

# Quakers in Wales and the First World War

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## Abstract

The commemoration of the First World War has provided an opportunity for Friends to re-examine and re-evaluate their contribution during that conflict, with particular attention to their witness for peace and the challenges it faced. This article focuses on what happened amongst the small number of Quaker men in Wales, looking at both the enlisted and the conscientious objectors.

## Keywords

absolutists, conscience, conscription, enlistment, FAU, Hardshaw West Monthly Meeting, Hereford and Mid-Wales Monthly Meeting, military tribunal, militia, nonconformists, patriotism, Hercules Phillips, South Wales Monthly Meeting, Wales, Western Quarterly Meeting.

The First World War was a watershed in modern Welsh history, the ‘deepest cleft in the history of the Welsh nation’.<sup>1</sup> It was certainly instrumental in accelerating the process of estrangement from chapel and church, a process that had begun before the war. Dewi Eirug Davies’ definitive study of the way Welsh nonconformity reacted to the war is unequivocal that, throughout the war, the Welsh denominations did not waver in their conviction on the righteousness of Britain’s actions, even though, before hostilities, they had consistently declared war to be a barbarous mechanism.<sup>2</sup> The honour of the country had to be upheld and Britain could not have acted otherwise. War was unavoidable and it was argued there was a need ‘to put to an end that warlike spirit which made permanent peace

1 Quoted in Gaffney A., *Aftermath: remembering the Great War in Wales*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1998, p. 9.

2 Davies, D. E., *Byddin y Brenin: Cymru a’i Chrefydd yn y Rhyfel Mawr*, Abertawe, Ty John Penry, 1988, p. 153.

impossible'<sup>3</sup> and that 'the abandonment of the peace policy was truly remarkable'.<sup>4</sup> The influence and rhetoric of David Lloyd George, 'the greatest Bible-thumping pagan of his generation',<sup>5</sup> given his standing in the politics and life of Wales, was undoubtedly crucial to the way the churches reacted.<sup>6</sup> They could put aside their scruples and seriously support the war without jingoistic airs, although the plight of Belgium, another small nation, was to be a powerful image providing rationale for vocal apology from the pulpit defending that which was unjust with righteous indignation.<sup>7</sup> The words of one young volunteer to the ranks in 1914, Tom Nefyn Williams (who fleetingly in 1928, as a Presbyterian minister, shook orthodox nonconformity to its core), are apposite: 'the crusade was to save that small country Belgium from the grasp of Prussian militarism and to ensure to the whole world a democratic and war free future.'<sup>8</sup> That sentiment most people in Wales would have recognised, that there was a need to win the conflict and that this 'should be the priority of all righteous people'.<sup>9</sup> Thus the minister could use the pulpit for recruitment, and the role of such leading ministers as the Presbyterian, the Rev. Dr John Williams, Brynsiencyn, in his khaki uniform as honorary Colonel, became an iconic figure in the Welsh imagination that lingered long.<sup>10</sup>

Despite this unified support for the war, the introduction of conscription in 1916 was a challenge to the denominations, a crucial factor that further undermined the 'nonconformist conscience' as a force in British politics.<sup>11</sup> It was a catalyst that reshaped attitudes to the war and an uncomfortable issue for the churches, such that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1916 could declare that conscription was unacceptable. The resolution was presented by the Rev. Williams, Brynsiencyn, who would declare that the church 'adhered to their principles, with a view to peace and the true rights of conscience'.<sup>12</sup> This did not affect the churches' support for the government and their trust in its leadership,

3 Davies, *Byddin y Brenin*, p. 51: 'rhoi trefyn ar yr ysbryd rhyfelgar a oedd yn gwneuthur heddwch parhaol yn amhosibl'.

4 Pope, R., 'Christ and Caesar?: Welsh nonconformists and the state', in Cragoe, M., and Williams, C., (eds), *Wales and War: society, politics and religion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2007, p. 171.

5 Quoted by Pope, 'Christ and Caesar?', p. 151.

6 See, for example, Morgan, K. O., *Rebirth of a Nation: a history of modern Wales*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 159–62.

7 See Morgan, D. D., *Span of the Cross: Christian religion and society in Wales 1914–2000*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1999, pp. 41–46.

8 Williams, T. N., *Yr Ymchwil*, Dinbych: Gwasg Gee, 1949, p. 26.

9 Pope, R., *Building Jerusalem: nonconformity, labour and the social question in Wales, 1906–1939*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1998, p. 165.

10 I can well remember the negative comments about his stance as a child and teenager in the 1950s and 1960s.

11 Pope, 'Christ and Caesar?', p. 177.

12 Quoted by Morgan, D., 'Y Ffydd yng Nghymru yn yr Ugeinfed Ganrif: profiadau 1900–1920', in Griffith, W. P., (ed.), *Ysgrifau ar Hanes Crefydd yng Nghymru*, Bangor, Canolfan Uwch-Efrydiau Crefydd yng Nghymru, 1999, p. 202.

and they continued 'to yield in prayer and supplication before the Lord, asking God to hasten the day of victory, and the dawn of peace to the whole world'.<sup>13</sup> Conscriptio further galvanised the small number of active Christian pacifists in Wales, many of whom were to suffer opprobrium and persecution, such as the Rev. Thomas Rees, the Principal of the Congregational College at Bangor, or the poet minister and socialist, the Rev. T. E. Nicholas (Niclas y Glais), who found himself persecuted and harassed by the Chief Constable of Glamorganshire, who urged repression of pacifism during the war.<sup>14</sup>

If the Welsh denominations in their pronouncements supported the war effort, the same could not be said of London Yearly Meeting (LYM). It maintained its traditional stance in opposing *all* wars whilst demonstrating loyalty to both King and country, and avoiding internal ruptures, even though many leading Quakers, particularly in 1914, gave public and vocal support to the war. One such was Joseph Pease, who resigned as President of the Peace Society, declaring that Britain's cause was a just struggle, 'against the spirit of aggressive domination'.<sup>15</sup> The comment that many Quakers, young and old, were confused and demoralised as to how they should respond to the war was no exaggeration.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, as a body, the Yearly Meeting could adhere to its traditional conviction about war and peace and trust that its members would respond appropriately to the demands made upon them. What then of Quakers in Wales?

