“The staff and girls and boys Department presented Miss Lanman (Mrs Elson) with a silver cake stand and a salad bowl on the occasion of her marriage with Sergt Elson, serving with the Sportsman’s Battalion. Mrs Elson is allowed to continue her duties during the period of the war.” EA9/1 Aberdare, National Mixed.

Although rationing was not introduced until 1918, schools along with the general population experienced shortages of fuel and food and were expected to “economise”. As head teachers recorded, by 1918, food shortages impacted very directly on school attendance.

“ Many of the children were kept at home because their mothers went to Aberdare to try and procure food.” EA1/2 Aberaman Infants

“Attendance still low 88% due to colds and partly to search for food – noted that some children been kept home on certain days in each week to stand in queues or in the Co-operative stores. “EA14/3 Capoch Mixed.

“Attendance low owing to mothers or the girls themselves having to take their turns in the grocers and butchers shops in order to secure their supplies of provisions” EA1/5 Aberaman Girls .

“School had to be cancelled as there was no coal. The coal had was ordered three weeks ago.” EA22/3 Llwydcoed Infants.

“Circular received requesting that schools open and close an hour earlier in the afternoon during winter in order to save fuel and light.” EA23/2 Park Infants.

Schools were also required to help pupils and families find ways and means of coping with food shortages.

“Circular received concerning lessons on thrift. Leaflets from the National Food Fund should be given to the older children. Pupils should be aware of the severity of the national situation and discuss the information they learn in these classes with their family.” EA22/2 Hirwaun Infants .

“Circular received regarding the shortage of the supply of meat. Lessons should be given to older children on the importance of restricting the consumption of meat with a view to economising the national supplies and avoiding excessive increase of price.” EA25/1 Robertstown Infants.

“Circular requesting to make known a course of lectures on War Cookery to be held in different centres.” EA3/2 Aberdare Higher Standard Selective Boys School.

“Received two copies of the National Food Fund’s advice for housewives and six copies of “The Great War and how it arose”. Also received leaflets on “Housekeeping and saving fuel” and “National Thrift”. “EA19/5 Cwm-Bach Mixed.

School provided an important focus for local communities and particularly those hard hit by the War. However, their efforts were not always appreciated by the Board of Education

“The Director sent word today (4th Feb 1918) that we provide no more meals after today . We have given 496 meals since 8th January to children whose fathers have been working irregularly at Cwmaman. The meals (breakfast – porridge, dinner – soup) were prepared at the Wind Street Cookery Centre and sent here for distribution.” EA9/1 Aberdare, National Mixed.

Keeping up morale. The War led to the production of first Government sponsored propaganda films. Aberdare does seem to have followed the trend in Merthyr and Cardiff of encouraging schools to see the film, although all schools were expected to

use the opportunities provided by Empire Day and St David's Day to promote patriotism.

"A circular was received .. and copies of the pamphlet "The Great War and How it Arose". A copy was give to each teacher as was a copy of National Thrift. The teachers had to make this the topic of one lesson and set homework on it." EA23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boy's School.

"Address given to the assembled school on our national flag and patriotism. Rule Britannia, the National Anthem and Before all lands in East and West are sung by the assembled school. Names on the Roll of Honour (Old Park school boys who are serving the country) are read out. The response of the men of the Empire - at home and from our colonies – have given to the call of England attended to.2 ." EA23/10 Aberdare Park Council Girls School .

"Normal timetable suspended and a program involving presentations on the Union Jack, patriotism and the Economy was adopted. Procession by children in the school year past the Union Jack. Cheers given for the following The King, The Sailors, The Soldiers, Munitions Workers, Land Workers, Women carrying on the work of men and all people of the Empire." EA23/10 Aberdare Park Council Girls School .

"The children take part in a simple Empire day pageant which includes singing songs of the Allies." EA22/3 Llwydcoed Infants.

"Standard 5 performed a piece entitled "Britain's Call". It brought in all the Allies and the Colonies. Dresses appropriate to each country and national anthems of each sung." EA23/10 Aberdare Park Council Girls School .

"St David's Day was celebrated in the school by unveiling a large framed photograph of the late Lieut John Edwin Howells, one of our teachers killed in action at Cambrai on Nov 20th 1917." EA9/1 Aberdare, National Mixed.

"As part of the St David's day celebrations – an address on why we went to war." EA19/5 Cwm-Bach Mixed.

"Head Teacher took 25 boys to the bat. On the way through the park tested them in drill – marching, changing step, turning, wheeling. Hardly satisfactory as some of the boys continually wrong in the turning and some do not exercise any thought they simply do what others do whether right or wrong – a few cannot change steps." EA23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boy's School .

Throughout the war a string of national campaigns was used to promote the Allied cause. A small number of schools also used stories based around figures such as

Nurse Edith Cavell and Jack Cornwell to praise the heroism of those who fought against the Germans and their allies.

News from the Front. News from the front was provided largely by national and local newspapers with extensive coverage of the military campaigns. However, it would have been supplemented by the frequent visits of former teachers and pupils to their schools when home wounded or on leave.

“Sergeant J Trevor Jones formerly of the staff of the school paid a visit this morning. Sergeant Jones is now at home after having spent 7 months with the forces at Salonica, being recommended for a commission. The children sang their songs in order to entertain the Sergeant.” EA11/4 Abernant Boys, Mixed and Infants.

“Private J Davies a member of the Australian Expeditionary Force and an old pupil visited the school yesterday.” EA14/3 Capoch Mixed.

