

MANPOWER AND MILITARY CONSCRIPTION IN ACTON, 1916-1918

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Abstract

The human resource – or ‘manpower’ – problem faced by the British during the First World War is a topic that has been neglected and is therefore much misunderstood. This thesis sheds light on the ways in which the nation attempted to organise its citizens to serve four concomitant manpower needs: the sufficient supply of men for the armed forces, the workforce required for the munitions industry, the personnel needed to cater for the needs of the civilian population, and the people who worked to maintain the country’s financial and economic stability. This is done through study of the implementation and administration of compulsory military service. The principal archival source is the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal archive, held at The National Archives in Kew. The urban district of Acton has been used as a data sample. This thesis examines five different occupations and considers the three groups of people involved in the tribunal process: the potential conscripts, their associated contemporaries and the tribunal members.

This thesis demonstrates the complexities involved in balancing the nation’s manpower needs. Indeed, many of the problems were never fully solved. With little overall central guidance the demands made by various government departments, the military authorities, trade associations, employers, the local populace, family members and the appellants themselves were often difficult for the military service tribunals to resolve. This thesis shows that home front imperatives were a fundamental aspect of the decision making with regard to the nation’s manpower. A man’s skill, his local influence and his health were important points to consider when deciding whether he should remain on the home front or serve in the armed forces. In addition it is clear that tribunals paid mere lip service to some central government advice, such as that related to one-man businesses. Much of Britain’s manpower

legislation was enacted as a reaction to the problems caused by the country's implementation of compulsory military service in the middle of the war. As this thesis demonstrates, tribunals were expected to implement a manpower policy that was constantly evolving to deal with the very conscription they were supposed to manage.

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Introduction

The expression 'manpower' was initially coined in the First World War and used to describe Britain's labour needs as the country fought a conflict that stretched its human resources to its utmost limits. In 1923 Humbert Wolfe, a civil servant with the Board of Trade, reflected that in order to sustain such a task the country had been required to organise its workforce to serve four purposes simultaneously. The first was the sufficient supply of men to serve in the armed forces. As the conflict escalated, the second priority was for a home front industry to equip, clothe and feed the combatants. These two imperatives drained the country's workforce and the third concern was to provide the civilian population with essentials such as food, heating, clothing and transport. Last, but by no means least, was the importance of sustaining the country's financial stability.¹

Paying attention to all four priorities identified by Wolfe, the main aim of this thesis is to shed new light on the ways in which the British addressed their workforce needs and how they made decisions about the best use of available manpower. It will do this by analysing the implementation and subsequent administration of mandatory military service. Six Military Service Acts were passed between 27 January 1916 and 18 April 1918, each allowing for the conscription of an increasingly large and diverse group of men into the armed forces. Military service tribunals were set up to hear appeals lodged by men, their families and their employers against conscription.

Implementation of the so-called Derby Scheme in mid-October 1915 was presented to the country as being the last chance for men to enlist voluntarily into the armed

¹ Humbert Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), pp. 1-2.

forces.² A man could 'attest' his willingness to serve and be placed into one of forty-six groups relevant to his age and marital status. He was then released back to civilian life until such time as his group was called up. It was possible for an attested man to apply to a local tribunal for a postponement and to be called up in a later group if he could demonstrate significant personal reasons for such a delay. Local tribunals, originally set up to hear Derby cases, became local military service tribunals when conscription was introduced in January 1916.³

Single men who were aged between eighteen and forty-one on 15 August 1915 were the first to be called up for compulsory military service on 2 March 1916. This obligation to serve was extended to married men on 24 June 1916. Later Military Service Acts extended compulsion incrementally to larger groups of men, resulting in the potential conscription of those as old as fifty-five by April 1918. Men who were

² In fact, men could continue to volunteer into any branch of the armed forces throughout the war. For example, all men brought within the Military Service Acts had 'the option of volunteering for naval service': The National Archives, Kew [hereafter TNA]: MH – Records Created or Inherited by the Ministry of Health and Successors, Local Government Boards and Related Bodies: MH 47 – Central Military Service Tribunal and Middlesex Appeal Tribunal – Minutes and Papers: MH 47/142 – Blank Forms, Circulars, Pamphlets Issued by the Local Government Board and Other Government Departments, With Printed Acts, Proclamations, Booklets, etc.: MH 47/142/4/2 – Local Government Board [hereafter LGB] Circular R.84, 1 June 1916, p. 1. See Alison Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies – The Replacement of British Infantry Casualties on the Western Front, 1916-1918* (Warwick: Helion, 2018), p. 23, for the evidence that 'some 208,450 men volunteered [into the army] between 1 January 1916-30 June 1917'.

³ Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, pp. 87-8. Also James McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals, 1916-1918 – 'A Very Much Abused Body of Men'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 15-6.

called up under any of the Military Service Acts were entitled to make an application for exemption to their local military service tribunal on grounds of domestic, financial or business hardship, ill health and/or infirmity, and being employed on essential war work or engaged in training and education. This entitlement to apply for exemption was also extended to the man's employer and other interested parties who could present their case to retain a man on the home front. In addition, men liable for conscription were allowed to state a conscientious objection to military service for moral, religious or political reasons and to have such objections heard by a tribunal.⁴

If a man's application was made on personal grounds he would apply to the local tribunal in the district where he lived. If it was made on business grounds it was lodged at the tribunal located nearest to the man's employment. Shortly after the implementation of compulsory military service, county tribunals were set up to hear appeals against decisions made by the local tribunals. In addition, a Central Tribunal was established in London to hear cases sent by – or with the authority of – the county appeal tribunals. Appellants did not appear at the Central Tribunal, the function of which was to read case notes, make decisions and tender advice to the lower tribunals. Much of this advice became legislation from which the country attempted to organise its manpower issues.⁵

With the exception of conscientious objectors, who represented only a small minority of appellants, there has been comparatively little study made of men who applied to the military service tribunals for exemption from mandatory service in the armed forces. Many men – and their employers – appealed on grounds of ill health,

⁴ For a useful summary of the Military Service Acts see Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, pp. 311-3.

⁵ See McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 16-24.

domestic, business and/or financial hardship and their contribution to the home front. Their experiences have been largely overlooked until recently and study of these tribunals enables examination of the nature and impact of compulsory military service. By considering the legislative and administrative solutions proffered to resolve the many resultant problems of conscription, it is possible to gain new insights into the impact of the war on the British home front during the last three years of the war.

Aims and Research Questions

As Humbert Wolfe and more recent scholars have pointed out, conscription did not simply mean that all physically fit civilian men of military age were re-directed to the armed forces. Rather, individuals were given an opportunity to put forward arguments that would allow them to remain on the home front, while a variety of related organisations and individuals provided support or opposition to these applications, and local, county and national bodies were given the task of assessing their relative merits. This thesis analyses the applications for exemption from military service put forward to local and Middlesex appeal tribunals by men who lived in the urban district of Acton, with the aim of shedding new light onto the changing priorities, expectations and ideals that influenced manpower debates, policies and decisions from 1916 to 1918.

Adopting microhistorical and prosopographical methodologies, this thesis uses the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal documents, held at The National Archives in Kew, to examine the claims put forward by five Acton occupational groups: laundrymen, taxicab drivers, munitions workers, retail food and fuel providers, and white-collar workers. Attention is paid to all three groups of people associated with the tribunal

process: the men who were themselves subject to conscription, the men and women who formed the wider social network of domestic and workplace contemporaries and the men of authority who sat in positions of judgement on the military service tribunal boards.⁶

This thesis thus examines how appellants articulated their cases against conscription, paying attention to the ways in which contemporary notions of masculine skills, status, family commitments and financial responsibilities featured in the appeals put forward both by the men who were subject to conscription and by their associated contemporaries. How much weight did these ideas carry in the eventual outcome and did this change between 1916 and 1918? How were such ideas about masculine roles and responsibilities received by the men on the tribunal boards?

This thesis also considers the extent to which, as the war's demands intensified both military and civilian manpower pressures, leading to an ongoing process of legislative change, men were able to renegotiate their position in society in order to remain in civilian employment. Did a man's job, wartime activities and/or position in society lead the tribunals to view his application more favourably than those of other men? Were some occupations seen as being of more value to the war effort than others, for example in terms of finance, provision of war materiel or catering for the home front population, and did these views change in the course of the conflict? Is

⁶ Although a small number of women did serve in military service tribunals in other districts and counties, all tribunals studied in this thesis were composed of men only. For more detail see McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 17-8; David Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards in the Great War – Determining the Fate of Britain's and New Zealand's Conscripts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 33-52.

there any evidence of collaboration amongst the appellants? This thesis also assesses the role of employers in attempts to retain men who were deemed to be essential to their business, explores the arguments put forward to justify their actions and considers whether and why some industries were more successful than others in convincing the tribunals to allow them to keep their male workforce.

Also examined is the significance of a man's domestic position – including the number and health of his dependents – to the arguments that he or his family used to justify his continued civilian status. Particular attention is paid to variations between men of different age groups and marital status and between men of different classes and social position, as well as to changes between 1916 and 1918. Did appeals challenge contemporary understandings of masculine domestic responsibilities and feminine dependence and were such understandings shared by the tribunal authorities? In addition, this thesis examines the role played by health in exemption applications and assesses the extent and ways in which an appellant's professed physical capabilities influenced the success or failure of his exemption claim. In a context where manliness was associated with physical strength and resilience, were some men willing to sacrifice contemporary concepts of masculinity in order to remain at home and were such claims met sympathetically?

This thesis pays especial attention to networks and connections, both between applicants and between others involved in the tribunal process, assessing how they operated and whether they had an impact on the outcome of applications. It questions whether influential contacts could secure exemption from military service. If so, how was this done and to what purpose? The thesis considers evidence of shared values and expectations about appropriate masculine behaviour in wartime, and assesses the extent to which these values reflected wider notions of patriotism

and equality of sacrifice. Consideration is made of the role played by local newspapers and of letters sent to the tribunals in demonstrations of solidarity or disapproval of appellants.

The thesis questions whether there were recognisable pockets of approbation for – or opposition to – men who chose to appeal against conscription on grounds of conscientious objection. Did notions and negotiations of patriotic duty and equality of sacrifice come up in appeals or in the tribunals' response? To what extent were they present in the arguments put forward by employers and other associated contemporaries that included trade bodies and volunteer organisations? Were applicants and their associates able to put forward claims of patriotism and sacrifice that justified their remaining on the home front, or were such notions rejected in favour of alternative understandings of appropriate male behaviour in wartime? Did either prove effective and did these negotiations and responses change between 1916 and 1918?

Finally, the thesis considers the shifting interplay between local and national priorities and pressures in influencing appeals and their outcomes. It examines the many conflicting demands made upon tribunal authorities in their intermediary position between state and populace. It questions the significance of community imperatives or individuals' local power in determining the outcome of applications and the extent to which this changed in light of developments on battle and home fronts. By examining the appeals put forward by Acton men, this thesis sheds light on the pressure that was brought to bear – by government departments, military authorities, trade associations, employers, the local populace, family members and the appellants themselves – upon the men who were in the unenviable position of making decisions based on an ever-changing manpower situation.

Literature Review

Conscription and Conscripted Men

Conscription in the First World War has received little attention until recently. In 1986, the American historian R. J. Q. Adams stated that ‘the enactment into law in January 1916 of the first instalment of mandatory military service in modern British history was an event whose importance few scholars dispute’.⁷ However he went on to explain that despite such historical significance there was at the time of writing only one monograph on the subject of the political debates and public controversies that resulted in British military conscription in 1916. That study was *Conscription Conflict*, written by Denis Hayes in 1949.⁸ In Adams’ opinion commentators had been ‘warned off’ the subject by such historians as Robert Blake, who remarked in 1955 that:

The question of conscription would indeed be a tedious topic to pursue through all its ramifications. The endless discussions, the attitudes taken by public men at various times, the compromises, the disputes, constitute a chapter in English history to which, no doubt in years to come, dull history professors will direct their duller research students.⁹

⁷ R. J. Q. Adams, ‘Asquith’s Choice – The May Coalition and the Coming of Conscription, 1915-1916’, in *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1986), p. 243.

⁸ Denis Hayes, *Conscription Conflict – The Conflict of Ideas in the Struggle For and Against Military Conscription in Britain Between 1901 and 1939* (London: Sheppard, 1949).

⁹ Robert Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister – The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law, 1858-1923* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), p. 282 – cited in Adams, ‘Asquith’s Choice’, p. 244.

To view an historical topic as laboriously convoluted and therefore not worth the study is dubious in itself. However, dull or not, there are still only two books that specifically detail the early twentieth century debates on the subject of British military conscription. They are Hayes' above-mentioned 1949 publication and *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900-18*, published by R. J. Q. Adams and Philip Poirier in 1987.¹⁰

Hayes started to write his book in the final years of the Second World War and he explained that it was written 'to make some contribution ... to the question of peace-time conscription'.¹¹ It is useful as a broad overview of the conscription debates that took place from the middle of the Boer War to the beginning of the Second World War. Adams and Poirier, with extensive archival research, concentrate on the conscription issues facing the authorities up to the end of the First World War.

Apart from these two books, the history of conscription has been considered in studies of conscientious objectors.¹² The Quaker writer and activist John Graham stated emphatically in 1922 that the British hated the very name of conscription.¹³ Studies such as Graham's suggest that mandatory military service was a sinister and unwelcome phenomenon, foisted on the country out of desperation in 1916.

¹⁰ R. J. Q. Adams and Philip Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900-1918* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987).

¹¹ Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, p. 7.

¹² See for example Thomas C. Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience – A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship, 1914-1919* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 1981), pp. 1-74; David Boulton, *Objection Overruled – Conscription and Conscience in the First World War* (Dent: Dales Historical Monographs, 2014 [1967]), pp. 66-98.

¹³ John W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience – A History, 1916-1919* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 51.

However, Hayes argues that conscription was neither entirely unprecedented nor an altogether unwelcome prospect for the nation as a whole.¹⁴ Early twentieth century discussions on the topic show that the British had many and varied views on compulsory military service.¹⁵

Political historian John Turner explains that conscription was a subject that divided all political parties in the first two years of the First World War and ‘was treated by

¹⁴ Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, p. 13. See Margaret Levi, ‘The Institution of Conscription’, in *Social Science History*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1996), pp. 133-167, for a useful overview of First World War conscription in the ‘Anglo-Saxon democracies’ of Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America.

¹⁵ See for example pro-conscriptionist civilian George Shee, *A Briton’s First Duty – The Case for Conscription* (London: Grant Richards, 1901), pp. 110-114 (in particular) and anti-conscriptionist soldier Ian Hamilton, *Compulsory Service – A Study of the Question in the Light of Experience* (London: Murray, 1910), pp. 151-208. See Caroline Playne, *The Pre-war Mind – an Historical Review* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1928), pp. 125-165, for a pacifist’s opinion that a propaganda of fear and patriotic disdain had enabled the growth of militarism in Britain. Also Conservative politician Leo Amery, *My Political Life, Volume 1 – England Before the Storm, 1896-1914* (London: Hutchinson, 1953), pp. 213-8. For analysis of press debates see A. J. A. Morris, *The Scaremongers – The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1896-1914* (London: Routledge, 1984), pp. 224-248. Also Anne Summers, ‘Militarism in Britain Before the Great War’, in *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1976), pp. 104-123. For pre-war popular fiction and ‘the growth of the military conditioning of British society’ see Ian Beckett, *Britain’s Part-Time Soldiers – The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558-1945* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2011 [1991]), pp. 198-200. Also George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 33-5. For discussion of the National Service League, founded in 1902 as a result of Shee’s publication, see Adams and Poirier, *Conscription Controversy*, pp. 15 and 88-9; Peter Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army – The Raising of the New Armies, 1914-1916* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014 [1988]), pp. 23-4.

those whose opinions have become historical sources as predominantly an ethical question'.¹⁶ Political studies have tended to focus mainly on the Liberal Party's disagreements about mandatory military service.¹⁷ A number of historians argue that the so-called conscription controversy was a leading factor in H. H. Asquith's political downfall in December 1916.¹⁸ However, R. J. Q. Adams contends that Asquith was not an unwilling participant in the introduction of mandatory military service, explaining that it was only enacted when the Prime Minister 'had himself suitably prepared the way and when he was quite ready'.¹⁹ In his work on the Liberal War Committee, Matthew Johnson argues that 'Liberal doctrine was more flexible with regard to compulsory service than has hitherto been appreciated'.²⁰

¹⁶ John Turner, *British Politics and the Great War – Coalition and Conflict 1915-1918* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 64; also pp. 73-81 and 86-90.