Quakers in Wales, at any point in their history, were never numerous. Once a substantial number of them had emigrated to America, those who remained were insufficient to replenish their meetings so the denomination was never a dynamic force in Welsh life. They were to rely on Quakers from England for much of their sustenance and vigour, and, at a time when the majority of the Welsh were monoglot, the language of the Yearly Meeting, and of their evangelising, was English. When the Methodist revival swept through Wales this further marginalised Friends. Thus, when nonconformity was allied to an awakening of Welsh national consciousness, the Quakers had very little, if anything, to contribute. By 1862 there were perhaps 111 Quakers in eight meetings across Wales—it is difficult to be precise—and by 1916 the figure was around 158 and in the same number of meetings; membership had peaked in 1897 at around 313.

The following report in the *Llanelli Star* in December 1914 might have caused disquiet and discomfort amongst some of the 300 who attended the Quaker

13 Morgan, 'Y Ffydd yng Nghymru', p. 51: 'ymostwng mewn gweddi ac ympryd gerbron yr Arglwydd, a gofyn i Dduw brysuero dydd y fuddugoliaeth, a gwawr heddych i'r holl fyd'.

14 See Hopkin, D., 'Patriots and Pacifists in Wales, 1914–18: the case of Capt. Lionel Lindsay and the Rev. T. E. Nicholas', *Llafur* 1 (May 1974), pp. 27–41.

15 Quoted by Paul Laity, *The British Peace Movement 1870–1914*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2001, p. 227.

16 Kennedy, T. C., *British Quakerism 1860–1920: the transformation of a religious community*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 314.

meetings in Wales at that time, and especially within Western Quarterly Meeting, which covered most of Wales:

Probably the most notable recruiting speech delivered in South Wales during the past week was one by Mr F. W. Gibbins, a leading member of the Society of Friends in Glamorgan. Although the doctrine of the Quakers, said Mr Gibbins, repudiated war and standing armies, he could not in regard to this great struggle with Germany subscribe to this doctrine. The issues to civilisation were so vital that he surrendered that Quaker doctrine and stood a convinced supporter of England's part in the war.<sup>17</sup>

Gibbins' views seem not to have been the subject of discussion amongst members of his Monthly Meeting, with no criticism by that body. Ambivalence within the Yearly Meeting about the war could also be detected. Gibbins was probably the most prominent Quaker in Wales at that time. He had served the Society in a number of capacities, and was held in high public regard: Justice of the Peace, Poor Law Guardian, a former Member of Parliament (he had served briefly as a Liberal for seven months in 1910, following a by-election, the only Quaker in Wales ever to achieve this distinction), and in 1908 was High Sheriff of Glamorganshire.<sup>18</sup> A leading industrialist, at the time of his speech he was Chairman of the Tinplate Industry Conciliation Board. By 1916, he was Chairman of the West Glamorgan Military Appeals Tribunal, which heard appeals from those not wishing to serve in the armed forces. He would not be the only Quaker to serve on these tribunals. Gibbins' Quakerism must have moulded part of his attitude as a tribunal member as evidenced at the West Glamorgan Appeal Tribunal in April 1916, when, in the case of a prominent member of the Independent Labour Party's (ILP) claim for absolute exemption, he was quoted as saying, 'I honour your views, as you take the consequences, but we have no alternative. It is not a pleasant task to judge other people's consciences, but we must carry out the law.'<sup>19</sup>

Any ambivalence about the war amongst Friends arose from their need to demonstrate their patriotism and loyalty whilst maintaining adherence to their traditional peace testimony. Thus one Friend from Wrexham, in membership through Chester Meeting, along with three others, wrote protesting against the challenge by the Friends Service Committee to the censorship regulations in 1918, noting that Friends 'stood for truth and liberty, not for license of liberty'.<sup>20</sup> This was dismissed by the Assistant Clerk of Chester Preparative Meeting, who, writing in reply, supported the decision of Meeting for Sufferings,<sup>21</sup> noting, with

17 *Llanelli Star* (12 December 1914).

18 See <http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/s-GIBB-WIL-1861.html>, accessed 20/02/2016.

19 *The Friend (TF)* (14 April 1916), p. 103.

20 *TF* (11 January 1918), p. 31.

21 The standing representative committee entrusted with the general care of matters affecting the Society between Yearly Meetings, referred after this as Sufferings.

wonderful understatement, that three of the four signatories, 'are so placed that they can never attend either meeting for worship or discipline, and can therefore hardly be expected to appreciate the difficulties that beset those Friends who are now in active work in our Society'.<sup>22</sup>

Some Quaker voices were perhaps even more strident in their attitude. Marriage Wallis, a weighty Yearly Meeting Friend, and Justice of the Peace, resident at Reading, could pronounce:

the peace which broods over these islands... is not attributable to Friends' Principles, but to a fleet which we have systematically cried down [and paid our taxes to perfect]... It is not the preparedness of the allies, but their want of preparation which has led to this catastrophe. For the duty laid upon us, and upon Europe, at this juncture, is not to convince the German mind of Friends Principles, but to keep the German body out of Paris, Antwerp and London.<sup>23</sup>

Wallis and Gibbins represented what David Rubinstein has described as those Quakers who were well integrated into British political and business power structures—a scenario that is not so true today—and holding considerable influence within the Yearly Meeting.<sup>24</sup> Many Quakers then saw themselves 'not simply as being integrated into British public life, but integral to its further development',<sup>25</sup> and hugely supportive of the establishment and its then imperial ambitions, an aspect that remains buried in the Quaker psyche.

At a recruitment meeting held in Dukestown, Tredegar in August 1914, the then MP for Breconshire, Sidney Robinson, quoted Friends as supporting the need to pursue the war. The newspaper reported the MP reading to his audience from what was described as the 'Quaker Message'. This was the statement issued by Sufferings on 7 August 1914, following the declaration of war, and which had been widely distributed:

We recognise that our Government has made most strenuous efforts to preserve peace, and has entered into the war under a grave sense of duty to a smaller State, towards which we had moral and treaty obligations. While, as a society, we stand firmly to the belief that the method of force is no solution of any question, we hold that the present moment is not one for criticism, but for devoted service to our nation.<sup>26</sup>

According to the report, the quotation drew applause from the audience, Robinson adding, 'That, coming from the source it did, fully justified him... in urging them to do all they could... to secure adequate forces for the protection

22 *TF* (25 January 1918), p. 67.

23 *TF* (2 October 1914), p. 735.

24 Rubinstein, D., *York Friends and the Great War*, Borthwick Paper no. 96, York, University of York, 1999, p. 1.

25 Phillips, B. D., 'Friendly Patriotism: British Quakerism and the imperial nation, 1890–1910', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1989, p. 32.

26 *TF* (14 August 1914), p. 599.

of our country and Empire.<sup>27</sup> Not the usage that Quakers would have hoped for or expected.

