

**Cymdeithas Hanesyddol Tyddewi a Phebidiog
St Davids and Dewisland Historical Society**

Women in Pembrokeshire in World War I

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The Great War had a dramatic and long-lasting impact on the population of Pembrokeshire - not just 722 thousand deaths in the war zones of the Western Front, the Middle East and the Ottoman Empire but also on the Home Front. Pembrokeshire - with its miles of coastline - became a vast military establishment, facing the threat of invasion (after all the French had invaded Wales!) with U-boats in St George's Channel and wreckage from ships sunk in the Atlantic washed.

In 1914 with the '*Defence of the Realm Act*' the State became all-powerful and 'Total War' required 'Total Control' over everything ... food production could supply 145 days a year - relying on USA, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand amongst others Rationing had to be introduced for sugar, beef and butter - even clothing (with imported materials and the need for materials for uniforms). With shortages prices escalated - in Fishguard bakers doubled the price of bread overnight, pre-War eggs were 6 for 2d but shot to 4 for 6d, butter at 9d per lb rose to 1s 9d per lb ... margarine was sold to replace butter and clogs replaced shoes. This led to profiteering and women rebelled - fisher-women blockaded Haverfordwest Market Hall. To administer the issue of 90 thousand ration books female teachers were seconded by the Ministry of Food. The Council became responsible for controlling retail and could prosecute shopkeepers for over-charging and hoarding.



With all the military camps women were needed for feeding, nursing, providing uniforms, weapons, munitions and all aspects of supporting the fighting. Pre-War traditional roles of women's 'Domestic Duties' transformed in to the Voluntary Aid Detachment - staffing the hospitals at Neyland, Haverfordwest and Angle. 10 thousand military men were based in Pembrokeshire Dock alone in 1914. There was felt to be a threat of 'Khaki Fever' - the impact of large numbers of military men on the female population ... implying the growth in number of brothels! Women even joined the forces serving overseas and even signed-up to join the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps from 1917 and, as 'soldiers' took on the men's roles in administration - freeing up men to fight overseas.

Women were responsible for 13 thousand new charities and provided funding for activities supporting the war effort ... including knitting mittens and socks or supplying hospitals as well as providing funding for the 'machinery-of-war'. Practical roles included, with the loss of the agricultural labourers (made worse by the government's demand for an extra 30 thousand acres to be brought into agricultural production), the growth of the Women's Land Army ... including khaki uniform and trousers (unheard of pre-War!)

Women replaced the male workforce in manufacturing including munitions. The 'Right to Serve' in 1915 allowed women to take over former male roles as 55 thousand men per month were needed to for the military. The military of Pembroke Dock by 1917 had women working in ALL areas of labouring - even blacksmithing and all aspects of heavy industry.

In education 3 thousand of the nation's teachers signed up during the conflict - leaving schools staffed by women and men too old for active service. Even staff who had retired years before 1914 were persuaded to return to the classroom

Women were moving into all aspects of previously male roles releasing men to join the armed forces in the fight overseas. This insertion of women into mens jobs created problems when 3 million men returned after the end of the war, expecting to return to their pre-War jobs but positives of the War, as 'fortresses of prejudice' crumbled, were:

- The high mortality rates meant the government paid more attention to infant mortality rates and public health.
- Demands for women to get the vote had to be taken more seriously and women (30+) were actually granted the right to vote once it was based on citizenship rather than land ownership.

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