

Merthyr Tydfil 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. At first their efforts were directed towards practical activities such as 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.

“On the 15th December parcels as Xmas gifts were sent to fathers (or brothers) of the pupils of the School who were serving with the Expeditionary Forces at the front. The money necessary for the purchasing of these parcels was received from the children and members of staff.” EMT9/6 Dowlais Central.

“School closed during the afternoon session. A Grand Football Match (Boys) Ebbw Vale and Merthyr School Boys to take place for the National Fund (Prince of Wales Fund)” EMT12/3 Heolgerrig Infants.

“During the past week the little ones have brought coppers to buy writing paper and envelopes to send to the Aldershot Military Hospital to put in the wounded soldiers stockings. Just over 16s has been raised.” EMT9/2 Dowlais Infants.

“Sent off £7.12.0 to the National Committee for the Relief of the Belgians collected by the children during the Christmas Holidays. EMT15/4 Pant Junior School.

“Two sacks of vegetables contributed by the boys sent for the Belgian refugees.” EMT19/4 Queens Road Boys.

“The Head Teacher has photographed all the lads who have fathers in the Army and each has been supplied with 2 photos, one of which was sent to the father.” EMT9/6 Dowlais Central.

“Several girls asked for permission to knit scarves for our soldiers who are out in the front fighting for our country. Teacher gladly consented.” EMT17/2 Pengarnddu Infants and Mixed.

“Despatched parcel of garments to Red Cross Hospital, Aberdare consisting of socks, mufflers and body belts. On Sat 22nd a sovereign’s worth of groceries were also sent. EMT19/5 Queens Road Girls.

“Received a letter this morning from Mr Lloyd George, Minister of Munitions, acknowledging receipt of leek sent to him for St David’s Day and also his pleasure in wearing it. The sum of £5.6.6 was realised at this school by sale of leeks for St David’s day. This has been handed to the Town Ward Committee in order to provide “Comforts for Welsh troops.” EMT19/5 Queens Road Girls.

Fairly soon, however, schools were key players in the friendly rivalry fostered between local authorities to provide specific help for the Forces. For example, in Merthyr this took the form of the Mayor’s Appeal for funds to provide an Ambulance Car for the Front.

“A meeting was held on Monday night when the Mayor desired the teachers to do something towards getting an Ambulance Car for the Front – Merthyr Ambulance car. We in the three Departments have decided to hold sports and races in about 6 to 7 weeks hence and committees will be held with the teachers during mid May to arrange.” EMT23/4 Troedyrhiw Junior School.

“There is a half holiday today in preparation for a whist drive and dance at the New Hall Pentrebach with the four schools Aber Mixed and Infants. The proceeds go to the Mayor for a Motor Ambulance for the Front” “EMT2/2 Abercanaid Infants.

By 1917 as result of a concerted national campaign nearly all school had set up a War Savings Association. Local authorities gave additional holidays to the most successful schools based on the amount raised per pupil. National campaigns including the visit of Tanks to major towns in 1918 were used to encourage and promote the purchase of War Bonds.

“The Education Committee has granted a holiday tomorrow to all schools as a reward for the patriotism of the children of this Borough who have this week invested £20,000 in War Securities by Means of the TANK. EMT5/1 Brecon Road Infants.

“Tank Week at Merthyr 3-7 June. During this memorable week the School were invited to do their utmost to promote the purchase of War Savings Certificates through the War Savings Association. The scholars of this department responded in a magnificent way to the appeal and with the result that 3000 War Savings Certificates (£1 each) were sold during the first three days; thus breaking the School record throughout the County. EMT 9/6 Dowlais Central.

Life in school. The war had an immediate impact on schools. With wounded soldiers invalided back to Britain there was a desperate need for hospital beds and a number of schools in South Wales were handed over to military.

“The Education Committee having decided on Monday to hand over these schools as a Hospital for wounded soldiers, Mr Rhys Elias, Director of Education, had a conference with the Head Mistress of Girls and myself and a few buildings were suggested as likely places to accommodate the children during the period the schools would be in use as hospitals” EMT19/4 Queens Road Boys.

Boys' schools were particularly hard hit as staff volunteered or were called up for military service. Teachers were also expected to “do their bit” to help local recruitment and help with local defence. Women were increasingly taking leading roles on the home front. Applications to the local authority for children to be released from school before the age of 14 were commonplace. They were driven by the need to not only to provide manpower in the fields but also to release mothers to take up employment in industry and agriculture. However, there were still only limited opportunities for women to contribute directly to the military effort beyond occupations such as nursing.

“Received circular asking if any Teachers would render voluntary assistance to do clerical work in the evenings at the Recruiting Office, Merthyr. The whole of the staff gave their names and the same were sent to Mr Price to forward.” EMT9/2 Dowlais.