What is significant about both these newspaper reports is that they reflected what their readers would have been familiar with, namely, the Quaker position and commitment to the way of peace and their traditional abhorrence of war. A survey of articles in the Welsh press during the war confirms this general understanding, and that Quakers, sincere in their witness, were seen to stand apart from the other denominations. This was certainly true of the denominational press. The Presbyterian, *Y Goleuad*, (a publication that was to demonstrate a pro-war attitude), in relation to the August message, would say of it that these were 'brave words, worthy words from a body of people who have ever stoically stood for peace'.<sup>28</sup> The same author had the same article in the Wesleyan, *Gwyllyddydd Newydd* the following week.<sup>29</sup> In 1915, *Seren Cymru*, a Baptist publication, even had prolonged correspondence, arising from a letter which supported the Quaker position as a result of the statement issued by the Yearly Meeting that year, which evolved into a discussion between two Baptist ministers on the nature of authority.

Not everyone, however, saw the Quaker position as something admirable, and no doubt many would have agreed with the sentiments of an article that appeared in July 1917 in the *Udgorn*—a short-lived Pwllheli-based weekly publication—that many 'slackers' rushed to become Quakers, because it provided shelter, 'In some ways it is appropriate to call the "slacker" quaker. An attempt is made by one class of Christians to make Christianity a sanctuary for slackers.'<sup>30</sup> The *Carmarthen Weekly Reporter* reported that close upon 'thirty influential members of the Society' (it was in fact 26) had written to the *The Times*, dissociating themselves from the decision of the Yearly Meeting to endorse the action of the Friends Service Committee in challenging the censorship laws, as a result of which the committee's Clerk and Assistant Clerk had been imprisoned.<sup>31</sup> The 'dissentient Quakers', as they were labelled, had written: 'As loyal and law-abiding citizens we recognise that in the circumstances in which our country is now placed some limitation of our civil liberties is inevitable, and should be loyally acquiesced in by all sections of the community';<sup>32</sup> a sentiment with which the readers of the *Reporter* would probably have agreed.

The viewpoint of Quakers to war had been tested particularly by the advent of the second South African War. Whilst many in the Yearly Meeting testified against it, there was a significant minority, largely those who had become Liberal

27 *Brecon and Radnor Express* (15 October 1914).

28 *Y Goleuad* (14 August 1914): 'Geiriau dewr, a geiriau teilwng o gorff o bobl sydd wedi sefyll yn ddigryn dros heddwch erioed'.

29 *Y Gwyllyddydd Newydd* (25 August 1914).

30 *Udgorn* (19 July 1917): 'Mewn rhyw ffordd priodol fydd galw y "llaciwr" yn "grynwr". Gwneir ymgais gan ddsbarth o Cristnogion i wneud Cristnogaeth yn noddfa i "slacwyr".'

31 *Carmarthen Weekly Reporter* (7 June 1918).

32 *The Times* (4 June 1918).

Unionists, who were supportive of it. Amongst Welsh Quakers, one of these was Henry Tobit Evans, editor of the *Carmarthen Journal*, who proved to be a prominent apologist for the war and its imperial justification. As John Wilhelm Rowntree was to comment, 'The Society of Friends has been lamentably weak upon this wretched war. I have been appalled at the falling away among younger people especially. I feel that one lesson from the war for us as a Church is the need for proper instruction of our *own* people.'<sup>33</sup> Thus, when the First World War broke out, attitudes within the Yearly Meeting to voluntary enlistment in the armed forces had already been softened.

In Wales, opposition to the second Boer War was well documented although confined to a vocal minority, with the nonconformist and predominantly rural Welsh speaking areas most hostile. The unwavering and vocal opposition of David Lloyd George was also well known and influential, although he did face considerable hostility in Bangor, which was part of his constituency.<sup>34</sup> The opposition in Wales to the South African war was not entirely lost on Friends. In 1901, the Yearly Meeting Peace Committee distributed 190,000 copies of a leaflet entitled 'Christianity and War', which had been approved by the Yearly Meeting the previous year, and arranged for 5,000 copies to be printed in Welsh. At a peace conference on the war held in Cardiff, in January 1901, Frederick Joseph Gibbins of Neath Meeting, Frederick William's father, seconded a resolution to promote the ideals of peace in Wales, in the course of which he read from the minute of protest agreed by Sufferings in December 1900, 'which was very cordially received by the conference'.<sup>35</sup>

What developed from the debate in Wales over the Boer War was that 'Welshness' acquired a greater pacifist construction which the onset of the First World War challenged. Neither can Welsh links to the Peace Society be overlooked. Founded in London, in 1816, Joseph Tregelles Price, the Neath Quaker, was one of its principal architects. Despite this Welsh connection, the Peace Society never took deep roots in Wales, even though its first four secretaries were Welsh.<sup>36</sup> Two were Quakers, namely, Evan Rees (again from Neath), and William Jones, originally from Ruthin. The other two were Congregational ministers: Henry Richard, MP for Merthyr Tydfil from 1868 to 1888, was born in Tregaron, Ceredigion and the Rev. W. Evans Darby was born in Laugharne, Carmarthenshire and brought up in Tenby, Pembrokeshire.<sup>37</sup> The status, importance and influence of Henry

33 Quoted in Hewison, H. H., *Hedge of Wild Almonds: South Africa, the 'pro-Boers' and the Quaker conscience*, London: James Currey, 1989, p. 132.

34 Jones, J. G., *Lloyd George and Welsh Liberalism*, Aberystwyth, Welsh Political Archive National Library of Wales, p. 55.

35 *TF* (11 January 1901), p. 28.

36 Lewis, T. H., 'Y Mudiad Heddwch yng Nghymru, 1800–1899', in *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1957 Session), pp. 87–127. See also Owen, R., 'Cymru a'r Mudiad Heddwch, 1814–1824', *Y Genninen* 43 (1925), pp. 201–10.

37 See Jones, G. J., *Wales and the Quest for Peace*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1969.

Richard on Welsh life must not be underestimated. His speeches and efforts on behalf of nonconformity made him a formidable figure in Welsh national life, and his secretaryship of the Society from 1850 to 1885 must have permeated the thinking of many in Wales who took an interest in his activities. Perhaps this pacific attitude was one reason why, in 1913, Welshmen made up only 1.8 per cent of the regular army<sup>38</sup> and why, overall, the percentage of Welsh men who served during the First World War was lower than for Scotland and England—23.7 per cent and 24 per cent respectively. For Wales it was 21.5 per cent. (These figures are based on statistics issued by the government in 1922.)<sup>39</sup> When, in 1934–35, the Union of the League of Nations organised a national Peace Vote encouraging disarmament, 34 per cent in Scotland and 37 per cent in England favoured the motion but in and Wales it was 62 per cent.<sup>40</sup> The efforts of Richards and others had left its mark.