¹⁷ Cameron Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War, July 1914 to May 1915 – A Prologue to the Triumph of Lloyd George* (New York: Knopf, 1971), pp. 265-8 and 301-3; George Bernstein, 'Yorkshire Liberalism During the First World War', in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 32, no. 1, (1989), p. 116. Some historians argue that conscription contributed to the destruction of the Liberal Party itself. See Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-1935* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011 [1966]), pp. 23-91; Michael Hart, 'The Liberals, the War and the Franchise', in *The English Historical Review*, vol. 97, no. 385 (1982), p. 821.

¹⁸ Michael Fry, 'Political Change in Britain, August 1914 to December 1916: Lloyd George Replaces Asquith – The Issues Underlying the Drama', in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 31, no. 3 (1988), pp. 616-8; John Grigg, *Lloyd George – From Peace to War* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011 [1985]), pp. 308 and 325-41.

¹⁹ Adams, 'Asquith's Choice', p. 244.

²⁰ Matthew Johnson, 'The Liberal War Committee and the Liberal Advocacy of Conscription in Britain, 1914-1916', in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 51, no. 2 (2008), p. 400. For the same point see John Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1989), p. 121.

Ian Beckett stated in 1990 that ‘if there is truly an unknown or hidden army in the British military historiography of the Great War it is that army enlisted by means of conscription’.²¹ With the exception of Beckett and the notable recent work of Alison Hine, few First World War military historians have examined conscription or conscripted men in any detail.²² There is a large literature concerning the recruitment of volunteers into the so-called Kitchener armies in 1914 and 1915.²³ The ways in which these voluntary soldiers were assimilated into the British army has been studied extensively, particularly in relation to the Battle of the Somme (1 July – 18 November 1916).²⁴ Conscripts also fought at the Somme but there is little

²¹ Ian Beckett, ‘The Real Unknown Army – British Conscripts 1916-1919’, in Jean-Jacques Becker and Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau (eds.), *Les Sociétés Européennes et la Guerre de 1914-1918* (Paris: Université de Paris X-Nanterre, 1990), p. 339. Beckett co-edited a book in 1985 in which there is no study of conscription or conscripts: Ian Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds.), *A Nation in Arms – A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

²² Hine, *Refilling Haig’s Armies*. Also Charles Messenger, *Call to Arms – The British Army 1914-1918* (London: Cassell, 2005), pp. 130-169. The only monograph written specifically about conscripts is Ilana Bet-El, *Conscripts – Lost Legions of the Great War* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999). This book is widely criticised by other historians for its limited sources and unreliable conclusions. See for example Hine, *Refilling Haig’s Armies*, p. 24.

²³ For example Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army*; Ray Westlake, *Kitchener’s Army* (Tunbridge Wells: Nutshell, 1989).

²⁴ For example Peter Doyle and Chris Foster, *Kitchener’s Mob – The New Army to the Somme* (Stroud: History Press, 2016); William Philpott, *Bloody Victory – The Sacrifice on the Somme* (London: Abacus, 2016 [2009]). There is a large literature about the so-called ‘Pals Battalions’. For example David Bilton, *Hull Pals – 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th Battalions, East Yorkshire Regiment* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014);

comparative analysis of the ways in which these men were recruited and how they were incorporated into the existing army in 1916 – or, indeed, at any other time during the war.²⁵

The official history of the Battle of the Somme, published in 1932, set the tone for future discussion of the British army's conscripts, describing the men who fought on

John Sheen, *Durham Pals – 18th, 19th and 22nd Battalions of the Durham Light Infantry in the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2007).

²⁵ Trevor Wilson writes that three groups of soldiers were sent into the battle: the regulars, the territorials and the volunteers. He is one of many military historians who make no reference to the conscripts who were drafted in over the four months of fighting. See Trevor Wilson, 'The British Army on the Somme, July-November 1916', in Michael Howard (ed.), *A Part of History – Aspects of the British Experience of the First World War* (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 52-62. Some writers have acknowledged the role of conscripts. Leon Wolff describes the British army in the summer of 1917 as 'an amazing hodgepodge of regulars, reservists, conscripts, territorials, volunteers and assorted units dropped into the cauldron'. Leon Wolff, *In Flanders Fields* (London: Longmans, 1959 [1958]), p. 127. Also J. G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1991]), p. 46. In addition to Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, recent analysis of conscripts in the British army include R. J. Clare, "'Fit to Fight?' How the Physical Condition of the Conscripts Contributed to the Manpower Crisis of 1917-18', in *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, vol. 94 (2016), pp. 225-244; Peter Scott, 'Law and Orders: Discipline and Morale in the British Armies in France, 1917', in Peter Liddle (ed.), *Passchendaele in Perspective – The Third Battle of Ypres* (London: Leo Cooper, 1997), pp. 350-2. The notion that the battles of 1918 were fought largely by young conscripts has been challenged by Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, p. 298; Jonathan Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front – The British Third Army and the Defeat of Germany in 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 39; David Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall – Victory and Defeat in 1918* (London: Penguin, 2012 [2011]), p. 263.

the first day as 'the finest of all classes of the nation in physique, brains and education. And they were volunteers not conscripts'.²⁶ Reginald Pound insisted in 1964 that although large numbers of conscripts fought the 'muddier and bloodier' Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) they would never attain the moral and courageous heights of the men who had volunteered.²⁷ Few memoirs were written by conscripts.²⁸ Gary Sheffield attributes such scarcity to an unwillingness to admit to the 'stigma of conscription'.²⁹ Richard Holmes observes that 'the conscript army had no separate identity'.³⁰ Studies of life in the trenches make no differentiation between conscripts and volunteers, the assumption being that all soldiers shared the same

²⁶ James Edmonds, *Military Operations – France and Belgium 1916, Volume I* (London: Macmillan, 1932), p. 315. For similar comment see John Keegan, *Face of Battle* (London: Cape, 1976), pp. 215-6.

²⁷ Reginald Pound, *The Lost Generation* (London: Constable, 1964), pp. 251-261 and 273. However, volunteer Charles Carrington contended that 'our drafts of new recruits [were] conscripts now and just as good soldiers as the old volunteers'. See Charles Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), p. 191.

²⁸ For example W. V. Tilsley, *Other Ranks* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1931); F. Gray, *Confessions of a Private* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1929); F. A. Voigt, *Combed Out* (London: Swarthmore, 1920). For comment on these three books see Beckett, 'Unknown Army', pp. 346-351. Also Paul Fussell (ed.), *The Ordeal of Alfred M. Hale – The Memoirs of a Soldier-Servant* (London: Cooper, 1975).

²⁹ Gary Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches – Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 182. Beckett identifies 'pre-war and wartime assumptions' that were made about conscripts in this period. See Ian Beckett, *The Great War, 1914-1918* (Harlow: Pearson, 2001), p. 219.

³⁰ Richard Holmes, *Tommy – The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (London: Harper Collins, 2004), pp. 89-90.

experience.³¹ John Bourne succinctly explains that ‘the British soldier of the Great War was essentially the British working man in uniform’ and that both volunteers and conscripts remained ‘obstinately civilian’, only willing to serve in the army ‘for the duration’.³²

Recent scholarship has begun to recognise that the war-time experiences of conscripts add an important dimension to the historical understanding of the society from which they came. A Cambridge University Press series of studies of the major First World War combatant armies, published during the war’s centenary commemorations, includes a joint-authored monograph that incorporates conscripted soldiers in its analysis of the British army.³³ Michael Roper and Joanna Bourke both include conscripts in evaluations of the physical and emotional trauma endured by men on the battlefield.³⁴ Jessica Meyer’s analysis of combatant masculinities makes the valuable point that the military experiences of conscripts gave rise to legislative changes and ‘the original pressure brought to bear on Parliament to amend the

³¹ See for example Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918 – The Live and Let Live System* (London: Macmillan, 1980); Eric Leed, *No Man’s Land – Combat and Identity in World War One* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Denis Winter, *Death’s Men – Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Allen Lane, 1978); John Ellis, *Eye Deep in Hell – Life in the Trenches, 1914-1918* (London: Fontana, 1977).

³² John Bourne, ‘The British Working Man in Arms’, in Hugh Cecil and Peter Liddle (eds.), *Facing Armageddon – The First World War Experienced* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 1996), pp. 336 and 340. Also Tammy Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War, 1914-1918* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), p. 15.

³³ Ian Beckett, Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 86-134.

³⁴ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle – Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male – Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1996).

pensions system arose from public opinion that men disabled through a service to the state made mandatory through conscription were heroes because of their physical sacrifices for the state'.³⁵

The First World War predates the introduction of public opinion polls. Stephen Badsey identifies that 'the loss of volunteerism in January 1916 also meant the loss for historians of a critical indicator of mass public opinion and support for the war'.³⁶ Both Catriona Pennell and Adrian Gregory highlight difficulties in gauging public reactions to the outbreak of war in August 1914.³⁷ Pennell's use of newspapers, diaries and journals allows for an interpretation of a wide range of individual responses. Similar, broadly prosopographical, methodologies have been adopted in order to ascertain public reactions to military conscription. Laura Ugolini uses diaries and personal correspondence to analyse issues of masculinity connected to the conscription of English middle-class male civilians.³⁸ Adrian Gregory's 2008 monograph *The Last Great War – British Society and the First World War* uses a wide range of sources, including 'contemporary voices', and convincingly argues that

³⁵ Jessica Meyer, *Men of War – Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011 [2009]), pp. 100-2. Also Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, pp. 67-8.

³⁶ Stephen Badsey, 'Press, Propaganda and Public Perceptions', in Howard (ed.), *A Part of History*, p. 31.

³⁷ Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United – Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 1-11; Adrian Gregory, 'British "War Enthusiasm" in 1914 – A Reassessment', in Gail Braybon (ed.), *Evidence, History and the Great War – Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2008 [2003]), pp. 67-85.

³⁸ Laura Ugolini, *Civvies – Middle-Class Men on the English Home Front, 1914-18* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 131-47.

military conscription was one of many legislative measures brought about as a result of a public demand for equality of war service and sacrifice.³⁹ By using military service tribunal documents and local newspapers, this thesis will contribute to the growing historical interest in Britain's implementation of military conscription in the last three years of the war.

Manpower

There are few academic studies of British manpower during the First World War.⁴⁰ Historian H. M. D. Parker, in his 1957 contribution to the twenty-eight volume Second World War home front official history series, writes a brief overview of the manpower issues faced by the authorities between 1914 and 1918. His broad outline of the 'improvisations and experiments' was written 'to judge how far the planners in the Second World War benefited from the experience of their predecessors'.⁴¹ No equivalent series of home front histories was written about the First World War, with the exception of a twelve-volume official history of the Ministry of Munitions.⁴² Written between 1918 and 1923, these volumes include analysis of industrial manpower. In addition, after the First World War the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace commissioned a series of economic and social histories in an 'attempt to measure

³⁹ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War – British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 70-111.

⁴⁰ A recent notable exception is Douglas Delaney, Mark Frost and Andrew Brown (eds.), *Manpower and the Armies of the British Empire in the Two World Wars* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2021).

⁴¹ H. M. D. Parker, *History of the Second World War, United Kingdom Civil Series – Manpower, A Study of War-Time Policy and Administration* (London: HMSO, 1957), pp. 1-2.

⁴² See Denis Hays, 'The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions, 1915-1919', in *Economic History Review*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1944), pp. 185-90.

the economic cost of the War and the displacement it was causing in the process of civilisation'.⁴³ Although useful as overall studies of the home front, these publications do not focus specifically on manpower issues.

Keith Grieves' 1988 monograph *The Politics of Manpower* remains the most influential study of British First World War manpower issues. His book was the first – and is still the only – to concentrate on the political and administrative measures put into place to respond to the conflicting demands for military and industrial manpower.⁴⁴ With a focus on the military service tribunals, this thesis also examines legislation designed to organise the nation's manpower and extends the analysis to include domestic, commercial and financial manpower concerns.

The armed forces' need for men has tended to be discussed by historians in terms of the disputes between civilian and military authorities.⁴⁵ Jay Winter has studied

⁴³ This was a comment made in each book by the editor of the series, James Shotwell. See for example William Beveridge, *British Food Control* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. v. For analysis of the series see Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History – Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 153-155.

⁴⁴ Also Keith Grieves, 'The "Recruiting Margin" in Britain: Debates on Manpower During the Third Battle of Ypres', in Liddle (ed.), *Passchendaele in Perspective*, pp. 390-405; Keith Grieves, "'Total War'?: The Quest for a British Manpower Policy, 1917-18', in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1986), pp. 79-95.

⁴⁵ For the British army's global manpower issues before military conscription see John Gooch, *The Plans of War – The General Staff and British Military Strategy, c. 1900-1916* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016 [1974]). Other military manpower studies include Elizabeth Greenhalgh, 'David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, and the 1918 Manpower Crisis', in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 50, no. 2 (2007), pp. 397-421; David Woodward, 'Did Lloyd George Starve the British Army of Men Prior to the

civilian and military manpower relative to the occupations and physical fitness of men who were recruited (both voluntarily and through conscription) into the armed forces.⁴⁶ As previously mentioned, there has been little analysis of the ways in which conscripted men were incorporated into the army. Alison Hine has identified that this has resulted in many misconceptions about manpower within the First World War military historiography. Her 2018 monograph *Refilling Haig's Armies – The Replacement of British Infantry Casualties on the Western Front, 1916-1918* is the first study to explore in depth the ways in which the army dealt with its manpower issues in the second half of the war. Her focus is on military manpower but she juxtaposes this with an analysis of the realities on the home front, making for a valuable overall picture of manpower for the last three years of the war. The intention of this thesis is to build on Hine's work by delving further into the process by which certain men were selected for conscription.

In his studies of the manpower required for the Ministry of Munitions, R. J. Q. Adams argues that by the end of the war most British people had accepted, 'grudgingly or not', what came to be known as 'war socialism' – a level of state control that was unprecedented in the nation at that time.⁴⁷ Studies of skilled men who remained on the home front to make munitions concentrate on Labour politics and the disputes

German Offensive of 21 March 1918?', in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 27, no. 1 (1984), pp. 241-252.

⁴⁶ Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003 [1985]), pp. 25-64.

⁴⁷ R. J. Q. Adams, 'Delivering the Goods: Reappraising the Ministry of Munitions, 1915-1916', in *Albion*, vol. 7, no. 3 (1975), p. 244. Also R. J. Q. Adams, *Arms and the Wizard – Lloyd George and the Ministry of Munitions, 1915-1916* (London: Cassell, 1978).

between trade unions and the government.⁴⁸ There is a significant literature that examines women on the home front, especially those who took up munitions work and positions vacated by men who were serving as soldiers.⁴⁹ This research makes only passing reference to the men who remained on the home front and amongst whom these women worked. The continued role of men has been acknowledged by some women's historians, even if not discussed in detail. Sallie Hogg's 1967 PhD thesis provides a substantial overview of the ways in which women were incorporated into the home front workforce and concludes that, by the end of the war, 'men were still performing over sixty per cent of the nation's civil work covered

⁴⁸ John Horne, *Labour at War – France and Britain, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), especially pp. 218-260; Gerry Rubin, *War, Law and Labour – The Munitions Acts, State Regulation and the Unions, 1915-1921* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987); James Hinton, *Labour and Socialism – A History of the British Labour Movement, 1867-1974* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983), especially pp. 96-118; for the replacement of men by women through so-called 'dilution' see Marion Kozak, 'Women Munition Workers During the First World War with Special Reference to Engineering' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Hull, 1976), pp. 69-95. For a social history of war-time Labour politics see Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987). For a comparison of the male industrial workforce in France, Britain and Germany see Thierry Bonzon, 'The Labour Market and Industrial Mobilisation, 1915-1917', in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War – Paris, London, Berlin, 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 164-195.