“Staff who have joined HM Forces (by March 1916) - Lieut J Stanley Humphreys, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, Pte D Cyril Price 2nd Devon's in India, Pte Oscar Morgan, RAMC in France, Pte JD Evans, Public School Battalion, Pte Thos Whitney, BA, Public School Battalion, Oxford, Pte Dan Connolly, Public School Battalion, Oxford, Pte Rd Douglas Evans, Public School Battalion, Oxford, Pte Jas Harold Evans, Pioneer Battn, Porthcawl, Sgt T J Williams, South Lancs, Pte Leyshon Williams, 5th Welsh, Pembroke, The following have attested under the Derby scheme – E R Davies, TJ Owen and b Jones” EMT9/6 Dowlais Central.

“Mr Lewis not in school Tuesday morning having been on sentry duty at Cardiff Docks the preceding night with a draft from local VTC.” EMT19/4 Queens Road Boys.

“Miss Ida Kenshole leaves the employ of the Education Authority for a time in order to take up duties as a Red Cross Nurse. She leaves for France on 11th inst. EMT19/5 Queens Road Girls.

Although seen as a temporary measure, women were increasingly employed in boys' schools and to backfill special dispensation was given for married women to continue to teach for the duration of the war.

“The Director called and asked for the loan of a teacher during the war to take the place of one who has joined the Forces in the Boys School. Miss Ceinwen Jones TC was the one chosen”. EMT9/2 Dowlais Infants.

“Two teachers Mrs Berry and Miss Thomas commenced here on Tuesday morning. Owing to the failure to get teachers owing to the war these ladies have been appointed for the time being.” EMT23/4 Troedyrhiw Junior.

Although rationing was not introduced until 1918, schools along with the general population experienced shortages of fuel and food and were expected to “economise”. Schools were also required to help pupils and families find ways and means of coping with food shortages.

“Slates to be used instead of exercise books to save expense, starting today.” EMT11/8 Georgetown Boys School.

“The Education Committee has authorised that the afternoon session begins at 1.30 from Nov 2nd 1915 to 30th April 1916. This is done with a view to reducing the expenditure on light fuel.” EMT19/1 Queens Road Infants.

“Girls between 6 and 10 years of age were told to bring their Meat Coupons in order to have them exchanged for Adult Meat Coupons by the Food Controller.” EMT17/2 Pengarnddu Infants and Mixed.

“School was opened on these separate days but as the number of children who presented themselves was so small they were sent home on each occasion and school closed for the day. The cause of the low attendance was the inclemency of the weather and also the inability of the parents to procure food owing to the shortage of supplies.” EMT16/1 Pantglas Infants.

“Director of Education visited and notified that Domestic Centre would be closed for the children on Dec 13th and 14th when a Demonstrator will address the Cookery Mistresses of the Merthyr and Aberdare Education Authority on “Present Day Cookery” difficulties arising from shortage owing to the war to be dealt with. EMT19/5 Queens Road Girls.

School provided an important focus for local communities and particularly those hard hit by the War.

“During the Christmas Holidays by permission of the Council, Classroom 1 was used by the Welfare Committee on Monday 28th to Wednesday 30th to prepare the Christmas tree for the children of the Soldiers and Sailors which was held in the Central Hall on Dec 30th where over 700 children had a

present, some toys and also scarves with also an orange and bag of sweets.”
EMT 9/2 Dowlais Infants.

Keeping up morale. The War led to the production of first Government sponsored propaganda films and most pupils in Merthyr were taken to see “Britain Prepared”. However, the local authority was more circumspect when “The Battle of the Somme” was released in 1916 and decided that it was not suitable for children.

“Mr Elias, Director of Education called here on Wednesday morning and instructed that boys should attend the Theatre Royal in afternoon to see the Government pictures “Britain Prepared.” EMT19/4 Queens Road Boys.

“Had intended sending the scholars to the Picture Palace in order to see “The Battle of the Somme” film – however as the Education Committee had passed a Resolution to the effect that it was undesirable to let school children attend they came back to school where ordinary lessons were resumed” . EMT 19/5 Queens Road Girls.

Schools were expected to use the opportunities provided by Empire Day and St David’s Day to promote patriotism.

This morning one lesson was devoted to a talk to the little ones on the love of our Country and Empire of which it forms part. The reading lesson was made appropriate to the day and Patriotic songs were sung.” EMT6/2 Caedraw Junior.

“School closed for afternoon. Empire day lessons during the morning chiefly being on “Empire and the present need for Patriotism during the war.” EMT19/5 Queens Road Girls.