The first official pronouncement from LYM on the 1914–18 war came with the message prepared by Sufferings already referred to. This meeting was touched by the ministry of Henry T. Hodgkin and Joseph Allen Baker, two of the Quaker delegates at the Peace Convention of Christian Churches, held at Constance, which had been cut short by the declaration of war. A draft message for the consideration of the meeting, highlighting the duty of Friends and Christians, had been prepared. Joan M. Fry, another of the delegates at Constance, who in the late 1920s was to be an important influence on Quaker work in the Welsh valleys during the depression, supported the suggestions in the message. The meeting agreed to issue a message and a small committee was directed to retire to consider suggested amendments and arrange for immediate publication. The message appeared in nine newspapers. Its tone was reflective of the challenge Sufferings faced, being openly patriotic at a time of turmoil whilst reminding the world that Quakers stood for peace. Some 350,000 copies were printed and distributed, at a total cost of £625, with translations into Italian, Dutch and German. In response, the Yearly Meeting received almost 7,000 letters.<sup>41</sup> The message, as noted, gave succour to those supporting the war, and *The Friend* would not publish letters it received in relation to it. Several had been received, some critical, but the editor decided not to publish, determining that ‘little or nothing profitable is to gained by so doing’, explaining ‘that it is not entirely suitable or convenient that we should open the columns of *The Friend* to a political controversy’. He was undoubtedly reflecting some of the unease surrounding events and the need to demonstrate loyalty and patriotism, noting that: ‘It seems clear that up to a certain point the

38 Barlow, R., ‘Did Wales Go Willingly to the First World War?’, in Bowen, H. V., (ed.), *A New History of Wales: myths and realities in Welsh history*, Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2011, p. 152.

39 Eurig, A., ‘Agweddau ar y gwrthwynebiad i’r Rhyfel Cyntaf’, *Llafur* 4 (1986), p. 58.

40 Jones, *Wales and the Quest for Peace*, p. 140.

41 *TF* (4 September 1914), p. 666. In January 1915, the journal reported that 425,000 copies of the message had been distributed in two months.



British government—admittedly one of the most pacific governments that has ever ruled in England—sought peace and ensued it, strenuously and consistently.<sup>42</sup>

With the outbreak of hostilities Sufferings agreed to establish a War Victims Relief Committee to assist civilians affected by the war. One of its assistant secretaries was to be T. Alwyn Lloyd, Liverpool-born to Welsh parents, but not a member of the Society.

One academic has distinguished between ‘pacifism’—the personal conviction that it is wrong to take part in war—and ‘pacificism’—an ethic of responsibility to prevent and oppose war.<sup>43</sup> Up to 1916, Quakers in Britain could, as an organisation, identify with the latter, but the introduction of conscription in 1916 meant that men of a certain age had to respond to a legal requirement to join the armed forces, and the Yearly Meeting had to decide how to respond. The Yearly Meeting had been vocal in their opposition to the resurrection of the ‘militia’ by the National Service League when it was founded in 1902, fearful of the implications and conscious of the militarism inherent in its proposals. As a body, they had sought the prevention of war through support of continental peace conferences and the use of their connections at the highest levels, and any prospect of universal compulsory military service undermined what had been a comfortable state for Quakers in LYM. Conscription was a matter of conscience, and the pacifism of each Quaker man became a matter for individual declaration. As for the Yearly Meeting, it had no sanction over those amongst its members who volunteered for military service other than to express its disfavour or expect the Monthly Meetings to take disciplinary action.

It was the issue of conscription that sharpened the debate within LYM about the war and focussed the argument about primacy of conscience and religious faith. The government introduced clauses to allow for conscientious objection, and Friends were vocal and active in their support. It has been estimated that between 1916 and 1918 there were, across Britain, some 16,500 applications for conscientious objection, of which 6,511 (including some 1,400 Christadelphians) were granted on grounds of conscience.<sup>44</sup> As a body, they sought and negotiated overall exemption for *all* their eligible men, a route that was not available to the Yearly Meeting, given the way authority worked within it. The Christadelphians had no objection to alternative work, except that work on munitions proved to be controversial.<sup>45</sup>

The objectors to military service fell into three categories. Those opposed to conscription and any participation in the war efforts became the ‘absolutists’,

42 *TF* (21 August 1914), p. 615.

43 Caedel, M., *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–1945: the defining of a faith*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.

44 Eurig, ‘Agweddu’, p. 59.

45 See Brady, M. M., ‘Christadelphians and Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Britain in World War One’, MA dissertation, University of Wales, Bangor, 1992. It should be noted that the Christadelphians made their claim for exemption on unique terms: not as pacifists but as ‘a separate people’.

refusing all forms of alternative service. The military tribunals could give such men absolute and unconditional exemption. There was then the group who were prepared to undertake alternative civilian work provided it was not under military control. The tribunals could exempt those who agreed to this. There were also the 'non-combatants', who were prepared to carry out uniformed military service provided it was a non-combatant role and did not involve weapons of any kind. The tribunals could direct the men to serve on that basis, and many did so through the Non-Combatant Corps (NCC) or through the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC). Some 3,400 joined the NCC and they were to be discriminated against, as their slow demobilisation compared with combatants reveals.<sup>46</sup> There were to be 5,970 courts martial, including 1,330 absolutists, 819 of whom served more than two years in prison, 73 of them dying there, none Quaker, although the health of many was undermined.<sup>47</sup> There were 142 Quaker absolutists, the largest of any of the religious denominations.<sup>48</sup> The largest group of absolutists were members of the Independent Labour Party—around 805.<sup>49</sup>

Women were not of course affected directly by conscription since they were not subject to military service, although the recruitment of women to fill posts vacated by men might have caused some disquiet as they indirectly supported the war effort by taking up employment. This was undertaken by women of all social classes (working-class women did not go out to work because of the war, 'they had to work anyway').<sup>50</sup> Women who served in the Red Cross and the Order of St John managed Voluntary Aid Detachments as an entirely voluntary commitment. There were to be over 100,000 nurses in active service over the course of the war, and a wish not to be under military authority prompted some women to join the Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU). This was established in 1914, by younger Friends, to work on ambulance convoys at the front, and thus demonstrate their loyalty when enlistment to the forces was not a choice they could make. There were to be two women with Welsh connections who joined the FAU.<sup>51</sup> The suffragette movement was to be divided on the question of war, Emily Pankhurst enthusiastically supporting the war effort and suspending agitation for the vote. Indeed, she was hostile to the pacifist movement and denounced conscientious

46 Wilkinson, A., *The Church of England and the First World War*, Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014, p. 49.

