Mountain Ash School Log Books World War 1 Identified Themes

<u>Supporting the War effort</u>. 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 providing "comforts" for soldiers at the Front and raising money for local and national war charities. As the number of war wounded mounted many were brought to hospitals in South Wales and schools often provided support for local military hospitals.

"Harvest Week. The children brought fruit and vegetables during the week. These were sold to staff and parents on Friday and the proceeds given to the "The Book Fund" for the children of Soldiers and Sailors." EMA3/1 Abercynon Abertaf Infants.

"The sum of £2 14s 2d was collected by the scholars for the Blinded Soldiers' Fund during the Christmas week. An acknowledgement of receipt was received last week." EMA24/1/2 Ynysybwl Mixed.

"The school was closed owing to a carnival at Mountain Ash in aid of the Hospital." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"Stamps have been sold to the children on behalf of "Jack Cornwell's" memorial fund during the past week. This effort realised £1.0s7d which has been forwarded to Lord Charles Beresford." EMA9/1 Darren Las Mixed School.

"Received two postcards from soldiers at the Front thanking us for gifts sent on 25th June." EMA24/1/2 Ynysybwl Mixed.

"Closed this afternoon for carnival in aid of War Charity (Ladies Needlework Guild)." EMA9/1 Darren Las Mixed School.

By 1917 local authorities were active supporters of the national campaign to set up a War Savings Association in every school. Additional holidays were awarded to the most successful schools. National campaigns, including the visit of Tanks to major towns in 1918, were used to encourage and promote the purchase of War Bonds. By and large the schools responded very positively to the campaigns.

"A War Savings Association formed." EMA1/5 Abercynon, Navigation (Board) Boys School.

"This school was closed today for a War Savings Holiday, granted by the Education Committee when the number of War Savings equals the average number of children on the books for the current year – 121 for this school." EMA3/1 Abercynon Abertaf Infants.

"Tank day at Abercynon. Visit of "Julian Junior". The children were taken down to see the Tank at 10.15 am and then brought back to school immediately after the inspection." EMA4/2 Carnetown Mixed.

"The War Savings Association among the children maintains its popularity. An average amount of £4 being secured weekly since its inauguration in February." EMA 9/1 Darren Las Mixed School.

"83 War Savings Certificates were handed to the owners this morning. Up to the present 201 have been purchased altogether." EMA24/1/2 Ynysybwl Mixed.

"School is closed today, a War Savings holiday having been granted by the Education Committee." EMA2/1 Abercynon, Navigation (Board) Infants School.

<u>Life in school.</u> Many teachers volunteered or, later in the war, were called up for military service and often at very short notice. Boys were taught largely by male teachers and, therefore, boys' schools were particularly hard hit.

"Mr Handel Davies completed his duties at 4.30 yesterday afternoon. He has enlisted in the Army and will serve there until the war ends. His position as class teacher is being kept open for him until his return." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"Received a letter from Mr Masters notifying me that he had already proceeded to Winchester to join the 130 Field Ambulance, RAMC." EMA19/1 Pengeulan Mixed.

"Mr Henry Thomas did not present himself this morning. He has joined the Army." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"Mr Lamburn who joined the Army Service Corps some time back has been sent to Aldershot this morning." EMA5/1 Caegarw Boys.

"Mr R Emrys Davies completed his duties today. He had joined the army as a Despatch Rider." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"Mr D D Davies absent today – joined the colours." EMA4/2 Carnetown Mixed.

"E J Griffiths away at Military Camp, Haverfordwest." EMA1/5 Abercynon, Navigation (Board) Boys School.

"Mr Ben Thomas joined the RAMC on Saturday last. His last day at school (for this year) therefore was Friday last the 27th." EMA5/1 Caegarw Boys.

"The work of the school has been carried on under difficulties during the last three days – three of the certified teachers having left – 2 to join the Army and 1 gone to the Mt Ash County School." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

As the war progressed those identified initially as medically unfit or as holding reserved occupations were frequently reassessed and passed fit for active service. The number of teachers called to appear before local Military Medical Boards and Tribunals from 1916 onwards was a clear indication of the pressure to find more manpower for the armed forces.

"Mr Isaac Richards completed his duties today. He has been recalled to the Army, having been placed in Category B1 by the Medical Board at the last exam. He has to report to Margate Monday morning next." EMA 21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"Mr Frank Richardson terminated duties today having been put in Class A for Army purposes and called up for Service." EMA 10/5 Dyffryn Boys School.