“Captain Aneurin Rhydderch, 15th Welsh Regt, paid a visit to the school this morning. He is an old pupil of the school and has been serving with his Battalion in France for the past six months.” EA14/3 Capoch Mixed.

“Harry Williams having visited his home on furlough called this week. He is unfit for military service through dislocation of his wrist of long standing. It is to be hoped for the sake of the school and espec the teaching of gardening and nature study that he will soon return to his school duties.” EA23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boy’s School .

“Mr E W Thomas returned to school today following being drafted to France where he was seriously injured and discharged. He left on 9 May 1916 to join the Army and drafted to France the following August. Within a fortnight he was seriously injured and discharged from hospital only a fortnight ago having spent ten months in various institutions.” EA14/3 Capoch Mixed.

“Attendance very low today – girls staying home to see soldier returning. He does not return until 5 o clock so I think that the girls should be punished.” EA15/6 Cwmaman Girls.

The level of casualties at the Front also had an ongoing and significant impact on the lives of many staff in schools.

“Miss Jessie A Thomas absent since Monday. She was wired to return home to see her brother in Liverpool Hospital. He was seriously wounded ... in the battle around Ypres on 4 May.” EA16/1 Glynhafod, Cwmaman.

“Mr Davies asked whether his daughter... might leave school at 11.45 in order to go to Cardiff to see her uncle who had been wounded at the front.” EA23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boy’s School .

“Miss Cronk absent having gone to London to see her brother who was in the hospital wounded.” EA1/2 Aberaman Infants.

“Mrs Hall sent word to say that she had permission from the Director to absent herself for two weeks because her husband had arrived home on leave from France.” EA9/1 Aberdare, National Mixed.

“Mrs Davies was absent yesterday as her brother had been killed in the war. “ EA15/5 Cwmaman Boys.

The extent to which the names of servicemen who were awarded medals and/or died in the war was recorded in log books was variable. Nevertheless, the log books contain a considerable list of local war heroes. In addition most schools set up a Roll of Honour to record the names of staff and former pupils who had joined the armed forces.

“Mr Williams’ group has been called up. He has also handed over the Roll of Honour which had names of 84 old scholars of the school “who have answered their country’s call”. “EA 23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boy’s School .

“ Mr John Edwin Howells who joined the King’s Forces on Sept 14th 1914 and who had risen in the Tank Corps was killed in action on November 20th. ” EA9/1 Aberdare, National Mixed.”[NB almost certainly at the Battle of Cambrai]

“On Jan 28th news was received from France that Private Oswald J Davies who prior to enlistment was a teacher at this school was lying at the ... Hospital suffering from serious wounds in the back and shoulder caused a by an enemy machine gun bullet. A fortnight later Mr Davies succumbed from the effect of these wounds and was buried with full military honours at Abbeville. Mr Davies served here as an Uncertificated Teacher for one year leaving to join the Grenadier Guards on Aug 24th 1916. Mr Davies is the third member of the school staff to make the supreme sacrifice.” EA12/3 Aman Mixed.

“The union Jack has been hung in each room. The names on the Roll of Honour read aloud to the children.” EA23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boy’s School .

“Friday afternoon letter brought from the office requiring the following particulars which were supplied on Saturday morning. David James Private 134885 DM/2 ASC MT 648 Coy British Expeditionary Force to East Africa c/0 General PO London. William Williams – Private 133911 ASC MT 595 Coy 17th MAC Salonika. David Parry – 46398 3rd Battalion Welsh regiment B Company 16 camp 3 Kimmel park Denbighshire. William Hughes – Trooper 2559 3/1st Glamorgan Yeomanry B Squadron Park hall camp near Oswestry.” EA23/6 Aberdare Park Council Boy’s School .

Celebrating the End of the War. Many schools simply recorded the signing of the Armistice and the short school holiday that followed. This may be because schools in south Wales were in the grip of an epidemic of Spanish Influenza that resulted in most being closed for periods before and after 11 November 1918. However, the following week all head teachers received a circular from the Board of Education suggesting that a celebration tea be provided for pupils.

Influenza epidemic. Today (8 Nov 1918) only 147 present out of 253 owing to Spanish influenza chiefly. “EA16/1 Glynhafod, Cwmaman.

“Influenza epidemic – attendance fell from 85% on Monday to 66% today.” (1st Nov 1918) EA12/3 Aman Mixed School.

“Received a circular for Head Teachers to arrange a tea for children to celebrate the end of the War.” EA16/1 Glynhafod, Cwmaman.

However a series of celebrations were held in 1919 and 1920 to commemorate the end of the war.

“Peace celebrations were a success. The children marched along the streets of Llwydcoed, congregated on the Green and sang songs. They returned to the school had tea and went to the park.” (July 1919) EA22/3 Llwydcoed Infants.

“Armistice day was observed in the manner desired by the King. An address on the League of Nations was given by the master. A hymn of thanksgiving for peace and the National Anthem were sung. The school closed in the afternoon as a procession of discharged soldiers and sailors was likely to affect attendance.” EA19/6 Cwm-Bach Mixed.

“Mr W J Evans resumed duties here (Feb 1919). He had been in the Army since 21/1/16.” EA 9/1 Aberdare, National Mixed.

“Yesterday afternoon the scholars were presented with a cup each in commemoration of the “Peace”. “ (Jan 1920) EA19/6 Cwm-Bach Mixed.