47 <http://www.ppu.org.uk/copproject/coww1a.html>, accessed 20/02/2016.

48 This is based on the breakdown in Hobhouse, Mrs H., *I Appeal Unto Caesar*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1917, p. 15 and provides an analysis by denomination only up to July 1917.

49 Eirug, 'Agweddu', p. 67. Statistics on this subject are difficult and analysis provided by the No Conscription Fellowship is illustrative. See *Troublesome People*, London: Central Board for Conscientious Objectors, 1958.

50 Bartley, P., *Votes for Women, 1860–1928*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2009, p. 113.

51 *Friends Ambulance Unit 1914–1919: list of members and addresses*, London: Chas. Straker & Sons, 1919, pp. 104–05.

objectors in South Wales to David Lloyd George when he was Minister of Munitions in 1915.<sup>52</sup>

At the outset of the war, many Quaker men volunteered and enlisted. When conscription was introduced, Sufferings agreed to establish a Wartime Statistics Committee to monitor the fate of its male membership. This did not report until 1923, reflecting the difficulty in analysing 1,666 returns which had been sent by all the monthly meetings bar seven, one of which was Hereford and Radnor Monthly Meeting. The information collected did not go beyond the close of 1917 so it could not present a true picture of what transpired amongst those eligible for service. *The Friend* was perhaps uncharitable about the report, commenting that it 'did not state how many men joined the FAU, or how many were arrested and sent to prison'. There was also a somewhat dismissive understatement from Sufferings who felt the statistics to be interesting 'as far as they went'.<sup>53</sup> Issued six years after the event, there was no longer a sense of urgency about the report. According to the analysis of the questionnaires, 560 (33.6 per cent) of the Yearly Meeting members of military age had enlisted to fight, whilst 670 (40.2 per cent) applied and were granted exemption as objectors, but the analysis did not indicate how many of these were conditional or absolute; 288 (17.3 per cent), applied for and were granted exemption on other grounds, presumably because of their restricted employment—this was conditional.<sup>54</sup>

An analysis of the Yearly Meeting questionnaire from Western Quarterly Meeting provided information on 33 men, of whom 13 were from South Wales Monthly Meeting, and included one attender. Seven enlisted (two into the RAMC, one with the Motor Transport Army Service Corps and four with the infantry). One joined the FAU. Two were absolutists (including the one attender), two were given conditional exemption on grounds of employment (one with attachment to the Voluntary Aid Detachment). Of these two, one may have had to enter the services since the return shows that his conditional exemption was withdrawn in April 1917. One was considered to be medically unfit to undertake military service. The name of Benjamin Llywelyn Elsmere from Llangennech was omitted since he had transferred his membership outside Wales. Three addresses can be identified in north Wales in the returns from Hardshaw West Monthly Meeting, which had responsibility for the area. There was only one Meeting, at Colwyn Bay, but two of the men probably worshipped at Chester. Two joined the FAU, the other was assigned to alternative service. One source relevant to the Quaker absolutists were the pages of *The Friend*, an inadequate mechanism for a proper understanding of the scale of activity, since it did not report all appearances

52 Mayhall, L. E. N., *Militant Suffrage Movement: citizenship and resistance in Britain, 1860–1930*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 122.

53 *TF* (10 November 1922), p. 782.

54 *TF* (10 November 1922), p. 782 and *Yearly Meeting Proceedings*, Friends House, London, 1923, pp. 231–32.

before the tribunals. It reported on the outcome of some tribunals and listed the whereabouts of individual objectors, essentially the absolutists.

There were to be three absolutists connected to Wales. One, an attender at Cardiff meeting, was Bernard Henry Cudbird, a Londoner by birth and a cabinet maker draughtsman by trade. He was released from his second sentence in prison in July 1919. His brother, Horace Richard, was also an absolutist who came into membership with Friends in 1939. Both were raised as Congregationalists. The second was Samuel Broomfield of Newport. (The returns from South Wales Monthly Meeting have him under the name Blomfield.) He insisted on keeping his hat on before the tribunal, indicating his allegiance to the tradition of 'plain' conservative Friends, and influenced no doubt by that prominent Newport Friend and conservative Quaker, the publisher John Edward Southall.<sup>55</sup> Broomfield was originally offered conditional exemption but refused, and by May 1918 was held in Brecon Barracks awaiting his first court martial. By June, he was in Wormwood Scrubs sentenced to six months' hard labour. The third absolutist was Harold Mostyn Watkins, originally from Llanfyllin, the brother of Sir Percy Watkins, who in 1916 was Assistant Secretary to the Welsh Insurance Commission. By 1916, Harold had joined Friends whilst working in Cardiff as a teacher. He then moved to live to Colwall, outside Malvern, teaching at the Downs School owned by Herbert Jones, former headmaster of Leighton Park School. He was to serve four terms of imprisonment, his final sentence being for 12 months. His father in law, Walter Rees, an elder at Cardiff Meeting, was to lose two sons in the war, neither of whom appears in the returns sent to the Wartime Statistics Committee. One of Watkins' autobiographies offers a detailed account of his experiences as a conscientious objector, an overlooked source amongst historians.<sup>56</sup>

None of the Welsh conscientious objectors was imprisoned at Caernarfon gaol and Friends, perhaps not surprisingly, had some difficulty in finding a Quaker chaplain for those held there, as the minutes of their Visitation of Prisoners Committee illustrates.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the efforts of the committee, across Britain, seems to have been a struggle. Support to objectors held at army camps proved problematic and their transfer by the military across the country added to the challenge of monitoring what was happening: 'There must have been over one hundred Conscientious Objectors at one time or another at Kimmel Park, Abergele. About one third of the men seem to be sent from one place to another every week.'<sup>58</sup> Visitation at Kimmel Park was a problem for the convenor of the committee, Alfred Brown, who in May 1916, noted, 'It is early days and I am doing much correspondence, and I shall get fixed up in time I expect, but such a

55 *TF* (24 March 1916), p. 188.