⁴⁹ Susan Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (Harlow: Pearson, 2002); Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls – Women Workers in World War 1* (London: Tauris, 2000 [1998]); Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend – Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994); Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage – Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (London: Pandora, 1987); Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1981).

by the Board of Trade's State of Employment returns and virtually all of its military work'.⁵⁰

John Bourne stated in 1989 that 'all modern wars are fought on two fronts. The home front is not only as important as the war front but also inseparable from it'.⁵¹ Although an increasing number of historians are taking an interest in the British home front, most still concentrate their attention on women. Civilian men are not the focus of the majority of First World War home front studies.⁵² In her 2013 monograph, *Civvies – Middle-Class Men on the English Home Front, 1914-18*, Laura Ugolini points out that approximately fifty per cent of men who were of military age did not serve in the armed forces during the First World War.⁵³ Her book is the first to specifically study male civilians and she examines the ways in which middle-class men justified their continued presence on the home front. Her focus is on the renegotiation of

⁵⁰ Sallie Hogg, 'The Employment of Women in Great Britain, 1891-1921' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Oxford, 1967), p. 205.

⁵¹ Bourne, *Britain and the Great War*, p. 199.

⁵² See for example Susan Grayzel, 'Men and Women at Home', in Jay Winter (ed.), *Cambridge History of the First World War: Volume III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 96-120. Despite the title of her chapter, Grayzel focuses almost exclusively on women. Also Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War*; Gerard DeGroot, *Back in Blighty – The British at Home in World War 1* (London: Vintage, 2014); Margaret Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Weitz (eds.), *Behind the Lines – Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War* (Cambridge: Polity, 1986); Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge – British Society and the First World War* (New York: Norton, 1965). See Ian Beckett, *Home Front, 1914-1918 – How Britain Survived the War* (Kew: The National Archives, 2006), pp. 17-64 for a chapter 'Men at Work' which discusses men's contribution to industrial output.

⁵³ Ugolini, *Civvies*, pp. 4-7.

masculine identity at a time when many of their contemporaries were fighting as soldiers. This thesis also concentrates its attention on male civilians and will extend the focus beyond the middle class.

Recent studies show that male wartime home front employment remains little understood. Anne Spurgeon declares that, although four fifths of the 1.5 million people engaged on making munitions in 1916 were men, most were ‘too old or unfit for military service’ or were under-age boys.⁵⁴ In fact, there were a significant number of able-bodied men of military age working in the munitions trade. In her study of British civilian masculinity, Juliette Pattinson discusses men who remained in essential home front occupations between 1914 and 1945.⁵⁵ She recognises that the male civilian worker of the First World War has been largely forgotten and concludes that men who did remain on the home front were ‘derided as shirkers and cowards’.⁵⁶ This thesis places such assertions under scrutiny.

Political historians – most notably John Turner – have considered the ways in which finance determined military and political strategy.⁵⁷ David French also considers the

⁵⁴ Anne Spurgeon, ‘Mortality or Morality? Keeping Workers Safe in the First World War’, in Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas (eds.), *The Home Front in Britain – Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences Since 1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 58.

⁵⁵ Juliette Pattinson, ‘“Shirkers”, “Scrimjacks” and “Scrimshanks”? British Civilian Masculinity and Reserved Occupations, 1914-45’, in *Gender and History*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2016), pp. 709-727.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 724.

⁵⁷ Turner, *British Politics and the Great War*. Also Martin Horn, *Britain, France, and the Financing of the First World War* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), for an overview of the financial problems facing the two allied nations; Theo Balderston, ‘Industrial Mobilisation and War Economies’, in John

economics of manpower in his two-volume study of British war strategy. He provides a detailed analysis of the debates regarding manpower within Britain's coalition government in 1915. He concludes that, had the country thrown all of its resources into providing men and materiel for the armed forces, it would have won the war but lost the peace by making itself bankrupt in the process.⁵⁸ His analysis of the British morale crisis of mid-1917 details the 'labour shortages, falling imports, a worsening balance of payments, and inflation'.⁵⁹ On a broader scale, in his 1998 book *The Pity of War*, Niall Ferguson provides an overview of the economic position of the belligerent powers prior to, during and after the war. He notes that 'the allocation of manpower was perhaps the most difficult economic problem which the combatant states faced'.⁶⁰ The allocation of British manpower is the focus of this thesis and consideration is made of the economic problems facing the nation.

Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2010), pp. 217-33, for his overall analysis that the Allies won the war because they maintained economic superiority over the Central Powers. For an economic history perspective see Stephen Broadberry and Peter Howlett, 'The United Kingdom During World War I: Business as Usual?', in Stephen Broadberry and Peter Howlett (eds.), *The Economics of World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 206-34. Also Hew Strachan, *Financing the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [2004]), for a useful overview of the economic issues facing the combatant nations.

⁵⁸ David French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914-1916* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986), especially pp. 116-35.

⁵⁹ David French, *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition, 1916-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p. 67.

⁶⁰ Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), p. 267. Also Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, pp. 156-7.

Military Service Tribunals

Perhaps the most neglected and misunderstood aspect of British manpower is that connected to the military service tribunals, put into place to hear appeals against conscription and make judgements on the best use of the nation's available male workforce. In 2003 Adrian Gregory explained that 'in as far as they have been thought about at all, the military service tribunals have been seen through a distorting lens, as enemies of individual liberty, the essence of the tyrannical state'.⁶¹ In fact, Gregory argues, tribunals were a 'safeguard against the tyranny of public opinion' – a courtroom in which men could explain the circumstances by which they believed they should be exempted from compulsory military service.⁶²

Gregory also explains that 'conscientious objection was easily the *least* common ground for appeal against conscription'.⁶³ Until recently, however, the historiography of military service tribunals has been dominated by studies of conscientious objectors. This is because such cases were highly controversial at the time, receiving much attention and comment by their contemporaries. John Graham's 1922 monograph *Conscription and Conscience* focuses on the negative experiences of absolutist conscientious objectors at the hands of the tribunals.⁶⁴ Cyril Pearce

⁶¹ Adrian Gregory, 'Military Service Tribunals: Civil Society in Action, 1916-1918', in Jose Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History – Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005 [2003]), p. 177.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁶⁴ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, pp. 51-109. Also John Rae, *Conscience and Politics – The British Government and the Conscientious Objector to Military Service, 1916-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*.

suggests that although there is 'broad agreement' amongst historians of conscientious objection that the tribunals were 'muddled, inconsistent, prejudiced and unjust', opinion is divided as to how far the tribunals were themselves to blame.⁶⁵ David Boulton describes the men sitting in judgement as 'bewildered and frightened' by the 'avalanche of conscientious objectors' and he explains that their task was made more difficult by the military representative who appeared in uniform and 'dominated the civilian members of the Tribunal'.⁶⁶ As this thesis will show, military representatives were often civilians themselves and were an integral part of the complex debates surrounding conscientious objectors and military conscription.⁶⁷

Few military historians have commented on military service tribunals and, perhaps unsurprisingly, those who have tend to argue that the civilian authorities were holding men back from the armed forces. Peter Simkins contends that 'the local tribunals were, if anything, too liberal in granting exemptions'.⁶⁸ He cites Denis Hayes' comment that the tribunal system represented 'compulsion with the velvet glove'.⁶⁹ However, Hayes was referring to the early days of conscription and this judgement takes little consideration of the complexities of the initial problems.⁷⁰ In his 2018 study of British military service tribunals, David Littlewood explains that the

⁶⁵ Cyril Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience – The Story of an English Community's Opposition to the Great War* (London: Francis Boutle, 2001), pp. 158-9.

⁶⁶ Boulton, *Objection Overruled*, pp. 124 and 134.

⁶⁷ See Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards*, p. 47, for civilian military representatives in Yorkshire.

⁶⁸ Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, p. 157.

⁶⁹ Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, p. 201.

⁷⁰ See McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 22-5, for inconsistencies in tribunal policy and practice due to initial confusion, demographic differences and the inexperience of the tribunal members in the early months of military conscription.

calling up of unmarried men, under both the Derby Scheme and the first Military Service Act, in the early months of 1916 'prompted a vast number of hardship claims. As most of these initial cases concerned men who were entitled to relief, the rate of success was extremely high'.⁷¹

Until recently there has been an assumption amongst historians that only a few men appealed to the tribunals. In 1978 Denis Winter argued that 'only men who could afford a solicitor and professional counsel were likely to think it worth their while to confront the state's whipper-in'.⁷² In fact, as this thesis will show, many men who presented their cases in front of a military service tribunal did not – and perhaps could not – pay for a legal advocate. Historians such as Ilana Bet-El assume that men called up under compulsory military service legislation were victims of the system. She states that conscripts endured 'a bureaucratic maze, marked by the lack of choice or control of the individual over his own fate', but this is an oversimplification.⁷³ Adrian Gregory argues that surviving tribunal documentation demonstrates that a significant majority of conscripted men did attempt to avoid, or at least delay, military service through recourse to the exemption clauses in the Military Service Acts.⁷⁴ As Pierre Purseigle explained in 2005, the study of British military service tribunals highlights not only individual experiences of conscription, but also 'the significance of the constant process of negotiation whereby civil society

⁷¹ Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards*, p. 79.

⁷² Winter, *Death's Men*, p. 34.

⁷³ Bet-El, *Conscripts*, p. 27.

⁷⁴ Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 101-108. Also Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 53-5.

attempted to limit the claims of the State over the Nation'.⁷⁵ This negotiation is one of the key themes of this thesis.

The internal workings and administration of military service tribunals have received little historical attention until recently.⁷⁶ This has arguably been due to a government order to destroy the vast majority of tribunal records in 1921, resulting in a lack of documentary evidence for historians to study.⁷⁷ However, as James McDermott explains, the destruction order was not implemented universally and many archives hold 'considerable fragments'.⁷⁸ He makes valuable use of the complete surviving

⁷⁵ Pierre Purseigle, 'Introduction', in Pierre Purseigle (ed.), *Warfare and Belligerence – Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 31.

⁷⁶ Keith Grieves' study of manpower has included research into two local tribunals: Keith Grieves, 'Military Tribunal Papers: The Case of the Leek Local Tribunal in the First World War', in *Archives*, vol. 16, no. 70 (1983), pp. 145-50; Keith Grieves, 'Mobilising Manpower: Audenshaw Tribunal in the First World War', in *Manchester Region History Review*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1989), pp. 21-9. Local historical research into tribunals include Philip Spinks, 'The War Courts: The Stratford-upon-Avon Borough Tribunal, 1916-1918', in *The Local Historian*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2002), pp. 210-217; Ivor Slocombe, 'Recruitment into the Armed Forces During the First World War: The Work of the Military Tribunals in Wiltshire', in *The Local Historian*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2000), pp. 105-123. Also Philip and Julie Spinks (eds.), *First World War Military Service Tribunals – Warwick District Appeal Tribunal, 1916-1918* (Warwickshire: Dugdale Society, 2017). Recent PhD studies include Stuart Hallifax, 'Citizens at War: The Experiences of the Great War in Essex, 1914-1918' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Oxford, 2010), especially pp. 228-294; Peter Harris, "'Structures, Experiences and Discourses": The Middlesex Military Service Tribunals and Their Appellants, 1916-1918' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, De Montfort University, 2018).

⁷⁷ The two exceptions to this order were the Peebles and Lothian Appeal Tribunal records now held at the Scottish Record Office in Edinburgh and the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal documents now held at The National Archives in Kew.

⁷⁸ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 3.

set of Northamptonshire Appeal Tribunal records in his 2011 study *British Military Service Tribunals, 1916-1918 – ‘A Very Much Abused Body of Men’*. David Littlewood’s 2018 monograph *Military Service Tribunals and Boards in the Great War – Determining the Fate of Britain’s and New Zealand’s Conscripts* uses the East Central Division of the West Riding of Yorkshire’s local tribunal records, many of which survived the government’s destruction order.⁷⁹

McDermott and Littlewood are historians at the forefront of current studies into the military service tribunals of the First World War. McDermott’s focus is on the civilians who were appointed to sit on the military service tribunals in judgement on members of their own community. He provides analysis of the ‘character, functions and developing policies’ of the tribunal system put in place to implement ‘a manpower policy that the government had yet to conceive’.⁸⁰ He examines the extent to which tribunal members were qualified, in terms of both their impartiality and judicial skill, to reach decisions with regard to conscription legislation without any substantial guidance from central government. He is interested in the social impact of conscription, highlighted through different approaches to local concerns demonstrated by individual tribunals in Northamptonshire. He concludes that ‘compulsion was a social contract requiring the visible demonstration of fairness in its implementation’.⁸¹

Littlewood uses a ‘British World’ methodology to investigate the relationship between the appellants and the tribunal members who held the power to grant or withhold exemptions from military service in Britain and New Zealand. Like McDermott, he

⁷⁹ Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards*.

⁸⁰ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

examines their competence and authority. He argues that British tribunals were more inconsistent in their dealings with appellants than the New Zealand boards, which operated under closer central government control. In addition, more British men appealed against conscription than their New Zealand counterparts, who arguably faced a greater degree of public censure for attempting to evade military service. Littlewood concludes that the Yorkshire tribunals under consideration in his research demonstrated tolerant practices. However, he reaches this conclusion by comparing the tribunal systems of two very different countries. He observes that British tribunals apparently prioritised local imperatives, resisted central directions and were willing to exempt a sizeable proportion of the appellants. He calls for further research into other tribunals across Britain to ratify such conclusions. This thesis responds to the call by focusing on the insights provided by Acton appeals, as they navigated their way through the tribunal system.

Both McDermott and Littlewood have produced studies on an impressive scale, including a broad spectrum of people from across regions, classes and backgrounds: McDermott's Northamptonshire study encompasses the records of thirteen urban and fourteen rural local tribunals included with the county appeal tribunal records; Littlewood's transnational approach compares the military service systems of West Yorkshire and New Zealand. McDermott's groupings of individuals with common grounds for appeal and Littlewood's chronological and comparative approach both provide important overviews of the events and include relevant individual examples. Like McDermott, this thesis pays attention to the local concerns that emerge from a study of different occupational groups. Like Littlewood, this thesis explores the arguments put forward by appellants and their associated contemporaries, and analyses the attitudes adopted by the tribunal members and the likelihood of a

favourable outcome. However, this thesis sharpens the focus of analysis onto a specific cross-section of British society – one urban region in Middlesex – and places the local imperatives that emerge from the sources into the constantly shifting context of changing wartime attitudes, manpower pressures and legislative priorities.

Methodology and Sources

This thesis uses a mixture of analytical and thematic methodologies. A broadly chronological approach has been useful in some chapters. As this section illustrates, the study also employs aspects of microhistorical and prosopographical methodologies in its analysis.

The principal source for this thesis is the ‘Central Military Service Tribunal and Middlesex Appeal Tribunal: Minutes and Papers’ (MH 47) archive. These records are held at The National Archives in Kew, available free of charge in digital format until 2024. The Middlesex Appeal Tribunal was one of fifty-eight military service appeal tribunals in England and Wales, that were set up in February 1916 to hear appeals against decisions made by over 1800 local military service tribunals. Middlesex was a large county, situated to the north and west of London, with borders adjoining London, Surrey, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Essex. It was divided into six administrative ‘hundreds’ and, at the time of the First World War, comprised four rural and thirty urban districts.⁸² The Middlesex Appeal Tribunal was divided into two ‘sessions’ in order to cover this large county. The first session was presided over by its chairman William Regester, JP while Herbert Nield, Conservative MP for Ealing was the chairman of the second session. Overall, the

⁸² The administrative county of Middlesex was dismantled in 1965 and incorporated into Greater London, Hertfordshire and Surrey.

Middlesex Appeal Tribunal heard cases from thirty-seven local tribunals and considered a total of 11,307 appeals between 1916 and 1918.

The MH 47 archive is therefore extensive – too large to examine in its entirety for the purposes of this thesis – and was thus mined for a more specific, yet sufficiently rich seam of information. A case study of the urban district of Acton, situated on the western border of London, yielded approximately 500 appeal records and was selected as enabling a study of appellants from a diverse range of ages, occupations, marital status, class background and physical condition. In 1911 Acton had a population of 57,497.⁸³ It had a well-established laundry industry that employed a large number of men amongst the predominantly female workforce. It also had a rapidly developing motor car industry and was the bustling hub of numerous retail and commercial enterprises. This thesis uses the case files of 291 Acton men who belonged to five diverse occupational groups, reflecting the area's social and occupational diversity: laundrymen, taxi-cab owner-drivers, men connected to the local munitions trade, food and fuel retail workers and white-collar workers.