“To celebrate France day the children were allowed to sing the Marseillaise. Each teacher gave an address to her class upon France as our ally in this conflict.” EMT17/2 Pengarnddu Infants and Mixed.

Throughout the war a string of national campaigns were 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.

“Miss Evans and Miss Richards took St 5a, 6 and 7 to Cyfarthfa Museum on Monday afternoon to an exhibition of the Great Allied War Photographs lent by HM Government and Allied Powers”. EMT4/10 Abermorlais Girls.

“Fifty two books “A Nation’s Heroes” gift of H Seymour Berry Esq were distributed to the upper classes this morning “ EMT11/8 Georgetown Boys School.

The last 20 mins of this morning was taken up by a little ceremony to unveil the picture of Nurse Cavell – national songs were sung and I gave a short address to assembled school on why and how she met her death.” EMT6/6 Caedraw Junior.

News from the Front. News from the front was largely provided by national and local newspapers that provided 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. It is difficult to gauge how they were received but certainly some schools took to the opportunity to make presentations to former pupils.

“L/ Corporal Tom Stephens , Royal Fusiliers and ex teacher in this school has been home on draft leave this week and called at the school when he was presented with a cigarette case by pupils and teachers. He was wounded in France on April 23 1917”. EMT19/4 Queens Road Boys.

“Lieut Evans, RFA visited school on Tuesday afternoon. Pte DE Morgan ASC and a late teacher called here on Wednesday – home on leave from Salonika after two years service out there. L/Cpl Probert MM of the RAMC called here Thursday morning also officer J Gordon Davies – an ex pupil and of the RAF - called here the same morning”. EMT19/4 Queens Road Boys.

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

Mrs Lumley absent on Thursday and Friday having received sad news that her son Lieutenant George Lumley was wounded on April 13th at Mesopotamia.” EMT4/10 Abermoralais Girls School.

“Miss Alice Davies has been absent all week. She has leave of absence for a month in order to devote her time to the recovery of her brother – a wounded soldier.” EMT5/1 Brecon Road Infants.

“Mr E R Hughes not in school in morning. Received on his way here a message that his brother’s ship had been blown up by the enemy.” EMT19/4 Queens Road Boys.

The extent to which the names of servicemen who were awarded medals and/or died in the war were recorded in log books was variable. Nevertheless, the log books contain a considerable list of local war heroes. To list just a few.

“Pte Daniel Connolly. News has been received that Mr Connolly who has been reported as “wounded and missing” since Nov 1916 has been killed in action in France on the 7th October 1916. Mr Connolly was in his 26th year and was a TCT on the Staff at this school since leaving College in Aug 1914 and up to 1st Feb. 1916 when he joined the Army. He was also a pupil and PT at this school. He was one of the finest men it has been my privilege to meet; a most excellent teacher always full of enthusiasm for his work and loved by both pupils and colleagues. Truly his death is a very big loss to the School.” EMT 9/6 Dowlais Central.

“I see by the S W Daily News of last Sat that Lieut Cecil Phillips has been recommended for the VC and DSM for his bravery at Gallipoli (Suvla Bay landing). Lieut C Phillips received five years of his early schooling at this school. Another former pupil of this school is a Lieut at Gallipoli” EMT4/7 Abermorlais Boys School.

L/Cpl Richard Douglas Evans was killed in action in Arras, France on the 1st May 1917. He has been a pupil at this school and afterwards at Merthyr County School , returning later as a Student Teacher.... He was of a gentle and lovable nature full of enthusiasm in all good works and was greatly esteemed and loved by both staff and pupils. A memorial service was held at the Parish Church , Dowlais”. EMT9/6 Dowlais Central.

“The sad news of the death from wounds of Major J M Wightman formerly a member of the Troedyrhiw Boys School staff appeared in the morning’s newspaper. He left the school for the Army Sept 18th 1914. His old scholars and those of the staff who knew him were much affected on hearing the news. He called at the school at the dinner hour when home on leave about 8 months ago.” EMT23/4 Troedyrhiw Junior.

Celebrating the End of the War. Many schools simply record 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, some did take the opportunity to express the joy and delight that accompanied the Armistice and the return of soldiers.

“Peace declared today – children assembled in the yard “Union Jack” hoisted while children cheered and sang the National Anthem.” EMT19/5 Queens Road Girls.

“Mr Dan Williams returned to duties after more than 4 years service in the Army in which he rose to the rank of 2nd Lieut. EMT22/4 Treharris Mixed and Boys.

"Influenza epidemic playing havoc with attendance of both staff and scholars. EMT 15/4 Pant Junior School.

"A great number absent today owing to an epidemic prevailing called the Spanish Influenza. No school in the afternoon owing to the same." EMT17/2 Pengarnddu Infants and Mixed.