"Mr R G Williams absent today. He has to attend at Cardiff to undergo examination by the Army Medical board. (Placed in Class C1 – service at home only in garrison or provisional units)." EMA18/4 Newton Mixed.

"R S Hughes called up for military service." EMA1/5 Abercynon, Navigation (Board) Boys School.

"Mr Aneurin Roberts TC ceased duties here as the end of the afternoon session. Reported himself under the Military Service Act." EMA4/2 Carnetown Mixed.

"Mr N G Jones absent in the morning – appearing before the Military Medical Board – permission granted." EMA4/2 Carnetown Mixed.

"Mr T Williams was re-examined by the Army Medical Board today. He was again classed C3 – suitable for the duties of a store keeper." EMA9/1 Darren Las Mixed School.

"Mr W J Davies resumed duties today owing to effects of wounds, he has been placed in a low Medical Category and this enabled to take up civilian employment. "EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

Teachers were also expected to "do their bit" to support the war effort for example through helping with enlistment and work in local hospitals

"Miss Fantham absent from school – having been sent by the Director to the Drill Hall to assist in the registration of men of military age." EMA19/1 Pengeulan Mixed.

"Miss Edwards and Miss Harrison were absent this afternoon, with permission of the manager, to interview the Matron of King Edward VII Hospital in Cardiff re volunteer work as nurses during the war." EMA3/1 Abercynon Abertaf Infants.

"Mr Evan Rosser will be absent this week. He has received instructions from Director of Education to attend to Registration work at the Town hall." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"Miss Edwards ceased duties here today to take up duties as a nurse in connection with the war." EMA3/1 Abercynon Abertaf Infants.

<u>Women and the war</u>. Although seen as a temporary measure, women were increasingly employed in boys' schools to fill the gaps left by recruitment to the armed forces. In addition, given the shortage of teachers across all sectors, dispensation was given for married women to continue to teach for the duration of the war.

"With the permission of Manager, Miss M A Davies will be absent for a few days. Her fiancé serving in the Royal Navy came home rather unexpectedly this morning and they are getting married by licence. Miss Davies is applying for permission to continue in the service of the Education Committee."

EMA13/4 Miskin

"Miss Polly Jenkins (TC) commenced duties today in place of Mr Lewis who has been called up for military service." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"Miss Margaret Richards commenced duties this afternoon – transferred from the Girls' Dept." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

<u>Schools and coping with shortages</u>. As head teachers recorded, by 1918, food shortages impacted very directly on school attendance. In addition there was intense

pressure to release children from school before the leaving age of 14 to compensate for the shortage of labour. Although rationing was not introduced until 1918, schools along with the general population experienced shortages of fuel and food. Schools were expected to "economise" and to help pupils and families find ways and means of coping with food shortages. Schools often used their land to create or expand gardens that could be used to produce food. In addition, in 1918 teachers volunteered to help set up the local arrangements for the introduction of food rationing.

"Children and Orphans of Soldiers and Sailors. Careful enquiries to be made of all the children and orphans of soldiers and sailors as to whether they are sufficiently and properly fed at their homes and report of inquiries to be sent to Mr Morgan, Director, by Wednesday next." EMA1/5 Abercynon, Navigation (Board) Boys School.

"Two boys have been fed this week owing to the wage earners being at the Front." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"School was closed at 4.30 this afternoon for the week. Thursday and Friday are to be devoted by the Teachers to distributing and filling the forms needed for the new scheme of rationing the people." (Feb 1918). EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"School was closed today owing to the distribution of Meat Cards by the staff." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"During this week the ground behind the school has been planted with potatoes by the boys in the Sixth Standard during their spare time." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

Keeping up morale. The War led to the production of the first Government sponsored propaganda films. Schools in the Mountain Ash area did not follow the trend in Merthyr and Cardiff of taking children to see the films. However, they were expected to use the opportunities provided by Empire Day and St David's Day to promote patriotism. In addition, a string of national campaigns were used to promote the Allied cause. A small number of schools 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.

"A suitable lesson is to be given to the scholars on Friday afternoon next ... on "France and the noble part she is taking in the tremendous conflict now being waged." EMA1/5 Abercynon, Navigation (Board) Boys School.