The sample of 291 cases was found to include applications based on the whole range of possible grounds for appeal, as well as plentiful examples of cases that demonstrated both support and opposition from groups of associated contemporaries. It also revealed a variety of responses by the Acton tribunal, which was composed of an identifiable group of men with strong links to their community. Furthermore, Acton's industrial base allowed for examination of the ways in which private factories and workshops offered alternative opportunities, through the

⁸³ *A Vision of Britain Through Time*, University of Portsmouth. Available from www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/table/EW1991GEN_M9 [Accessed 2 May 2020].

Ministry of Munitions, for men to contribute to the war effort on the home front. In addition, as an area of considerable white-collar and retail employment, it enabled a comparison with the strategies adopted by men unconnected with munitions.

For the purposes of this thesis, the most important sources in the MH 47 archive are the case files of appellants who sought an appeal from the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal. These appeals are organised by attested and non-attested men – and whether or not the appeal was dismissed. These case files are discussed further below, but it should be noted that, in addition, the archive includes a range of ancillary records that have also been used to inform this thesis – most notably in connection with legislative and administrative changes, contested cases and central government directives. Among these ancillary records are blank forms, circulars and pamphlets issued by the Local Government Board and other government departments, including printed Acts of Parliament, proclamations and reference booklets. There is also a complete set of lists of certified occupations.

These case files themselves are highly diverse, some only including the basic forms while others contain many pages of supplementary material. Most files consist of completed forms, filled out by the individuals concerned or their representative, applying for exemption. There are generally at least two separate forms: the form originally submitted to the local tribunal and a form submitted to the appeal tribunal. The arguments put forward by the man and/or his supporters usually remained similar (sometimes identical) as the appellant moved through the system, although it was far from rare for additional supporting information to be added. A range of information was requested on these forms such as name, address, age, marital status, medical classification, occupation, profession or business (including the length of time engaged in such work) and the grounds upon which the application or

appeal had been made. The forms provide space for reasons in support of the claim from the appellant or his representatives and further space for the resultant tribunal decision, with permission to extend explanations onto separate sheets if necessary. These sections further highlight the many and various ways in which individuals presented their cases: some are short, terse answers giving little (if any) information in response to the prescribed questions, while others are very detailed replies covering many pages.

Case files also contain letters to the appellant from the local and appeal tribunals, including notices of hearings, medical examinations and adjournments, reports from medical boards and decisions reached by the tribunal authorities. Most files include forms upon which the relevant military representative made 'observations' about the case, sometimes indicating his assent but, more often, explaining his reasons against either the appellant's claim or the tribunal's decision. Occasionally there is information from employment exchanges, recruiting personnel and local authorities as well as expired certificates of exemption. Some case files contain much supporting evidence from the appellant and this additional documentation can include letters written by the individuals themselves and correspondence from other interested parties such as family doctors, colleagues, relatives, local businesses or other trades people, trade associations, religious groups and volunteer organisations.

The MH 47 archive thus reveals much information about people's lives and experiences in Acton, as well as about local and national debates relating to the appropriate use of manpower between 1916 and 1918. Information about the 291 appellants has been recorded in a database that can be found in Appendix Three of this thesis. This database contains details such as the man's age, marital status,

occupation, employer (if known), exemption grounds claimed, medical grading (if known), the date of the first application and the date of the last recorded tribunal outcome. This database has been compiled along broadly prosopographical lines in order to analyse the information collected from the Acton case files and other related local sources.

Prosopography is a methodology for collecting and combining information conveyed by historical sources about people, most notably people about whom little is known. It is 'the inquiry into the common characteristics of a group of historical actors by means of a collective study of their lives'.⁸⁴ This information is usually collated in database format and consists of a series of snapshots – brief moments in time that are connected to individuals within a social and/or demographic group. This methodology has been described as 'a system for organising mostly scarce data in such a way that they acquire additional significance by revealing connections and patterns influencing historical processes' and identifying links between 'large groups of mostly anonymous or poorly documented individuals'.⁸⁵

In order to extend the study beyond the 'snapshot' provided by the appellant's case files in the MH 47 archive, this thesis' database is enhanced by material gathered

⁸⁴ Lawrence Stone, 'Prosopography', in *Historical Studies Today*, vol. 100, no. 1 (1971), p. 46. See David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life, 1913-1921 – Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998 [1977]), for extensive use of unpublished primary sources, including material from private papers, local repositories and interviews with eyewitnesses, in his study of 'popular politics' in County Clare.

⁸⁵ Koenraad Verboven, Myriam Carlier and Jan Dumolyn, 'A Short Manual to the Art of Prosopography' in K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (ed.), *Prosopography Approaches and Applications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 37 and 42. A second school of prosopography studies groups of 'elites'.

from genealogical sources. Birth and marriage registers have been examined to either trace missing information or validate evidence found in the case files: some men were vague about their age and marital status, and some forms were filled out by employers who clearly knew very little about the personal life of the man for whom they were appealing. Pension and military service records (where available) have provided valuable data about the ways in which men with particular skills were conscripted into different branches of the armed forces. Death registers and probate calendars have been used to trace individuals to the end of their lives, where possible. Census information has provided demographic data from which it has been possible to reconstruct certain aspects of Acton's pre-war community. Both the 1918 Electoral Register and the 1939 England and Wales Register have shed small pinpricks of light onto individuals which, when combined, have sometimes been sufficient to produce stronger spotlights of illumination.⁸⁶ This thesis has not used genealogical information to provide a biographical account of the individuals concerned; rather, the database has been compiled to build up a collective picture of responses to conscription, identifying common themes and patterns, as well as commonalities and links between individuals and their experiences.

Alongside the MH 47 archive and genealogical sources, this thesis also makes use of local history sources. The Ealing Local History Centre and Borough Archive contains two Acton local newspapers on microfilm: the *Acton and Chiswick Express* and the *Bedford Park, Turnham Green, Acton Gazette and District Advertiser*. These newspapers have been studied to gain insight into local public opinion, both through the reporting and analysis of local and national events and also through the

⁸⁶ See Appendix Three.

recording of local public behaviour.⁸⁷ The Ealing archive also contains the *Urban District Council of Acton – Proceedings of the Council and of the Several Committees of the Council*. This source has been studied in detail and provides much insight into local administration and public figures: for example, many of Acton's councillors (and some council staff) also served on the local tribunal board and advisory committees.

In addition, online sources have been very useful in building up a picture of London (and Acton) life prior to and during the war. Examples include trade directories, such as *Kelly's Directory*, which provide detail about commerce in pre-war Acton; digitised trade magazines, such as the *Commercial Motor Magazine*, hold valuable information about London's taxi-cab networks and wartime transport problems; the *1918 Directory of Manufacturers in Engineering and Allied Trades*, available from the Grace's Guide to British Industrial History website, provides a register of munitions-related work carried out by private industry across the nation and includes the contribution made by Acton's factories and workshops during the war, giving much context concerning the impact of wartime manpower prerogatives on the occupational groups under consideration in this thesis.

This thesis has thus made extensive use of local history sources. As indicated in the literature review, valuable local history studies of tribunals have been carried out by other historians and examined in relation to this research project. However, this

⁸⁷ See Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 6, for her comments on the efficacy of using newspapers as an historical source. Also Pierre Purseigle, 'Beyond and Below the Nations: Towards a Comparative Analysis of Local Communities at War', in Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle (eds.), *Uncovered Fields – Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 97-101, for his analysis of the 'appropriation of the national narrative through local cultural codes' within local newspapers.

thesis aims to explore beyond the local imperatives and narratives and look at these issues in relation to the wider national trends and the county's overall engagement in the war. In his study of social identity, and 'the more or less willing commitment' to the national cause in wartime France, John Horne explains that 'the essence of social action lies in its subjective significance for the individuals and groups undertaking it and also in the reciprocal influence of other individuals and groups in shaping such action'.⁸⁸ As Catriona Pennell states, 'we cannot understand localities properly unless we understand the whole of which they form part; we cannot understand the nation properly unless we understand the localities that exist beneath it'.⁸⁹ Pierre Purseigle's 2004 comparative study of Northampton and Béziers takes a 'cross-section' of local societies to reveal 'the characteristic "totalizing logic" of the Great War and its social implications'.⁹⁰ Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert argue that 'the best way to penetrate behind the illusory veil of a unitary "national experience" is to describe the character of community life in wartime'.⁹¹ They go on to explain that 'by narrowing the field of analysis to cities, and within cities to communities and *quartiers*, it is possible to trace with some precision the vicissitudes of civilian life and to compare the ways urban administrations and populations adapted to war and its severe demands'.⁹² In line with Winter's and Robert's call to examine the responses

⁸⁸ John Horne, 'Social Identity in War: France, 1914-1918', in T. G. Fraser and Keith Jeffery (eds.), *Men, Women and War* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1999 [1993]), p. 119.

⁸⁹ Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 10. Also David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain – The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014 [2012]), pp. 62-82, for the chapter 'Local Agency, Local Work'.

⁹⁰ Purseigle, 'Beyond and Below the Nations', p. 96.

⁹¹ Winter and Robert, *Capital Cities at War*, p. 3.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

to war of the 'urban villages and neighbourhoods' of capital cities, and to shift historical attention 'to the district and (where possible) the street and family level', this thesis focuses on one Middlesex district, directly adjoined to London on its western border, to explore national manpower issues.⁹³

It does this by adopting a microhistorical methodology, both episodic and systematic. Episodic microhistories focus 'on a single, spectacular episode or event usually involving one person or a small group of individuals': this thesis extends this approach to 291 individuals, which is arguably quite a large group, but it nevertheless uses conscription records and other sources to shed light on otherwise ordinary individuals' encounters with the exceptional circumstances of wartime conscription.⁹⁴ Systematic microhistory 'reconstructs the complex web of familial and extra familial social relations in a small community' and central to this thesis' analytical framework are the family, business and trade networks, as well as the less tangible links of obligation that emerge from the sources and are concerned with appeals and their outcomes.⁹⁵

Through the use of such methodologies, this study is informed by the current academic interest in so-called 'global microhistory'.⁹⁶ Global-microhistory has been

⁹³ Ibid., p. 7. See Braybon, *Evidence, History and the Great War*, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Andrew Port, 'History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory' in James Wright (ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences – Second Edition* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), p. 108.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Arguably the term was first used in 2010: Tonio Andrade, 'A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys and a Warlord: Towards a Global Microhistory', in *Journal of World History*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2010), p. 574. See John-Paul Ghobrial, 'Introduction: Seeing

described as ‘a way to honour and recover human agency and to leave room for contingency and subjectivity in the construction of historical accounts with a global reach’.⁹⁷ John-Paul Ghobrial explains that one approach to such a methodology is ‘the analysis of a single individual, object or place, which is then used as a sort of microcosm with which to explore general questions’.⁹⁸ While this thesis does not claim to be studying truly ‘global’ themes, it does examine the relationship between local, regional and national imperatives, paying attention to the agency of appellants and others involved in the tribunal process, and thus forming part of a much wider, more general and yet increasingly nuanced picture of manpower problems in the First World War.

Content

The five chapters of this thesis consider the employment experiences of conscription of Acton men from five different occupational groups. Each chapter discusses specific legislative and organisational issues, although these topics are not exclusive to the chapter’s occupational group.

Chapter one examines appeal cases from men working in Acton’s laundry trade. Known as ‘Soapsud Island’, this was a well-established pre-war industry catering for London’s laundry needs. Manpower shortages and an increased demand for military and hospital washing meant that conscripting men from this occupational group was not a straightforward decision. Men in the laundry industry were valued by their

the World Like a Microhistorian’, in *Past and Present*, vol. 242, Issue Supplement 14 (2019), p. 14.

⁹⁷ Jan de Vries, ‘Playing with Scales: The Global and the Micro, the Macro and the Nano’, in *Past and Present*, vol. 242, Issue Supplement 14 (2019), p. 28.

⁹⁸ Ghobrial, ‘Introduction’, pp. 15-6.

colleagues and the military service tribunals for their technical expertise, physical strength and business acumen. The Acton tribunal was comprised of men who also served on the Acton Urban District Council and this chapter demonstrates the financial and commercial incentives behind the granting of a relatively large number of exemptions for men within this occupational group. Also examined are the schemes for collaboration and co-operation recommended by one of the industry's largest and most influential trade organisations – the National Federation of Laundry Associations.

Chapter two discusses the appeals for exemption lodged by a group of taxi-cab owner-drivers. Most of these men worked for a local garage, W. and G. du Cros – a company that had well-publicised patriotic credentials. These men argued that they were buying their vehicles on a hire-purchase system and would lose a considerable financial investment if called up. This chapter shows the process by which the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal handed complicated manpower problems up to the Central Tribunal which then offered guidelines that could result in a change of legislation – such as the introduction of financial assistance. Also considered in this chapter are the ways in which men were organised according to their medical grading to make the best use of available civilian and military manpower. Many men from this occupational group volunteered with their vehicles to support London's beleaguered transport network and they provided transportation assistance during emergencies such as air raids. This chapter examines the increasingly compulsory nature of 'voluntary' work as the war escalated.

Chapter three considers the appeal claims of men who were connected to Acton's munitions trade. In order to examine the impact of the munitions trade on the local community, this chapter discusses the manpower legislation, enacted between

January 1916 and the end of the war, to cater for the nation's concomitant demands for men to both provision and serve in the armed forces. Examined in this chapter are the many initiatives designed and developed by the authorities to place men where they would be most useful to the war effort. These initiatives included 'badging' and 'starring' and the frequently changing lists of certified occupations and schedules of protected occupations. This chapter also examines the cases of men who claimed to be provisioning or building munitions factories and/or supporting the munitions trade. Demands made upon the local infrastructure by the wartime munitions industry, coupled with a lack of manpower and resources, meant that the needs of the local community were increasingly bypassed. This chapter looks at the ways in which claims for exemption were processed by a panel of men with strong links to Acton's domestic and commercial infrastructure.

Chapter four investigates appeals lodged by men who worked in local food and fuel retail businesses. The Ministry of Food did not impose the same level of central administration as the Ministry of Munitions and military service tribunals were left to organise manpower needs at a local and county level. This chapter considers Acton's food and fuel supply problems, paying attention to the lists of certified occupations and the role of recruiting personnel in determining who should be called up. Despite well-publicised sympathy and support for one-man businesses in the early months of conscription, the nation's independent small shopkeepers were increasingly likely to be ordered to leave their businesses and join the armed forces or the munitions trade as the war progressed. This chapter explores the arguments put forward by sole proprietors of food and fuel retail outlets in Acton and discusses the ways in which the tribunals processed such claims in light of the needs of the local community and the nation as a whole.

The fifth chapter studies white-collar workers and conscientious objectors. This chapter contains the largest number of unmarried men and looks at the controversy surrounding single sons of widowed mothers. Also examined are arguments put forward that some clerical work was too complex for women to undertake, exploring how such claims were dealt with by the tribunals. This chapter considers the men of local status who remained exempt through the health clause, presumably because of their contribution to the fiscal and financial security of their community, while men of less influence were conscripted despite having demonstrable health issues. Also explored are the conflicts of interest arising when local councillors who also served on the local military service tribunal were asked to decide on the claims for exemption from men who worked on the Acton Urban District Council staff. Of all the occupational groups studied, conscientious objectors were the most represented amongst the white-collar workers. These men put forward a complex set of arguments for exemption and this chapter considers the compromises made by both the appellants and the tribunals. Also examined is the extent to which the Acton and Middlesex tribunals were sufficiently prepared and judicially competent to reach decisions regarding the military service of men of conscience. Conscientious objection was a novel concept and this chapter discusses the ways in which the language of resistance was developed through the tribunal procedure.