56 Watkins, H. M., *Life Has Kept Me Young*, London: Watts & Co., 1951.

57 Visitation of Prisoners Committee, Minute Book (11 May 1916–6 September 1919), Friends House Library, London.

58 Visitation of Prisoners Committee, Minute Book, letter (20 May 1916).

centre as Abergele will want far more help than is apparently forthcoming yet.<sup>59</sup> The small numbers of Quakers living in north Wales were not able to assist. The committee was, however, able to appoint chaplains for Shrewsbury, Monmouth and Newport. The Governor at Hereford proved obstructive to the Quaker chaplain and had to be dealt with by the War Office.<sup>60</sup>

With the introduction of conscription in October 1916, an anti-war monthly non-denominational newspaper, which was strongly nationalist and labourist, was published by leading Welsh nonconformists and academics because they had 'been driven to shame by the failure of Christianity in Europe that it did not... serve as a strong bulwark against destructive impulses'.<sup>61</sup> The paper *Y Deyrnas* (The Kingdom), had a circulation of about 3,000 and was published until November 1919. Sadly, it had no Quaker contribution during its short-lived existence. There was no reference in it to the witness of the Society, not even when officers of the Friends Service Committee were imprisoned in 1918.

Cardiff Quaker Meeting spent time on war-related issues but with some ambivalence. It decided not to subscribe to the Aliens Relief Fund in 1915, but encouraged individuals to do so, presumably because some within the Meeting had reservations about collective action.<sup>62</sup> When asked by Sufferings, three months later, to support a memorial on cessation of hostilities, Cardiff hesitated, deciding 'to take no official action in the matter at present, this meeting feeling that the time for such action had not yet arrived'.<sup>63</sup>

Western Quarterly Meeting made enquiries about who had joined the armed forces in 1915. It discovered that from Gloucester and Nailsworth Monthly Meeting, two members had enlisted; from Hereford and Radnor Monthly Meeting, three members and three attenders, and two from South Wales Monthly Meeting. Significantly, it asked that no disciplinary action be taken against these Friends and requested that a decision be 'deferred until the war is over and peace declared'.<sup>64</sup> One Cardiff Friend, the 85-year-old Isabella Metford, of Dinas Powis, was obviously not so persuaded. She wrote to *The Friend*, saying that all Quakers in uniform should be disowned, that 'the retention of military Quakers can and ought only to mean that the Society professes no principle against war; whereas I believe no comprehensive presentation of our special tenets will be without it, its importance only increasing with the lapse of time'.<sup>65</sup>

59 Visitation of Prisoners Committee, Minute Book.

60 Visitation of Prisoners Committee, Minute Book, Minute 5 (5 July 1916).

61 *Y Deyrnas* 1 (October 1916). Its editor was Prof. Thomas Rees, Principal of the Congregational College at Bangor.

62 Glamorgan Record Office (GRO), S/S SF 462/2. Cardiff Preparative Meeting (CPM), Minute 9 (M9) (21 January 1915).

63 CPM, M4 (25 April 1915).

64 Worcester Record Office, Western Quarterly Meeting Minutes (WQM), M6 (21 April 1915).

65 *TF* (19 March 1915), p. 226.

By December 1915, Cardiff Meeting was renting a room to the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and by June 1916, to the No Conscription Fellowship.<sup>66</sup> Despite this, in February 1916, at a special meeting called in response to the Military Service Act, it could not agree to the placing of an advert in the local press offering help to conscientious objectors, 'But though the proposal was favourably considered no Friend could be found able and willing to undertake the work. The matter was therefore left in abeyance.'<sup>67</sup> The meeting did, however, donate to a local fund set up in response to conscription establishing a committee to visit all objectors in prison.<sup>68</sup> In July 1916, it sent two delegates to a conference convened in Swansea by the National Council for Civil Liberties.<sup>69</sup> General relief to the dependants of conscientious objectors was fully supported. Caroline Ferris, Clerk to South Wales Monthly Meeting, represented the Quakers at a meeting which set up a local 'Macdonald Committee', so called because it was the branch of the Committee for the Relief of Dependents of Conscientious Objectors, established by the No Conscription Fellowship under the chairmanship of J. Ramsay Macdonald.<sup>70</sup> Charlotte M. Elliott, another Cardiff Quaker was to serve on this committee in November 1917.<sup>71</sup>

In Llandrindod Wells, Friends discussed how to support conscientious objectors, arranging for occasional visits to those held at a Home Office camp.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, South Wales Monthly Meeting arranged for two of their members to visit those held at Llanddeusant.<sup>73</sup> One was Richard Watkins of Swansea Meeting. His son (not a Friend) had joined the FAU in 1915. Llandrindod co-operated in arranging religious services at the meeting house for soldiers in local hospitals. A local paper reported that 'The weekly service for soldiers was held at the Friends Meeting House on Sunday morning... Owing to the snowstorm, a number of men were unable to leave their hospitals.'<sup>74</sup> The meeting also concentrated on helping Belgian refugees. One of their members, Charles M. Binyon, was presented with a handsome letter wallet because 'for over twelve months [he] has performed, the duties of honorary organiser'<sup>75</sup> of the local committee. In 1914, it had 25 refugees under its care.<sup>76</sup>

Even if Hereford and Radnor Monthly Meeting had not made returns to the Yearly Meeting Wartime Statistics Committee the activities amongst Friends in

66 CPM, M5 (16 April 1916).

67 CPM, M5 (13 February 1916).

68 CPM, M1 (14 May 1916).

69 CPM, M3 (30 July 1916).

70 The NCF was a lay pacifist organisation opposed to conscription, which drew much support from the Independent Labour Party, especially amongst its leadership.

71 CPM (18 November 1917).

72 Powys Record Office, Minutes Llandrindod Wells Preparative Meeting (LIWPM), Minute 8 (16 January 1917).

73 GRO, DSF 35/1, South Wales Monthly Meeting, Minute 11 (8 September 1917).

74 *Radnor Express (RE)* (25 April 1918).

75 *RE* (6 January 1916).

76 *TF* (13 November 1914), p. 836.

Radnorshire were carefully recorded by the Llandrindod Wells-based Hercules Davies Phillips, the Quaker Home Mission worker in the town, who was a journalist. Indeed, reading the *Radnor Express* offers interesting insight into the general activities of Quakers in the county. There are reports of meetings of the Monthly Meeting, when held locally, and in at least one instance a report of the deliberations of the Yearly Meeting for 1915.<sup>77</sup> The reports highlighted the attitude of Friends to conscription and described the work of the FAU.

Phillips was in many ways an apologist, if not a propagandist, for Friends, although reports of the activities of other denominations were also common in the newspaper. Phillips, despite his pacifism, or possibly because he saw beyond it, was to be made an honorary member of the local branch of the British Legion. In February 1918, he had been active in supporting a temporary roll of honour to the local men who had fallen in the war.<sup>78</sup> To be enrolled as a member of the Legion was a considerable feat in a town which had shown hostility to other pacifists. When, in September 1917, a three-day meeting was arranged in the town by the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Wales, a public meeting at the Baptist Church was abandoned because of public protest.<sup>79</sup> Despite this, the meeting house was then used for further sessions with no disturbance. Phillips' role in making the arrangements for the conference was acknowledged, but this did not draw ire from the local 'patriots' or make him a victim of abuse.