"The Education Committee have given permission for lectures to be given to the school children by a representative of the Navy League." EMA 1/5 Abercynon, Navigation (Board) Boys School.

"Empire day ... Address. Our Empire. Its history and how to make it a great Empire." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"France's National Day was celebrated this afternoon in honour of "Our French Ally" in the Great war." EMA3/1 Abercynon Abertaf Infants.

"Gwyl Dewi Sant... 10-10.40 Lesson on patriotism each teacher taking his own class." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"Tableaux of Allies - accompanied by singing of the National Anthems." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

News from the Front. News from the front was provided by national and local newspapers. The newspapers provided extensive coverage of the military campaigns. This information would have been supplemented by the frequent visits of former teachers and pupils to their schools when home on leave and by soldiers from local military hospitals.

"A visit was paid to the school this morning by Sergeant Robert Bye VC (an old pupil of the school) He was accompanied by Councillor Hall – the School Manager. He was given a very fine reception." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"A Belgium refugee from Antwerp accompanies the SMO. The children were greatly interested and expressed a desire to sing the Belgium National Anthem. Permission was granted and they also sang the Russian, Welsh and English National Anthems. Our visitor thanked the children to best of his ability in English." EMA4/2 Carnetown Mixed.

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

"Mr W D Rogers was absent today, news having been received that Lieutenant Trevor Rogers his brother who was on the staff of this school had been killed in action in France." EMA24/1/2 Ynysybwl Mixed.

"Mr Edward Jones TC received permission to take today, in order to visit his brother – in hospital at Aldershot having been gassed in France." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"Miss Warren and Miss Blomeley absent this morning. Miss Blomeley having received news of her brother's death in action." EMA2/1 Abercynon Navigation (Board) Infants School.

"The Head Teacher was absent today with the Manager's permission visiting her husband, who is leaving this country for France." EMA3/1 Abercynon Abertaf Infants.

"Mrs E G Davies is away today – having received news that her husband has been wounded in France." EMA10/5 Dyffryn Boys School.

"Mrs Thomas was granted a fortnight's leave of absence, her husband being "home on leave" from France." EMA3/1 Abercynon Abertaf Infants.

"Miss G Price away through the death in action of her brother." EMA13/4 Miskin.

"Mrs Howells has been absent since Tuesday last and is still away now owing to the death of her brother Lieut S Howells." EMA16/1 York Street, Mixed School, Mountain Ash.

"Mr W J Davies absent this morning. His brother returned home last night after being a prisoner of war in Germany for two years." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

<u>War Heroes</u>. The log books often contain a considerable list of local war heroes although the level of detail provided is variable. Many schools set up a Roll of Honour to record the names of staff and former pupils who fought in the War.

"A holiday was granted this afternoon for the reception given to Sergeant Bye (an old school boy) who has been awarded the Victoria Cross for gallantry on the field of battle." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"Mr Brychan Thomas who joined the Army on March 10th last is reported to have been killed in France on Oct 16th while doing outpost duty. He was a thoroughly earnest, painstaking and intelligent teacher, upright and conscientious. His loss will be keenly felt in this school. The school flag has been hoisted to half mast." EMA5/1 Caegarw Boys.

"Informed that Mr Tom Masters TC Assistant at this school was killed in action in France on the 24th April last." EMA19/1 Pengeulan Mixed.

<u>Celebrating the End of the War.</u> The news of the signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918 spread quickly in the towns but often took some time to be

confirmed in rural schools. Unusually there is very little comment on the Armistice in the Log Books for this area. It is, therefore, likely that most schools were closed at the time due to the influenza epidemic that was sweeping the country. By the early months of 1919 many teachers were being discharged from the armed forces and returning to school life. However, the celebration of the ending of the War and many of the war time provisions including the War Savings Associations in schools continued into 1919 and beyond.

"The Registers were not marked on the 28th inst as we had received notice to keep the school closed owing to a severe epidemic of Spanish Influenza and Pneumonia." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys. (28 Oct 1918). The school did not reopen until 18 November.

"Mr W M Rees resumed duties after having been in the Army. He substitutes Miss Myfanwy James (U) who commenced duties today at Pengeulen School." EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys. (December 1918)

"War Savings Pictures were given out for the first time today (Jan 1919). EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.

"The school was closed today - Peace Celebrations. The children were regaled with tea, then sports followed." (July 1919) EMA21/4 Penrhiwceiber Boys.