Military service tribunals were required to undertake a complex balancing act between the manpower needs of the military authorities, the munitions industry, the local population and the economic stability of the country. They did this with varying central government guidance but very little overall control.⁹⁹ Much of Britain's manpower legislation was enacted as a reaction to the problems caused by the

⁹⁹ Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 25.

country's implementation of compulsory military service in the middle of the war. As this thesis will show, tribunals were expected to implement a manpower policy that was constantly evolving to deal with the issues that arose out of the very conscription process they were supposed to manage. The ways in which they managed this, and the impact that their decisions had on individuals, are the subjects of this thesis.

Chapter One – Laundrymen

Introduction

This chapter examines the appeals against military conscription of sixty-three men who worked in the Acton laundry trade – one of the largest employers in the district. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Acton had been a farming village on the outskirts of London. One of the results of the Enclosure Act of 1859 was that Turnham Field and Church Field in South Acton were sold for development. The British Land Company built cheap housing on much of the site and Acton's laundry industry developed within the area now bounded by the High Street, Steyne Road and Churchfield Road in the north; Acton Lane to the east; South Acton Lane in the south; and Bollo Lane and Gunnersbury Lane to the west. This clearly defined housing development earned the epithet of 'Soapsud Island' at around the time of the First World War.¹

Washing and drying clothes at home was strenuous and time-consuming, especially in cramped urban conditions, and laundries filled an essential role in a society that was increasingly conscious of the value of hygiene.² The Baths and Washhouses Act of 1846 legislated for the provision of public laundries and the industry developed

¹ Jerry White, *Zeppelin Nights – London in the First World War* (London: Bodley Head, 2014), p. 107; T. and A. Harper Smith, *The Acton Laundries* (privately published, 1994), pp. 3-5.

² Arwen Mohun, *Steam Laundries – Gender, Technology and Work in the United States and Great Britain, 1880-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 29-45; Patricia Malcolmson, *English Laundresses – A Social History, 1850-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 129. Also Laura Ugolini, 'War-stained: British Combatants and Uniforms, 1914-18', in *War and Society*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2014), pp. 163 and 165-6.

rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century.³ One could make use of the 'Bobwash': as many items as possible were crammed into a bag and then washed and dried for a shilling; while the more affluent could spend an often disproportionately large amount of their income on the maintenance of a respectable and well-presented image.⁴ The rapid development of the laundry industry in South Acton would appear to have coincided with the construction of middle-class housing in the immediate vicinity during the late Victorian period.⁵

Many of the laundries in South Acton had become professional businesses long before the end of the nineteenth century, employing whole families and other workers in houses that had been adapted for the purpose. Increased mechanisation had improved productivity and 'it is no uncommon thing to find a row of houses in separate occupation, the back yard of each of which is roofed in and packed with laundry machinery, all driven by an engine installed at the end of the row.'⁶ By the 1870s land agents had understood the importance of the industry in this area and were selling vacant plots in South Acton specifically advertised as being suitable for the construction of new laundries, many of which were fully mechanised factories employing upwards of eighty people.⁷ These factories catered on an industrial scale for London's hotels, restaurants and hospitals. There is evidence that 'the number of

³ Sophie Watson, 'Mundane Objects in the City: Laundry Practices and the Making and Remaking of Public/Private Sociality and Space in London and New York', in *Urban Studies*, vol. 52, no. 5 (2015), p. 880.

⁴ Malcolmson, *English Laundresses*, p. 7.

⁵ Smith, *Acton Laundries*, p. 5; Watson, 'Mundane Objects', p. 885.

⁶ Thomas Oliver, *Dangerous Trades* (London: Murray, 1902), p. 664, cited in Malcolmson, *English Laundresses*, p. 8.

⁷ Smith, *Acton Laundries*, p. 6. Also Malcolmson, *English Laundresses*, pp. 126-156.

power laundries grew by more than 42 percent in the West London District between 1900 and 1910'.⁸ There is no precise information about how many laundry businesses there were in 'Soapsud Island' at the beginning of the First World War but there must have been at least 400 – and possibly a great many more.⁹ 'No fewer than forty' had closed in the early months of 1916 and by September 1916 it was reported that there were '349 registered workshop laundries' in South Acton.¹⁰ Of the sixty-three appeals under consideration in this chapter, there is mention of fifty-three separate enterprises.

Laundry work was predominantly associated with a female workforce but there were a significant number of men employed within the industry in the decades preceding the First World War.¹¹ T. and A. Harper Smith argue that 1901 marked the height of the growth of laundries in South Acton, with 2,448 women and 568 men working in the trade.¹² However, the 1911 Census reveals that there were 714 men aged between fourteen and eighty-one working in the laundry industry in this area and it

⁸ Malcolmson, *English Laundresses*, p. 90. Also Michael Ball and David Sunderland, *An Economic History of London, 1800-1914* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 324.

⁹ See Ben Weinreb, Christopher Hibbert, Julia Keay and John Keay, *The London Encyclopaedia: Third Edition* (London: Macmillan, 2008 [1983]), p. 4, for the figure of 205 laundries in South Acton by 1900.

¹⁰ *Acton and Chiswick Express* [hereafter *Express*], 17 March 1916 and 1 September 1916.

¹¹ Mohun, *Steam Laundries*, pp. 54-60. Also Sallie Hogg, 'The Employment of Women in Great Britain, 1891-1921' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1967), pp. 15-7.

¹² Smith, *Acton Laundries*, p. 3.

might be assumed that the number of laundrywomen had risen exponentially.¹³ Men undertook a variety of roles in laundries and, broadly speaking, over a quarter of the laundrymen in the 1911 Census described themselves simply under the generic term of 'laundryman' (see Figure 1.1 below).

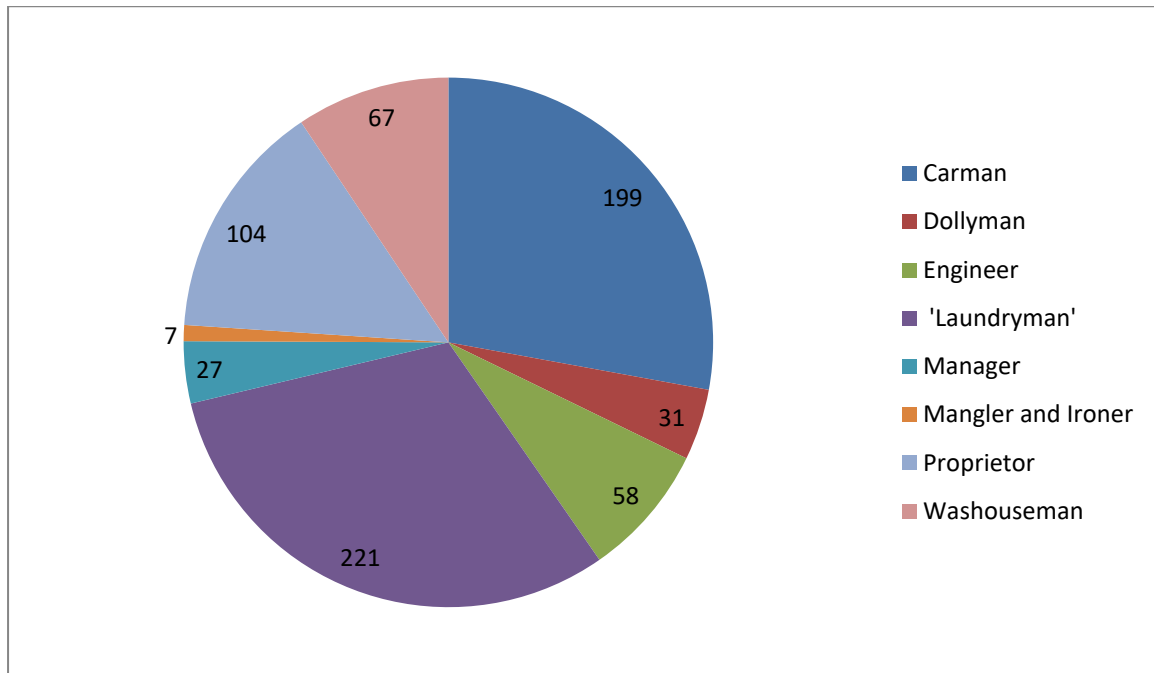


Figure 1.1 – Acton Laundrymen in 1911. Source – 1911 Census.

Some laundry tasks were undertaken only by men and these seem to have followed contemporary gender norms that emphasised the association between physical strength, technical expertise and masculinity.¹⁴ Some laundrymen worked as

¹³ The National Archives, Kew [hereafter TNA]: RG – Records of the General Register Office, Government Social Survey Department, and Office of Population Censuses and Surveys: RG 14 – General Register Office, 1911 Census Schedules [hereafter 1911 Census]. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 21 March 2016].

¹⁴ Malcolmson, *English Laundresses*, pp. 19-20 and 136-147. Also Arwen Mohun, 'Laundrymen Construct Their World: Gender and the Transformation of a Domestic

'dollymen': men who performed the arduous task of pounding large tubs of washing by hand. Other men doing heavy work were the 'wash-housemen', who loaded and unloaded the machines. There were a handful of mangles and ironers in 1911 but a large proportion were 'car-men' or 'van-boys': twenty-seven per cent of the men and boys in the census provided a collection and delivery service, often very far afield.¹⁵ Other men described themselves as 'engineers', skilled in the operation and maintenance of technically complicated – and potentially dangerous – machinery. Many stated that they were 'proprietors' or 'managers', some of whom were wealthy enough to live in the affluent areas of the district.

Significantly, as Figure 1.2 indicates, the sixty-three appellants under consideration in this chapter did not reflect the full range of masculine roles within the laundry industry: the majority claimed to be either the laundry's engineer and/or the proprietor or manager of the business.

Task to an Industrial Process', in *Technology and Culture*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1997), pp. 97-120.

¹⁵ Smith, *Acton Laundries*, p. 6

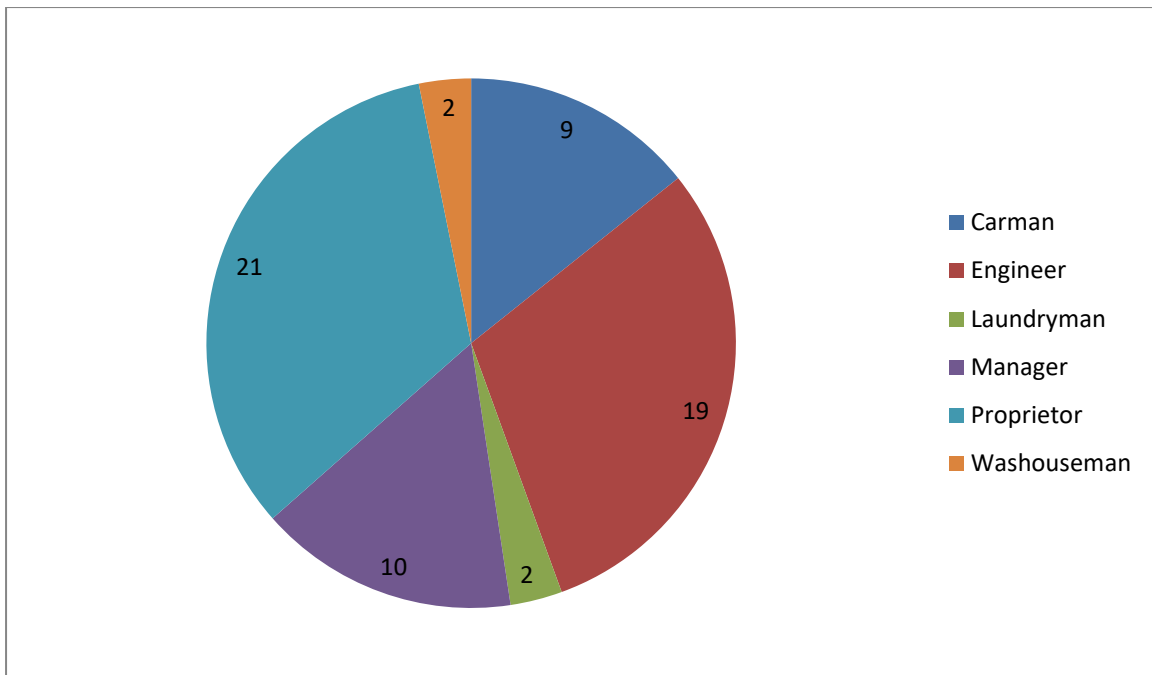


Figure 1.2 – Laundry Appellants: Main Stated Responsibility. Source – MH 47 Archive.

In an industry that had lost a large number of personnel as a consequence of the war there seem to have been compelling arguments for the retention of men who claimed that they were indispensable to the safe and efficient operation of Acton's laundries. Of the sixty-three men under consideration in this chapter, twenty-three remained exempt for the duration of the war (thirty-seven per cent).¹⁶

¹⁶ In addition, there is evidence that three other men were probably not called up for military service by the recruiting officer despite losing their exemptions at the appeal tribunal. See TNA: MH – Records Created or Inherited by the Ministry of Health and Successors, Local Government Boards and Related Bodies: MH 47 – Central Military Service Tribunal and Middlesex Appeal Tribunal, Minutes and Papers [hereafter MH 47]: MH 47/93/22: William Coney; MH 47/23/65: Charles Hooper; MH 47/13/15: Hubert Hughes. Their names appear on the 1918 Electoral Register. See London Metropolitan Archives, Electoral Registers. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 22 June 2020]. This topic is discussed in further detail in chapter four. See Appendix Three for this thesis' database.

This chapter is divided into three sections and some of the sixty-three laundrymen are considered under more than one heading. The first section examines the nature of conditional exemptions and the circumstances under which such exemptions were granted to men who were considered by the Acton tribunal to be indispensable to the local laundry industry, such as the laundry's engineer and/or the business owner or manager. Under consideration are the grounds upon which these exemptions were originally granted and the circumstances by which they were subsequently challenged, paying particular attention to claims of masculine competence, feminine dependence, local business and community concerns, and the ever-changing legislation enacted in an attempt to resolve civilian and military manpower problems as a result of the war.

The second section moves the focus from large industrial enterprises to smaller family-run businesses. It considers the nature and outcome of appeals made on the basis of a man's essential contribution to laundries that had varying degrees of other familial involvement. This section pays particular attention to differences of approach and outcome of appeals between male and female-owned and/or led businesses.

The third section looks at Acton's laundry industry from the perspective of employers and assesses whether women, by claiming that they were incapable of tending the machinery, were better placed to keep their engineers than their male counterparts. This section also examines the need for collaboration within a laundry community that was being asked to manage a hugely expanded demand for hospital and military laundry services, paying particular attention to notions of patriotism, equality of sacrifice and 'profiteering'.

Conditional exemptions

A man could be granted absolute, conditional or temporary exemption from military service: 'an Absolute Certificate of Exemption is ... without any specified conditions or limit of time. A Conditional Certificate is ... granted to a man subject to the continued fulfilment of the conditions specified upon the Certificate ... A Temporary Certificate is ... issued for a definite period of time'.¹⁷ Twenty of Acton's sixty-three laundrymen were granted conditional exemptions by the Acton tribunal in 1916 and these men are the subject of this section.¹⁸

Conditional exemptions were authorised by both local and appeal tribunals under legislation that had originated from the Munitions of War (Amendment) Act, 27 January 1916.¹⁹ The first Military Service Act – also enacted on 27 January 1916 – ordered that 'no certificate of exemption shall be conditional upon a person to whom it is granted continuing in or entering into employment under any specified employer

¹⁷ TNA: MH – Records Created or Inherited by the Ministry of Health and Successors, Local Government Boards and Related Bodies: MH 47 – Central Military Service Tribunal and Middlesex Appeal Tribunal, Minutes and Papers: MH 47/142 – Blank Forms, Circulars, Pamphlets Issued by the Local Government Board and Other Government Departments, With Printed Acts, Proclamations, Booklets, etc. [hereafter MH 47/142]: MH 47/142/1 – 'Group and Class Systems, Notes on Administration, Issued by the Director-General of Recruiting', February 1916, p.12.

¹⁸ Archibald Wiseman was the only laundryman to receive absolute exemption but this was revoked and replaced with temporary exemption on 9 August 1917. See MH 47/99/16: Archibald Wiseman, 2 March 1916.