Phillips' peace advocacy in Radnorshire had been consistent. On 27 January 1916, the *Radnor Express* reported on what must have been a partly 'apologetic' as well as an explanatory speech by him at the Friends meeting house entitled, 'Quaker Soldiers: What they are Doing'.<sup>80</sup> In his address he thanked the Prime Minister for having ensured that the new legislation on conscription contained exemption clauses for conscientious objectors on grounds of religion. He went on to explain that amongst the twenty thousand Quakers in Britain, with its 2,000 men of military age, over 300 had already joined, 'many in the RAMC', and that the Society had not set out to judge them for this. From those associated with the Llandrindod Meeting twenty had already volunteered. To ensure that conscientious objection was understood and not an easy option, he highlighted the fact that there were 500 Friends in the FAU, three of whom had been killed. In addition, the Society was actively engaged in relief work in France and Serbia, having raised over £100,000 in twelve months for such work.

In November 1916, and under the same banner headline, another article by him gave further details and names of members and those associated with Llandrindod Meeting, past or present, who were serving their country, noting the death of

77 For example, reports 17 June and 14 October 1915 and 16 March and 15 June 1916.

78 *RE* (14 February 1918).

79 *RE* (13 September 1917).

80 *RE* (16 January 1916). He must have written the article and the several accounts of Quaker activity appearing in the paper himself.

four. Six of twenty-one were listed as members of the Society, with eight as associate members; the rest were connected with the First-day school or the evening congregation.<sup>81</sup> Three names were associated with the FAU, although the final record shows that five Radnorshire Quakers served with the unit—two from the smaller meeting at Penybont.<sup>82</sup> Undoubtedly, the sacrifice of men associated with Llandrindod meeting had an impact, and in 1919 it agreed to purchase a large bible for their use into which was inscribed the names of those men associated with the war effort; this was their roll of honour.<sup>83</sup>

During 1916, Llandrindod Quakers sought to ensure that the issue of conscience was not lost from public view and was reported in the *Radnor Express*. In March, the Monthly Meeting at its gathering in Llandrindod arranged a public meeting on the subject of war and social order. In April, Phillips gave a public address on 'What is Conscience?'. In association with the holding of Western Quarterly Meeting at Llandrindod in September, some nationally prominent Quakers had addressed public meetings on the theme of 'Conscience and War'.<sup>84</sup> This was at a time when it was reported that two members of the meeting were seeking exemption as conscientious objectors.<sup>85</sup>

The public protests in Llandrindod against the Fellowship of Reconciliation should best be seen more as local reaction against outsiders, rather than hostility to the principles being espoused. There is no record that the stand taken by Friends in the area attracted any hostility, but local people would have been familiar with local Friends and those within it who had taken up arms. In this regard, the stance of men such as Phillips must have had some impact. When Charles Binyon, then Clerk to Hereford and Radnor Monthly Meeting at the time, addressed the Military Appeal Tribunal in March 1916 in support of Bernard Bentley, a member at Llandrindod, and his application for exemption from military service, the chairman, seeking to ascertain whether Bentley would serve with the FAU, could sympathetically refer to the fact that many from the Society were already in the FAU, including Binyon's son.<sup>86</sup>

What then of the fate of those Quakers who had enlisted? Three members of South Wales Monthly Meeting were killed in action. Private Llywelyn B. Elsmere, Llangennech, King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment, a member of Swansea Meeting, died aged 31 on 3 November 1917 in France. His father, Benjamin, had been the home mission worker at both the Pales in Radnorshire and then at Swansea, and had revived the meeting in the town and been heavily

81 *RE* (9 November 1916).

82 *Friends Ambulance Unit 1914–1919: list of members and addresses*, 104–05.

83 *LIWPM*, Minute 2, 18 March 1919.

84 *RE* (16 March, 6 April and 28 September 1916).

85 *RE* (16 March and 24 August 1916). Namely, in March, Bernard Bentley, formerly of Merthyr Tydfil, in August, John Davies.

86 *RE* (16 March 1916). Binyon was secretary of the local mineral water company and thus well known locally.



involved in a new meeting-house built there in 1899. Lieutenant John Herford Vivian Sessions, Newport, died in September 1918, and his father, Arthur, was a leading member of Cardiff meeting who had contributed considerably to the revival and survival of the meeting there. Both family names figure prominently in the life of the Society. Alan Corder Cunningham was the third. He joined the infantry in South Africa and was killed at the Battle of Ypres in April 1918. He was born in Bristol and in 1911 was a pupil at a school run by two Quaker sisters in Penarth. Elsmere, given his medal roll, went overseas to France after 1 January 1916. Sessions was a volunteer and joined the Honourable Artillery Company, a Territorial unit that drew its recruits from the middle-class men of the City of London, a major source for officers for the New Army (Service) Battalions. He probably responded to Kitchener's appeal but did not see active service before 1916. Elsmere and Sessions were buried in France, but Cunningham's body was never recovered, and his name appears on the Menin Gate Memorial, one of 90,000 men never found or identified and with no known grave in the Ypres Salient. Army records show that on his death his family were to receive £29 6s. 9d., including a war gratuity of £13 10s. 0d.<sup>87</sup> Sessions' widow would receive £155, and Elsmere's parents £4 17s. 9d.

One of the enlisted men from South Wales Monthly Meeting, the product of the Quaker school at Sibford, was Roger Francis Tregelles, from Penarth, who was a commissioned officer who in 1917 won the Military Cross. His entry in the *London Gazette* is worth quoting:

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. As intelligence officer of the battalion he organised a system of guides for each platoon on the tape, and the assembly was effected without a hitch under heavy shell fire. Subsequently this officer went round the posts, soon after the objectives were taken, in order to make a disposition map, which was done under continuous shellfire. He worked incessantly without rest, and showed great personal courage and endurance.<sup>88</sup>

This was probably at the Third Battle of Ypres. Reference to Quaker servicemen being decorated for bravery are few, but Tregelles would not be the only one.

It was no doubt with great sadness that in the week following his January 1916 speech, Hercules Phillips would have been aware of the death of Private Gilbert Oliver, aged 24, the second stepson of Mrs W. Oliver, a member of Llandrindod Meeting. He had joined the Banker's Battalion two months previously, and his four brothers also served.<sup>89</sup> His brother, William Claude Oliver, who had resigned his membership, died in October 1918, in Salonika. Five names appear on the Llandrindod War Memorial of men linked to Llandrindod meeting.