¹⁹ *History of the Ministry of Munitions* [hereafter *HMM*], Volume IV, Part II (London: HMSO, 1918), pp. 66-77.

or in any specified place or establishment'.²⁰ These instructions were designed to prevent so-called 'industrial compulsion', ensuring that men could not be mistreated or coerced by employers (or the government) under the threat of summary dismissal and resultant military conscription.²¹ The Local Government Board explained to military service tribunals that 'this provision does not preclude the granting of a certificate of exemption to a man whose claim may be on the ground that he is individually indispensable to a particular employer and that it is in the national interests that he be retained in his employment'.²² The wording specified that exemptions were permissible 'conditional on his remaining in a particular occupation in a particular trade'.²³ The Acton tribunal followed these instructions in granting the twenty conditional exemptions to laundrymen, stipulating that each man remained in his 'present occupation'.

As long as the 'present occupation' condition continued to be met, these exemptions did not have an expiration date. James McDermott describes the apparent reliance of the Northamptonshire boot and shoe industry on the tribunals to translate and

²⁰ MH 47/142/1: Military Service Act, 1916, section 2, paragraph 3, 27 January 1916, p. 4.

²¹ *HMM, Volume IV, Part III* (London: HMSO, 1919), pp. 58-62. Also Humbert Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), p. 42.

²² MH 47/142/1: Local Government Board [hereafter LGB] Circular R.36 – 'Relating to the Constitution, Functions and Procedure of the Local Tribunals', 3 February 1916, p. 4. In addition, any unsuccessful application or appeal had a two month grace period attached as 'it would be possible for an employer to deal unfairly with a man in his service with whom he was on bad terms by dismissing the man and thus cancelling the man's Certificate of Exemption and rendering him immediately liable to compulsory military service under the Act'. See MH 47/142/1: Group and Class Systems – Notes on Administration, February 1916, p. 25.

²³ MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.36, 3 February 1916, p. 4.

implement the government's manpower policy (such as it was) and this can be seen in Acton's local industry as well.²⁴ It was unusual for the Acton tribunal to issue open-ended certificates and it can be assumed that, by so doing, this reflected a local concern about the continued functioning of Acton's laundry trade. Although none of the twenty men under consideration in this section would ultimately keep their conditional exemptions, thirteen remained exempt for the duration of the war on temporary exemption certificates that were regularly renewed.²⁵ The other seven all retained their temporary exemptions until 1917 – with one as late as mid-1918. This section explores the reasons why these laundrymen received such extended exemptions.

Thirteen of the twenty conditional certificates were granted to men who convinced the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal that their masculine skill in operating mechanised equipment guaranteed the safe and efficient running of what was essentially a factory. Thomas Barry's employer argued that 'only a skilled and experienced man can operate a modern steam laundry and such are not obtainable at present'.²⁶ The knowledge and responsibilities of these 'skilled and experienced' men varied from business to business. Two were helping their parents: Robert Fraser was the only son left at his family's laundry and was 'in charge of a stationary engine and other

²⁴ James McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals, 1916-1918 – 'A Very Much Abused Body of Men'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 64-94.

²⁵ Conditional (and absolute) exemptions were phased out through the Ministry of National Service from late 1917. For example MH 47/54/36: William Dunn, 13 July 1918, for Form 47 "KK", Ministry of National Service. The Middlesex Appeal Tribunal was asked by the Ministry of National Service why Dunn's conditional exemption had not been reviewed and the tribunal replied that he had joined up eighteen months previously.

²⁶ MH 47/93/26: Thomas Barry, 2 May 1916.

machinery'; John Goodchild assisted his ailing father by 'repairing & attending to all the machinery'.²⁷

The first 'Official List of Certified Occupations', published in February 1916, included 'Enginemen' or 'Engine Tenters' (inclusive of 'Stationary Engines') and 'Stokers' or 'Boiler Firemen'.²⁸ Both William Mason and William Peach were described by their employers as 'an Engine man and Stoker' and their initial claims to the Acton tribunal were successful on the ground that these men were in certified occupations.²⁹ Other claims included a description for the tribunal members of the machinery being tended, emphasising the power and complexity of the equipment: George Howell was the 'working partner of this medium-sized power Laundry and [I] have to stoke a 20HP locomotive boiler, look after the other machinery consisting of a Steam Engine, 4 washing machines, 2 Hydro-extractors, one calender, one shirt and collar machine, and sundries'.³⁰

In some cases, the appellant's argument for retaining the laundry's engineer included safety concerns.³¹ The owners of the Carlton House Laundry explained that Percy Denyer 'is the only capable man on the premises and is therefore in sole

²⁷ MH 47/89/16: Robert Fraser, 27 March 1916; MH 47/102/66: John Goodchild, 8 January 1917.

²⁸ MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.40 – Official List of Certified Occupations, 10 February 1916, p. 1. See 'The Laundry Workers. What are the Reserved Occupations?' *Bedford Park, Turnham Green, Acton Gazette and District Advertiser* [hereafter *Gazette*], 11 February 1916.

²⁹ MH 47/109/4: William Peach, 24 May 1916; MH 47/69/37: William Mason, 22 September 1916.

³⁰ MH 47/103/42: George Howell, 8 June 1917. Also MH 47/111/35: George Heatherton, 8 May 1916, for a description of similar machinery.

³¹ MH 47/80/71: Thomas Burgin, 18 July 1916.

charge of the Boiler, Engine, Machinery ... The only other man is totally inexperienced and has lost two fingers off his right hand'.³² William Garner's employer stated 'that owing to my health entirely failing I was compelled for the safety of my employees to employ a competent engineer'.³³ Arthur Collins insisted that 'it is obviously impossible for a business of this kind to be conducted without one capable male, in fact the Factory Department of The Home Office insist upon the machinery being in charge of someone who thoroughly understands it'.³⁴

Many of these cases demonstrate an assumption that technical competence was specifically masculine. In her study of late nineteenth century to mid twentieth century trade journals, trade histories and laundry advertisements, Arwen Mohun argues that laundrymen created a narrative in order to assert their masculinity:

confronted with the persistent notion that laundrywork was women's work, ... [men] presented their own complex arguments suggesting that while individual parts of the process might better be carried out by women, laundries as technological systems were essentially masculine; that they required masculine ways of thinking about and organising technology in order to function properly; that, in fact, women unsexed themselves by claiming more than a small degree of authority in this realm.³⁵

³² MH 47/95/92: Percy Denyer, 24 March 1917.

³³ MH 47/62/65: William Garner, 6 June 1916.

³⁴ MH 47/88/1: Arthur Collins, n.d., circa 29 November 1916.

³⁵ Arwen Mohun, 'Industrial Genders: Home/Factory', in Nina Lerman, Ruth Oldenziel and Arwen Mohun (eds.), *Gender and Technology – A Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 155. Also Mohun, 'Laundrymen Construct Their World', p. 99.

This was one of the points raised by Edith Gardiner when she applied for the exemption of her engineer, Alfred Haydon: 'women assistants have replaced men who have left the laundry to join the Army, but no woman or women could take this man's place to run the needful machinery'.³⁶ This emphasis on men's technical expertise can be found reflected in other appeals, made by both male and female employers.³⁷

Conditional certificates were issued under specific exemption clauses and Haydon's was granted on ground G: 'that the principal and usual occupation is one of those included in the list of occupations certified by Government Departments for exemption'.³⁸ Three other conditional exemptions were granted on this ground and in each case the employer had successfully demonstrated that the man had engineering skills that could not be found in the female workforce.³⁹ George Howell and Albert Johnson both claimed to be operating their own laundry's machinery due to a lack of manpower and their conditional exemptions were granted on ground A: that it was 'expedient in the national interests' for them to remain in their present occupation.⁴⁰

Thirteen of the twenty conditional certificates were issued on ground D; that the man and/or his employer would suffer serious financial, business or domestic hardship if

³⁶ MH 47/49/50: Alfred Haydon, 9 June 1916.

³⁷ MH 47/80/7: Thomas Burgin, 15 June 1916; Frank Chopping, 12 December 1916; MH 47/23/65: Charles Hooper, 29 September 1916; MH 47/109/4: William Peach, 8 June 1916.

³⁸ See Appendix One – Exemption Clauses.

³⁹ MH 47/102/66: John Goodchild; MH 47/69/37: William Mason; MH 47/109/4: William Peach.

⁴⁰ MH 47/103/42: George Howell; MH 47/62/63: Albert Johnson.

he were called up. Arguments about the impact of military conscription on both the local economy and on local businesses and families were initially met with some sympathy by the Acton tribunal. From the outset of the war the district's laundry trade had been adversely affected and this was cause for much concern in the local community.⁴¹ 'No fewer than forty' laundries had closed in the early months of 1916, due, in part, to 'the almost impossibility of securing anything like an adequate supply of labour to deal with the work that comes into the district'.⁴² The Acton Council Finance Committee considered the impact to the local revenue of laundry closures when it reported that 'the Accountant said he had received definite information of 27 laundries having closed down, and only last week one assessed at £155 closed its doors. It needed only a few like that to make a big difference'.⁴³ Six of the ten men elected to the Acton military service tribunal were also Councillors on the Acton Urban District Council [hereafter AUDC].⁴⁴ Arguments, such as those voiced by Thomas Barry's employer, that 'the calling up for military service of the essential man to the business would mean ruin & hardship to his employer & wife besides the loss of the various rates and taxes now being paid into the national purse', seem to have

⁴¹ *Gazette*, 20 August 1915.

⁴² *Express*, 17 March 1916.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See Appendix Two – The Acton Urban District Council and the Acton Tribunal. Also David Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards in the Great War – Determining the Fate of Britain's and New Zealand's Conscripts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p. 36, for examples of the ratio of councillors to 'outsiders' in some Yorkshire tribunals.

been received with understanding by the Acton tribunal in its initial assessment of applications.⁴⁵

It was Acton's military representative, John Kent, and his assistant Francis Glass, who disrupted this consensus, even though both were councillors on the AUDC; indeed, Kent was the Council Chairman from April 1916 to April 1917. Military representatives had responsibilities that went beyond local concerns. Local Government Board guidelines stipulated that the role of the military representative was 'to represent the War Office and to do everything possible to protect the military interests of the nation'.⁴⁶ Their 'special duty' was to appear before the local tribunal in any case where they considered 'an application for a certificate of exemption to be unjustified'.⁴⁷ Military representatives were advised by a committee 'composed of men of wide knowledge and business experience in the district'.⁴⁸ Most – if not all – of the laundry applications were processed under the counsel of an advisory committee.⁴⁹ One of the main laundry trade organisations – the National Federation of Laundry Associations – also proffered expert advice to the appellants, the tribunals and the military representatives, through their representative, Mr Stark.

Military representatives were the 'pivot of the machine' and Kent's duties included having a detailed knowledge of multifarious pieces of new government legislation.⁵⁰ They were entitled to apply – or even appeal – for the withdrawal, review or variation

⁴⁵ MH 47/93/26: Thomas Barry, 2 May 1916. Also MH 47/64/3: Frederick Abery, 19 February 1916; MH 47/47/33: Francis Bradley, 13 June 1916.

⁴⁶ MH 47/142/1: 'Group and Class Systems', February 1916, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁹ Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 47.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

of any certificates of exemption and, between them, Kent and Glass challenged all twenty of the conditional exemptions held by Acton's laundrymen. These challenges were made to the Acton tribunal itself and thus debated at local level initially. This further scrutiny was based on constantly evolving government legislation that reflected the ever-changing imperatives of the war.

The Battle of the Somme (1 July – 18 November 1916) marked a turning point in the First World War, particularly in relation to military manpower.⁵¹ By September 1916 the British Expeditionary Force in France was short by 80,000 men and the estimated replacements were insufficient for the army's immediate and future needs.⁵² As McDermott explains, military representatives in Northamptonshire had 'largely acquiesced' to blanket exemptions in the boot and shoe industry until October 1916, but this ceased to be the case when the nation's military priorities overtook civilian imperatives.⁵³ This change of manpower emphasis can be seen in Acton's laundry industry as well. Six of the conditional certificates issued to local laundrymen were questioned by Kent in September/October 1916.

In four of these cases he stipulated that 'if certificate be renewed the man should commence training by enrolling at once in the 4th Battn Middlx Volunteer Regiment,

⁵¹ With regard to the Battle of the Somme: for contemporary military opinion see William Philpott, *Bloody Victory – The Sacrifice on the Somme* (London: Abacus, 2016 [2009]), pp. 433-6; for contemporary public opinion and the 'tangible effects at home' see David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda – The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014 [2012]), pp. 19-21; for military and civilian manpower problems as a result of the battle see Alison Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies – The Replacement of British Infantry Casualties on the Western Front, 1916-1918* (Warwick: Helion, 2018), pp. 149-80.

⁵² Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, p. 145.

⁵³ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 68-71.

on the usual conditions'.⁵⁴ The Volunteer Training Corps [hereafter VTC] was a voluntary home defence civilian militia that was officially recognised by the War Office on 29 February 1916.⁵⁵ By applying this condition, Kent was following a recognised course of action within local tribunals that permitted the continuance of exemptions on the understanding that men would undertake basic military training with the VTC in the meantime.⁵⁶ In this way they were expected to hone their masculine military skills in readiness for duty as manpower priorities altered in favour of the fighting front.⁵⁷ For Alfred Haydon and William Peach, who both worked as engineers for female employers, this would be the only time their exemptions were challenged by a military representative.⁵⁸ John Goodchild's case, however, would be subject to further scrutiny.

⁵⁴ MH 47/49/50: Alfred Haydon; MH 47/111/35: George Heatherton; MH 47/102/66: John Goodchild – all 21 September 1916; MH 47/109/4: William Peach, 23 September 1916.

⁵⁵ John Morton Osborne, 'Defining Their Own Patriotism: British Volunteer Training Corps in the First World War', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1988), p. 71. Also Laura Ugolini, *Civvies – Middle-Class Men on the English Home Front, 1914-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) p. 163; J. Sainsbury, *Herts Volunteer Regiment* (Welwyn: Hart, 2005), p. 7.

⁵⁶ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 198-201. There is evidence that this stipulation was successfully challenged, by the advisory committees and the tribunals alike, if a man had to work excessively long hours. See for example MH 47/107/29: Edward Whitehead, 4 February 1918. Also MH 47/142/4/3: LGB Circular R.102, Section 10, 6 October 1916, p. 3.

⁵⁷ See MH 47/101/5: John Pattinger [sic], 16 January 1918, for evidence that failure to attend VTC drills could result in the loss of an exemption certificate.

⁵⁸ MH 47/49/50: Alfred Haydon and MH 47/109/4: William Peach. Also MH 47/111/35: George Heatherton, whose exemption was challenged by Kent once again on 14 February 1917 (unsuccessfully) and by the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal's

Goodchild claimed that he had left a skilled position as a milling machinist in order to manage his father's laundry business. He stressed his father's poor health and physical weakness, making it clear that 'owing to chronic rheumatism' he could not provide the business with the necessary masculine skills and strength.⁵⁹ Kent investigated further and 'when the premises were visited' found a rather different situation. 'Goodchild Junr was not at work but was at home ... with a cold. At the laundry ... both father and mother were at work and also another man.'⁶⁰ As a result the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal ordered Goodchild to apply for work under the 'Government Substitution Scheme'.⁶¹ This scheme, approved by the Manpower Distribution Board on 13 October 1916, was designed to release unskilled men from munitions work and replace them with 'men who were for the time being exempted from military service ... on condition that they found work of national importance'.⁶² Goodchild's skills were thus redeployed to a different civilian industry, rather than to the armed forces, as he took a position in a local factory 'as a Miller on Aero Engine Work' and remained exempt from military service on that condition.⁶³

Robert Fraser also worked to support an ailing father in a family-run business, but he was not a 'skilled man' and, as a result of Kent's intervention, was eventually

military representative on 12 April 1918. Heatherton remained exempt for the duration of the war on the argument that his technical skills were essential to his widowed mother's laundry business.

⁵⁹ MH 47/102/66: John Goodchild, 14 December 1916.

⁶⁰ Ibid. It is plausible that Kent was informed about Goodchild through an anonymous letter. See *Gazette*, 8 September 1916, for evidence that Kent 'often received such letters and would be glad of more'.

⁶¹ MH 47/102/66: John Goodchild, 17 February 1917.

⁶² *HMM, Volume VI, Part I*, pp. 64-5.