Activity amongst Quakers in Wales mirrors what happened across the Society in Britain. Being a denomination on the margins of Welsh nonconformity this

87 Register of Soldiers Effects, 1901–21, National Army Museum.

88 *London Gazette* (15 March 1918).

89 *RE* (16 November 1916). See *RE* (10 October 1918).

did not figure large in the national debate on the war, although the pacifist tradition was acknowledged. The Rev. T. E. Nicholas could refer to the unjust war and that in the battle for peace and freedom 'the Quakers stand high. They did their part for freedom in all circles; and in the battle for peace no sect did as much.'<sup>90</sup> On the other hand, the Rev. Prof. Morris of the Presbyterian College at Bala would comment that, although he admired the Quakers, 'the Welsh Nonconformists were not as extreme in their conception of militarism as the Quakers.'<sup>91</sup> When the *Herald Gymraeg* had a fairly long report of a meeting held at Devonshire House, London in February 1916, addressed by Edward Grubb on the theme of the 'Primacy of Conscience', it was of interest because the meeting was disrupted and highlighted the patriotism of the objectors, and threw doubt on the Quaker position. The article was entitled 'Tell us something about the Kaiser: Troublesome Peace Meeting'.<sup>92</sup> The fact that the paper was published in David Lloyd George's constituency perhaps explains why the incident was so reported.

The involvement of Friends in Wales as witnesses against the war was consistent with the vigour shown across the Yearly Meeting, and something, as noted, that did not please everyone.

The experience of total war brought its horrors closer to home, and as a result the peace movement attracted greater support. In this regard, the popularity and growth of the League of Nations Association in Wales is visible proof. Yet, LYM in 1918 failed to support the League because its constitution envisaged the use of military force to deal with international incidents. The Clerks at the Yearly Meeting felt that a report by the Peace Committee, which recommended support for the formation of the League, could not be pursued because there was no unity on the matter.<sup>93</sup> One Welsh meeting, Llandrindod Wells, minuted that two of their members, including Hercules Phillips, should represent the meeting on the local committee of the League of Nations Association,<sup>94</sup> and Phillips became involved in the Welsh national association. In April 1918, he addressed Western Quarterly Meeting about the growing peace movement in Wales 'both among Free Church ministers and among members of the Independent Labour and Socialist Parties'. The meeting minuted that this provided 'probable opening for the service of Friends in the near future',<sup>95</sup> Phillips, as a Quaker home mission worker, was ever hopeful.

90 *Merthyr Pioneer* (23 January 1915): 'saif y Crynwyr yn uchel. Gwnaethant hwy eu rhan dros ryddid ym mhob cylch; ac yn y frwydr dros heddwch ni wnaeth un sect gymaint a hwy'.

91 *North Wales Chronicle* (18 September 1914).

92 *Herald Gymraeg* (15 February 1916): 'Dywedwch wrthym am y Kaiser: cyfarfod "heddwch" cynhyrfus'.

93 *TF* (31 May 1918), p. 347.

94 *LIWPM* (30 May 1920).

95 *WQM*, Minute 16 (24/25 April 1918).

Extrapolating from incomplete statistics does not provide a firm basis for accurate analysis. The returns from the Yearly Meeting questionnaire on the destination of its qualifying male members and attenders were incomplete and not comprehensive but provide a general measure of activity. Some of the information in these returns on marital status, children in families and occupation would provide interesting sociological information on the make-up of the Society if they were to be reanalysed. The absence of returns from Hereford and Radnor Monthly Meeting means that Welsh returns were incomplete. Although the newspaper reports partially make up for this deficiency, Hercules Phillips certainly omitted one name and one other name is incorrect. On the evidence available, 47 men in Wales were affected by the call to arms, including First-day school attendees in Radnorshire. There were 27 members, 9 attenders and 11 others. Of these, 8 joined the FAU, 36 enlisted and 3 were absolutists; 8 were killed.

There was ambivalence amongst Friends to the war, a polarity that wove itself throughout the Yearly Meeting. The introduction of conscription strengthened and reawakened the pacifist position within it, but those who felt compelled to enlist were not to be treated in any way harshly. Disownment for deviating from the discipline of the Society did not feature in decisions by Monthly Meetings when it became an issue. This record from Devonshire House Monthly Meeting in their returns to the Wartime Statistics Committee probably sums up the sentiments of most Friends across the country. It was in relation to John Matlock Allen. Born in 1893, he had enlisted and had tendered his resignation from the Society before the end of 1914, but 'this was not accepted, the question to stand over till after the war'.<sup>96</sup> Such an early resignation was treated sensitively. Many who did enlist felt obliged to resign such as, again from Devonshire House Monthly Meeting, Alfred Lloyd and Julian Gurney Braithwaite, the grandsons of Joseph Bevan Braithwaite, who had been an influential Friend in Britain and the USA. In both cases, the Monthly Meeting must have accepted their wishes, and acted upon them, possibly because their enlistment came later than Allen's. In South Wales Monthly Meeting, the fact that the two sons of weighty Friends enlisted, and were subsequently killed, must have influenced attitudes within the Meeting. Overall in Wales the life of the church was to be undermined and weakened by the war from which it never recovered. Similarly, Quakers in LYM modified their attitudes and their adherence to the peace testimony, and how they expressed themselves in relation to it. Perhaps the issue that was paramount for most members by 1916 was the question of 'liberty of conscience' rather than outright opposition to war and the promotion of the peace testimony.

At this time, with the commemoration of the First World War, and all its militaristic connotations, it is right that the Society of Friends should honour those who, for conscience and truth, stood firmly and bravely against the war and suffered for it. Given the exploits and destinations of many Quakers in Wales it is

96 Friends House Library, Wartime Statistics Committee, 1917–22.

appropriate that Friends should also acknowledge those who felt otherwise, and either fought in the war or took up alternative service or were killed. How many Quaker names are there on the war memorials across the country? Do we and can we acknowledge them? How many Quakers in uniform were decorated for their heroism? Their bravery was not a statement of futility even if linked to violence. All these Quaker men made sacrifices, and many, survivors of the fighting and those imprisoned, carried the scars of their efforts throughout their lives.

#### Author Details

Gethin Evans is a retired local government officer who delves into the history and development of Quakers in Wales. His book, published in 2014, *Benign Neglect: The Quakers in Wales c.1860–1918* stems from this.

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