⁶³ MH 47/102/66: John Goodchild, 26 February 1917.

conscripted into the armed forces.⁶⁴ Arthur Collins' claim to be a boiler stoker and engine tender was dismissed when Kent promptly utilised updated government legislation to argue that 'in accordance with the new list of certified occupations R.105 this man has no longer any claim as being in a certified occupation, as the reservation in the case of stokers and boiler firemen is exclusive of men employed on engines not requiring constant attention'.⁶⁵ Collins lost his conditional exemption and was eventually conscripted into the armed forces.⁶⁶

Twelve of the twenty conditional exemptions were not challenged by Kent or Glass until February 1917 when a raft of legislation, enacted by David Lloyd George's new administration, placed the value of civilian men's work under renewed scrutiny. This included Local Government Board Circular R.113 (20 January 1917), which advised tribunals that all men who could be spared 'without serious detriment to work of

⁶⁴ MH 47/89/16: Robert Fraser, 7 December 1916. Both Goodchild and Fraser were under the age of thirty which would have been a significant factor in their cases. In October 1916 the War Office issued new instructions regarding exempted men under the age of thirty: LGB Circular R.102, which stated in general terms that 'the men who are of the highest value to the Army at the present time are young men who are fit for general service': MH 47/142/4/3: LGB Circular R.102, 6 October 1916, p. 2. This circular included a memorandum from the Manpower Distribution Board, issued on 29 September 1916 and approved by the War Committee on 3 October 1916, that it had 'under consideration further steps to secure the release [for military service] of young men': MH 47/142/4/3: LGB Circular R.102, 6 October 1916, p. 4. See MH 47/142/5/1: LGB Circular R.114 – Men Under 31 Years of Age, which was issued to tribunals on 20 January 1917. Also Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, pp. 145-7; McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 68-71.

⁶⁵ MH 47/88/1: Arthur Collins, 21 November 1916. See MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.105 – List of Certified Occupations, 20 November 1916, p. 6. Like Goodchild and Fraser, Collins was under the age of thirty.

⁶⁶ MH 47/88/1: Arthur Collins, 23 November 1916 and 1 May 1917.

essential national importance or who have not other very strong grounds for exemption should be made available for military service as soon as possible'.⁶⁷ Kent announced in the local newspaper on 9 February 1917 'that all men classified "B1," "B2," "C1" and "C2" were urgently required. He added that all such men holding certificates of exemption must expect to receive intimation at once that the Tribunal would be asked to review them'.⁶⁸ Between 14 and 23 February 1917 Acton's two local military representatives used this directive to challenge the exemptions of twelve laundrymen on the grounds 'that the War Office have issued instructions that all men are now urgently required for the Army'.⁶⁹ These twelve cases were all reconsidered by the Acton tribunal on 1 March 1917. The outcome seems to have been a compromise: six received temporary exemptions of between three to six months and the other half were obliged to take their cases to the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal within a month of the hearing.

To some extent these twelve men made similar arguments to those that had enabled them to remain, in some cases unchallenged, in their civilian employment until 1

⁶⁷ MH 47/142/5/1: LGB Circular R.113, 20 January 1917. Also Keith Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 107-9; Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, p. 151.

⁶⁸ *Express*, 9 February 1917.

⁶⁹ MH 47/64/3: Frederick Aberly; MH 47/111/35: George Heatherton; MH 47/58/17: Frank Henry and MH 47/99/15: Ernest Jackson – all 14 February 1917; MH 47/35/11: Edward Tilson, 15 February 1917; MH 47/93/22: William Coney, 19 February 1917; MH 47/93/26: Thomas Barry and MH 47/63/19: Joseph Green – both 20 February 1917; MH 47/47/33: Francis Bradley, 21 February 1917; MH 47/103/42: George Howell, 22 February 1917; MH 47/95/92: Percy Denyer and MH 47/62/63: Albert Johnson – both 23 February 1917. Heatherton's exemption was the only one that had been challenged previously.

March 1917. The majority of claims included the argument that the man was responsible for machinery, but not all of them. William Coney was employed by two unmarried sisters who ran a hand laundry. These women had convinced the Acton tribunal that a reliable and respectable man was needed beyond the laundry premises. He was 'in charge of the wash-house, does the London round, interviews customers and collects money'.⁷⁰ It was unusual for a wash-houseman to receive an extended exemption but Arthur Perry made much of the scale and supervisory responsibilities of his wash-house foreman, Francis Bradley, and the economic value of the enterprise. Perry employed '60 or 70 workpeople mostly married women of middle age'.⁷¹ Bradley's certificate was withdrawn on 1 March but Perry persuaded the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal to grant a further temporary exemption on the ground that 'the business is a substantial one contributing an appreciable amount to the National Revenue and is of National Importance not only from the nature of the work done, but from the financial point of view as well'.⁷²

Many of the appellants heard on 1 March 1917 took the opportunity to extend the argument beyond the claim that they were the only male capable of working complicated machinery: only two of these twelve men were specifically – and solely – engineers.⁷³ Eight claimed to be the manager and/or proprietor of the business and, except for two, their arguments ensured their exemption on this occasion and, indeed, for the duration of the war. The two unsuccessful men were involved in claims that were arguably weakened by the employer having a financial interest in

⁷⁰ MH 47/93/22: William Coney, 3 June 1916. For the same argument see MH 47/101/57: Charles Box, 6 March 1917.

⁷¹ MH 47/47/33: Francis Bradley, 13 June 1916.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 6 March 1917.

⁷³ MH 47/93/26: Thomas Barry; MH 47/111/35: George Heatherton.

more than one business. Percy Denyer had equipped his hand laundry with power 'just before the War. Owing to misfortune I had to sell the business in July 1916, and was retained as Manager by the purchasers'.⁷⁴ Kent argued that 'the Managing Director being interested in another laundry the work should be transferred. The Advisory Committee recommend that the application be refused'.⁷⁵ Edward Tilson's case could have been construed as profit-driven: he had, 'with the object of being as useful as possible', also taken on the management of a laundry in Kingston-on-Thames, a business that one of his partners (serving in the armed forces) held as a financial asset.⁷⁶ According to Tilson, this was 'an additional factor in the case which in my opinion strengthens my application, but which I am inclined to think weakened it in the opinion of the Local Tribunal'.⁷⁷

All conditional certificates were withdrawn on 1 March 1917 but the Acton tribunal renewed the exemptions of six laundrymen on a temporary basis.⁷⁸ One of these six men remained exempt because his father was terminally ill but two of the other five received temporary exemptions on evidence that was less than transparent.⁷⁹ Some of Acton's influential businessmen retained their certificates for the duration of the war by claiming previously undisclosed medical conditions and such a practise can

⁷⁴ MH 47/95/92: Percy Denyer, 24 March 1917.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 23 April 1917.

⁷⁶ MH 47/35/11: Edward Tilson, n.d., circa 7 March 1917.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ It was still possible for a man to get a conditional exemption after this date. Both MH 47/102/70: Frank Chopping and MH 47/92/37: Arthur Turner received conditional exemptions (for the first time) from the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal on 1 March 1917.

⁷⁹ The man whose father was terminally ill was MH 47/62/63: Albert Johnson.

be detected in the laundry trade as in other businesses.⁸⁰ Ernest Jackson and Joseph Green both managed large enterprises and tended their own machinery. They were each granted a three-month temporary exemption with leave to reapply.⁸¹

Jackson remained exempt for the duration of the war when he was 'finally rejected' due to an unnamed medical condition in November 1917.⁸² In the case of Joseph Green, the military representatives fought a long battle to procure him for the army but both the Acton tribunal and the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal dismissed their objections every time.⁸³ Green's case on 1 March 1917 was adjourned 'for one month in consequence of the illness of the man and to enable him to be examined by the Medical Board' but the nature of this medical condition is not apparent from the case papers and was never mentioned again.⁸⁴

It is plausible that some of these cases were contrived in favour of the appellant but personal connections and networks did not always guarantee exemption.⁸⁵ Frederick Abery lost his conditional exemption on 1 March 1917 and was granted temporary exemption for three months – without permission to reapply.⁸⁶ During a series of appeals he wrote directly to Herbert Nield (Conservative MP for Ealing and

⁸⁰ See chapter five for a more detailed analysis of such practices.

⁸¹ MH 47/99/15: Ernest Jackson, 1 March 1917; MH47/63/19: Joseph Green, 26 April 1917 – after an adjournment.

⁸² MH 47/99/15: Ernest Jackson, 28 November 1917. His earlier notes contain no information about his health.

⁸³ MH 47/63/19: Joseph Green.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1 March 1917.

⁸⁵ Tribunal members were warned about the importance of acting with impartiality. See MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.36 – Military Service Act, 1916, Procedure, Clause 8, 3 February 1916.

⁸⁶ MH 47/64/3: Frederick Abery, 1 March 1917.

Chairman of the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal), reminding him that they had pre-war political connections and asking 'if time permits will you be so kind as to give me advice in a moment of trial!'⁸⁷ The reply came from the secretary of the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal who informed Abery that the proper course of action would be to write to the tribunal for leave to make a further application.⁸⁸

There is evidence that men who contributed to the war effort in the local community added some weight to their argument against military service. Abery was one such man and his case is examined in further detail in the next section of this chapter. As David Monger explains, civilians were expected to match the self-sacrifices being made by servicemen.⁸⁹ Frank Henry was described in the local newspaper as a laundryman who had 'given without stint' to local 'patriotic' causes, washing without charge for charities such as the 'Blue Cross working party in Ealing'.⁹⁰ Although his conditional exemption was revoked, he was granted a six-month temporary exemption on 1 March 1917.⁹¹

Henry's statement also claimed 'an exceedingly good connection and among others I work for 16 departments of the Board of Trade and also the Ministry of Munitions'.⁹² Henry was heavily in debt and he was ultimately permitted to remain exempt on

⁸⁷ Ibid., 24 October 1917.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda*, pp. 172-3. Also Pierre Purseigle, 'Beyond and Below the Nations: Towards a Comparative Analysis of Local Communities at War', in Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle (eds.), *Uncovered Fields – Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp.110-1.

⁹⁰ *Gazette*, 11 June 1915.

⁹¹ MH 47/58/17: Frank Henry, 1 March 1917.

⁹² Ibid., 10 June 1916.

condition that he undertook work of national importance and, in addition to his laundrywork, he made munitions until the end of the war.⁹³ Henry's 'connections' presumably helped him to find suitable work of national importance and this would have been an acceptable compromise.

The conditional exemptions examined in this section were mostly based on claims made about the work being carried out in each business: the next section considers the familial element in laundry appeals.

Family Businesses

Twenty-one of the sixty-three laundry appellants used the argument that the men were essential members of family-run businesses. In contrast to the large number of exempted engineers and proprietors considered in the previous section, only five of the twenty-one family-based applications were successful. Indeed, men who ran small hand laundries in partnership with their wives and other women-folk were generally unable to convince a military service tribunal that their masculine skills and expertise were indispensable and these cases were often summarily dismissed at both local and appeal level.⁹⁴

Fourteen of these twenty-one applications claimed that aging and/or ailing parents would not manage without their sons. In nine cases it was the father who was central to the appeal's argument but, with two exceptions, the older man's needs were not considered a sufficient reason to keep the son from military service. Five appeals

⁹³ Ibid., 24 January 1918.

⁹⁴ MH 47/80/8: Francis Griffiths; MH 47/13/15: Hubert Hughes; MH 47/81/11: Edwin Jones; MH 47/78/81: John Marsh; MH 47/77/61: William Owen.

were lodged by or on behalf of mothers and the argument that women, particularly widows, could not manage without their sons did carry some weight in two cases.

Frederick Abery and his widowed mother worked together in the densely clustered district of small, working-class laundries around Bollo Bridge Road. By 1916 the labour shortage in Acton's laundry trade had become acute: many men were serving in the armed forces – and both men and women could find better-paid employment in the local munitions factories.⁹⁵ Collaboration and mutual co-operation within laundry businesses was essential to alleviate this problem and was a leading argument in Abery's case. He explained to the tribunal: 'I fully realise that as a single man passed for B.1. the circumstances have to be very exceptional indeed for me to obtain exemption, and in making this application I am particularly anxious that the Tribunal should realise that I have no desire to avoid my responsibilities'.⁹⁶ He was represented by Mr Stark of the National Federation of Laundry Associations, who stated that:

⁹⁵ *Express*, 17 March 1916. Laundrymen who found work in munitions factories included MH 47/96/121: Richard Davey; MH 47/58/17: Frank Henry; MH 47/102/94: Frederick Mills; MH 47/50/91: William Simpson. For an example of the difference in wages between laundries and munitions factories see MH 47/30/22: Frederick Thompson, 23 March 1916. Thompson claimed that he left a Mortlake laundry where he was working as a 'laundryman' for 30 shillings per week. He took up munitions work at C. A. Vandervell in Warple Way where he earned 45s per week on day work and 65s per week on night work. Also MH 47/92/37: Arthur Turner, 1 March 1916. Turner was a laundry proprietor who stated in his own appeal that he paid his (unnamed) stoker and boiler tender 34s per week. See Susan Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (Harlow: Longman, 2002), p. 29, for the point that laundresses' working conditions were often worse than those of munitions workers.

⁹⁶ MH 47/64/3: Frederick Abery, 25 May 1917.

Mr Abery is doing the heavy work for some seven or eight small laundries from several of which the necessary men have been called up. I am sure the application is a perfectly genuine one, and in spite of Abery being unmarried (he has remained single for the sake of his aged mother) I think you will be perfectly justified in granting further open exemption. If he were taken for the Army his business would have to be closed and I believe it would cause the closing of five or six of the other small places above referred to.⁹⁷

Abery stressed that he had also been doing voluntary work as a motorcycle despatch rider for the Metropolitan Police since November 1914 and he had an efficiency badge for first aid with the St. John's Ambulance Brigade. The Brigade wrote to the Acton tribunal, stating that, since Abery had joined them on 12 November 1914, he had attended sixty-one drills and thirty-nine public duties, nineteen of which were air raid calls.⁹⁸ It seems that Abery remained exempt from military service mainly because of his work in the local community.

Mrs Abery was a widow in her late sixties and her son was described as her 'main stay'.⁹⁹ This argument was also used by other widows: both Kate Buck and Louisa Heatherton professed their own physical frailty and pleaded that, without the strength

⁹⁷ MH 47/49/50: Alfred Haydon, 8 July 1918. Haydon's case was heard at the same time as that of MH 47/64/3: Frederick Abery. Many of Acton's laundry applications provide evidence that the appellants, the military representatives and the tribunal members were advised by Mr Stark. See McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 77, for an advisory committee from the boot and shoe industry set up to assist the Northamptonshire Appeal Tribunal.

⁹⁸ MH 47/64/3: Frederick Abery, 12 September 1916.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, n.d. circa June 1917.

and support of their late husbands, their sons were indispensable to the business. Heatherton initially asked for the exemption of two sons and she successfully retained George, who operated complicated laundry machinery.¹⁰⁰ His brother, Henry, was the family's collection and delivery driver and, despite Louisa providing a doctor's certificate that 'she is suffering from general and nervous debility & is in a low state of health ... [and] is unfit to carry on own business which entails much worry and anxiety', Henry was called up.¹⁰¹ Frank Buck explained that his widowed mother 'has been very ill and is now away at Bournemouth under medical advice'.¹⁰² He was the manager of the family's hand laundry and he did all the clerical and washhouse work. Buck argued that he could not leave his mother without a capable man as 'this work is of an extremely arduous character and no woman would do it'.¹⁰³ The business employed some 'ineligible' men who assisted in the washhouse and the family had also tried ex-soldiers, who had all left 'as the work was too heavy for them'.¹⁰⁴ Buck's argument in favour of his own physical strength may have worked against him as he was given a final six weeks' exemption in January 1917.¹⁰⁵

Buck had employed a solicitor but this did not lead to a successful outcome. John Rundle also paid for legal representation and, in his case, it is plausible that his counsel played a role in the success of his exemption application. He claimed to be 'an only child of a Widow ... [who] has neither brother, uncle nor male cousins. The

¹⁰⁰ MH 47/111/35: George Heatherton.

¹⁰¹ MH 47/76/95: Henry Heatherton, 30 May 1916.

¹⁰² MH 47/87/25: Frank Buck, 2 August 1916.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 13 November 1916.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 30 January 1917.

Appellant's father and sister have died of consumption'.¹⁰⁶ Like Abery, Rundle was a single man who had worked alongside his mother for several decades but, unlike Abery, he had not shown himself to be an energetic member of his local community. Rundle's application was dismissed by the Acton tribunal but subsequently received an unusual twelve-month temporary exemption on appeal, signed by Herbert Nield.¹⁰⁷ This was a generous allotment of time and it is apparent from the documents that the decision may have been reached thanks to services behind the scenes of Rundle's 'counsel'.¹⁰⁸

Rundle's exemption was probably also sanctioned because his family had a history of 'consumption' (pulmonary tuberculosis).¹⁰⁹ From March to November 1917, Nield took a leading role in revising government medical grading legislation.¹¹⁰ His interest in the matter was a direct result of his work on the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal and he

¹⁰⁶ MH 47/37/36: John Rundle, 3 March 1916.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 22 March 1916.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Also MH 47/103/42: George Howell. Men with infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, were not recruited into the army. See MH 47/142/1: 'Registration and Recruiting', p. 60. If a man came from a family with a history of tuberculosis he would be treated with caution even if he had no symptoms. See MH 47/22/46: Henry Abell, 19 June 1916 and 6 July 1916.

¹¹⁰ MH 47/142/5/2: National Service Instruction No. 13, 1917 – Medical Grades of the National Service Medical Boards, 17 November 1917. A useful précis of Nield's efforts to restructure the medical grading system can be found in Peter Harris, "Structures, Experiences and Discourses": The Middlesex Military Service Tribunals and Their Appellants, 1916-1918' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, De Montfort University, 2018), pp. 293-307. Also Grieves, *Politics of Manpower*, pp. 130-3; Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985), pp. 50-64.

argued that it was not in the nation's interests to be 'saddled with useless soldiers'.¹¹¹ Medical examinations had been introduced under the Derby Scheme in late 1915 and Robert Cox had been 'rejected twice' when he tried to attest.¹¹² He remained exempt from military service until mid-1917 but was medically re-examined – probably under the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act, 1917 – and 'passed B.2.' which, in his opinion, was 'a very doubtful classification'.¹¹³ The Acton tribunal dismissed the application but Cox remained exempt through repeated successful applications to the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal.¹¹⁴

Cox's appeals were also granted, in part, because his five brothers were all serving – either in the armed forces or munitions – and he was the only man left to help his father, who 'would not be able to carry on through ill-health and age'.¹¹⁵ Nine of the men working in family-run laundries argued that their father was too old and/or too ill to cope without their services, but this argument seems to have carried only limited weight. Cox was forty-one years old when he made his first application and his age would have been another factor that justified his continued exemption. Young men assisting relatively able-bodied fathers did not receive much sympathy from the tribunals and, although mechanised establishments might retain their sons for a

¹¹¹ *Gazette*, 17 November 1916.

¹¹² MH 47/110/22: Robert Cox, 14 June 1917. Recruiting Medical Boards were established at each Infantry Regimental Depot and at the Central Recruiting Office in each recruiting area. See Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, p. 105.

¹¹³ MH 47/110/22: Robert Cox, 10 October 1917. See MH 47/142/2: Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act, 1917.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 July 1917, 7 November 1917 and 27 June 1918.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14 June 1917.

limited period of time, these exemptions were often short-term.¹¹⁶ Only exceptionally difficult family and work circumstances led to exemption. Albert Johnson's father was terminally ill and, although only twenty-six years of age, Johnson was one of the men who received a conditional exemption from the Acton tribunal.¹¹⁷ He was the only man, working as an engineer and manager, in a laundry 'where 16 persons are employed'.¹¹⁸ Despite his youth, Johnson had heavy domestic responsibilities: his three elder brothers were serving in the armed forces (one had been killed), he had a wife and infant child and he supported his parents and six younger siblings. He remained at home to run the family laundry for the duration of the war. His father died of cancer in June 1918.

Johnson's case was one of heavy domestic responsibilities, warranting a conditional exemption from the Acton tribunal and, when challenged by the military representative, receiving continued lenience from the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal. Both Robert Fraser and John Goodchild had also been granted conditional exemptions from the Acton tribunal and, like Johnson, both were young men claiming to support their fathers. In these cases, neither parent nor son were able to argue successfully that running a family laundry business on behalf of an ailing father was a valuable use of the nation's manpower.¹¹⁹ Goodchild was sent to munitions work as a skilled man, Fraser was conscripted into the army and both fathers were expected to manage without their sons. Fraser's brother wrote to the

¹¹⁶ MH 47/78/32: Owen James; MH 47/83/31: Charles Maile; MH 47/81/82: Henry Mills; MH 47/77/99: Percival Pullen.

¹¹⁷ MH 47/62/63: Albert Johnson, 7 and 15 June 1916.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5 March 1917.

¹¹⁹ Also MH 47/83/31: Charles Maile; MH 47/81/82: Henry Mills; MH 47/77/99: Percival Pullen.

tribunal from an army camp, complaining that: 'my Father is too old to carry on the business alone, and is handicapped greatly by ill-health ... Many fellows, when they enlisted were assured that their positions would be kept open, should they return'.¹²⁰ This argument was not sufficient justification to keep a fit young man out of the armed forces and older men were expected to remain economically productive.

There is evidence that, prior to conscription, family members decided between them which of their men could be spared for military service from within the domestic unit. Arthur Johnson and his two brothers had taken over the family laundry when their father retired and one of the siblings 'joined the army thinking that I [Arthur] should be allowed to carry on the business during his absence'.¹²¹ The laundry employed twenty-two women and Arthur worked in the washhouse and tended the machinery while a third brother, who suffered from heart disease, took a sedentary clerical role within the operation. They were apparently the only men left in 'an old established family business (of over 50 years) and to abandon it would work great hardship upon all concerned, including my aged parents'.¹²² Kent assented to a re-application 'as the man appears to be in a certified occupation', but both the Acton tribunal and the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal were unwilling to grant more than a few weeks' exemption.¹²³ There is no information about the father's physical health but the tribunals may have expected him to return from retirement and retake an active role in the family business.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ MH 47/89/16: Robert Fraser, 8 July 1916.

¹²¹ MH 47/31/54: Arthur Johnson, 7 February 1917.

¹²² Ibid., 16 June 1916.

¹²³ Ibid., 4 and 11 January 1917 and 5 February 1917.

¹²⁴ See McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 132.

Johnson's brother may also have been expected to take on a more active role in the business despite his professed health problems. Men who worked with – or employed – their brothers were subject to particular scrutiny. Albert Watters ran a laundry of a similar size to Johnson: 'the staff numbers about 30 of whom only 3 are male assistants viz. one aged 65, one (a cripple; attested) 31, and a boy. Applicant's Father was formerly in the business but is now too old (66) and infirm to help'.¹²⁵ Albert had taken on his twenty-eight-year-old brother to run a collection and delivery service. William Watters 'had been rejected 3 times' and it was claimed that he had been employed 'to take the place of a former employee who had broken down in health'.¹²⁶ Kent appealed, demanding that the two cases be heard together, but the appeal was withdrawn when the younger man 'joined up'.¹²⁷

On the whole, appeals originating from small family businesses were unsuccessful and the relatives concerned – with the partial exception of (some) widowed mothers – were expected to adapt to suit the wartime circumstances. The final section of this chapter considers claims made by individuals whose appeals did not centre on their membership of a family unit.

Employers

This section explores twenty-two claims made by owners of laundries for themselves and/or for employees who were not connected to them by family ties. The majority of these laundries were of industrial size, employing many people, utilising factory-

¹²⁵ MH 47/107/59: Albert Watters, 11 December 1916.

¹²⁶ MH 47/97/43: William Watters, 19 June 1917.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 25 July 1917.

scale machinery. Nine of these twenty-two employers lodged repeated applications that remained successful for the duration of the war.

Gail Braybon explains that pre-war British society was engaged in ‘wide-ranging discussions’ about the nature of women’s work that was both ‘mature and detailed by the outbreak of the war’.¹²⁸ As this chapter’s first section has shown, the manpower crisis challenged – although it did not destroy – the long-established gender divide in Acton’s laundries. Laundrymen were valued for their competence and physical strength and this was presumed to be specifically masculine. However, the convention that women were helpless without masculine muscle-power was sometimes questioned by the tribunals. Charles Page ‘was appealed for by his employer ... who argued that women could not carry the heavy baskets of linen in and out of houses, but the Chairman (Ald. Regester) said he had women in his employ carrying sacks of flour’.¹²⁹ Edward Tilson’s appeal against conscription mentioned that ‘the work in the Wash-house previously done by two men is being undertaken by a woman’ and it must be assumed that this was not an isolated case.¹³⁰ Applications that emphasised a man’s strength could simply demonstrate to tribunals his fitness for military service, but men who drove the laundry’s horse-drawn or motor van sometimes received sympathy from the tribunals, particularly in

¹²⁸ Gail Braybon, ‘Winners or Losers: Women’s Role in the War Story’, in Braybon (ed.), *Evidence, History and the Great War*, p. 91. See Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls – Women Workers in World War 1* (London: Tauris, 2000 [1998]), pp. 11-2, for the same point.

¹²⁹ *Gazette*, 15 December 1916. See McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 140, for an unsuccessful argument that women could not lift sacks of flour and pp. 88-9, for debates regarding women’s physical strength within the boot and shoe industry in Northamptonshire. Also Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards*, pp. 67-8.

¹³⁰ MH 47/35/11: Edward Tilson, 20 June 1916.

view of press complaints about the purported incompetence of female delivery drivers.¹³¹ Added to this was a warning from the trade magazine *Power Laundry* about laundry thefts: 'knowing that, as a result of the calling up of the able-bodied male population to the colours, vans are often in charge of youths or women, the professional van thief is unusually active'.¹³²

As the first section of this chapter has shown, arguments put forward for the exemption of the laundry engineer of large establishments were received with some approbation by the military service tribunals. Open demonstrations of patriotism were important and, if the employer could argue that he 'employ[ed] no man of military age who has not offered himself under Lord Derby's scheme', this would perhaps augment the argument in favour of his engineer.¹³³ Female employers often received a more favourable outcome than their male counterparts when applying for their engineers because of a widely-held belief that women were incapable of understanding technical equipment. Edith Gardiner used this argument when applying for Alfred Haydon.¹³⁴

Haydon's case was heard alongside that of Charles Tadd, who was employed by one Mr Salt at the Steamdale Laundry as his engineer.¹³⁵ It is clear from the descriptions of the machinery that Gardiner and Salt ran laundries of a similar capacity and technical specification. Salt implied that he was capable of taking on Tadd's responsibilities but argued that he did not have the time, whereas Gardiner

¹³¹ *Express*, 29 September 1916.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 4 August 1916.

¹³³ MH 47/99/16: Archibald Wiseman, 23 February 1916. See Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda*, pp. 169-197, for his chapter 'Patriotisms of Duty'.

¹³⁴ MH 47/49/50: Alfred Haydon, 9 June 1916.

¹³⁵ MH 47/100/80: Charles Tadd, 4 April 1918.

stated explicitly that no woman could possibly perform such tasks. It appears that the military service tribunals agreed with the latter rather than the former: Tadd was conscripted in April 1918 but Haydon's call-up in September 1918 was circumvented at the last minute by the publication of a new list of certified occupations, in which laundry work was included for the first time.¹³⁶ These two cases were heard alongside that of William Peach, who was the engineer for a laundry that was overseen by a 'manageress' and he remained exempt on the argument that 'the work is not suitable for a woman'.¹³⁷

There is evidence that when laundries collaborated in matters of manpower this led to the withdrawal of some appeals. Jessie Duff applied for Thomas Burgin by claiming that 'it is essential for the safety of life and property that a competent man should be in charge of the machinery especially as the factory is in charge of a manageress'.¹³⁸ She used a similar argument in her application for her carman, emphasising that her gender was 'an additional reason for one responsible male being retained on the outside staff'.¹³⁹ Duff withdrew her appeal for Burgin when she was 'able to secure the services of another [un-named] washhouse'.¹⁴⁰ Rosa Ricardo applied for her foreman on the ground that none of her other men 'know anything about the Boiler and it would be quite unsafe for them to be left in charge of it'.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ MH 47/142/3: LGB Circular R.136 – (Revised) List of Certified Occupations, 28 September 1918, p. 28.

¹³⁷ MH 47/109/4: William Peach, 9 August 1918.

¹³⁸ MH 47/80/71: Thomas Burgin, 18 July 1916.

¹³⁹ MH 47/101/57: Charles Box, 6 March 1917. Also MH 47/92/9: Frederick Hurrell, 13 January 1917.

¹⁴⁰ MH 47/80/71: Thomas Burgin, 4 September 1916.

¹⁴¹ MH 47/23/65: Charles Hooper, 29 September 1916.

The appeal tribunal refused exemption for her 'one reliable man' but her laundry was one of the businesses that was assisted by Frederick Aberly, previously mentioned.¹⁴²

Duff managed to retain the services of her carman and this was probably because she was practical enough to realise that she could not keep her engineer as well. Female employers who applied could be successful in keeping the one employee least likely to become an efficient soldier; indeed, in some cases such men had already replaced a man deemed fit for military service. Mrs Gould successfully argued for the continued exemption of her carman who had been 'rejected three times on account of his hearing. I therefore thought I was quite safe in employing him and thereby freeing his brother (who was also employed by me) to join His Majesty's Forces'.¹⁴³ Gould also employed John Pottinger, who 'has now taken the whole responsibility of the running of my plant of machinery, also is now doing the whole of the Washhouse Work single handed'.¹⁴⁴ Like Holmes, Pottinger had been medically rejected but 'was passed for B1 on May 14th'.¹⁴⁵ Kent opposed any further exemption 'in view of the man's age and medical category', adding that 'he has not carried out the Volunteer drills as ordered by the Tribunal'.¹⁴⁶ In both cases, Gould emphasised that her husband was away serving as a soldier but she was only able to keep Holmes.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Ibid. See MH 47/64/3: Frederick Aberly, 17 June 1917.

¹⁴³ MH 47/110/2: William Holmes, 11 June 1917.

¹⁴⁴ MH 47/101/5: John Pattinger [sic], 28 August 1917.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 4 June 1917.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 16 January 1918.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 18 December [sic – January] 1918.

Co-operation among laundries was not confined to businesses run by women and, according to local newspaper comment, ‘this is a time when even competitive tradesmen can afford to sink their petty jealousies in their mutual effort to protect the trade’.¹⁴⁸ John Horne describes the ‘social morality of wartime’ and the notions of self-sacrifice and moral economy that became particularly prevalent from the middle period of the war onwards.¹⁴⁹ Employers were expected to make sacrifices and co-operate with others in their community and a *Gazette* report from one of the sessions of the Acton tribunal indicates that ‘a young man who was doing the washhouse work of his own business was co-operating with another laundryman, and doing his washhouse work whilst the other man did his collecting and delivering’.¹⁵⁰ However, according to the *Power Laundry* magazine, male laundry employers were less inclined to amalgamate than their female counterparts; the principal objection being ‘the obstinate individualism and suspicion of his neighbour which is characteristic of so many members of the industry’.¹⁵¹ William Garner was engaged by George Kirk, a man whose health was failing and who had felt ‘compelled for the safety of my employees to employ a competent engineer’.¹⁵² Under specific instruction from the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal, Kirk was ‘lending Garner to my competitors for engineering repairs. He has done work of this kind not only during my time, but also

¹⁴⁸ *Gazette*, 20 August 1915.

¹⁴⁹ John Horne, ‘Introduction’, in John Horne (ed.), *State, Society and Mobilisation in Europe During the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 11. Also John Horne, ‘Social Identity in War: France, 1914-1918’, in T. G. Fraser and Keith Jeffery (eds.), *Men, Women and War* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1999 [1993]), pp. 119-135.

¹⁵⁰ *Gazette*, 2 June 1916.

¹⁵¹ *Express*, 19 May 1916.

¹⁵² MH 47/62/65: William Garner, 6 June 1916.

in the evenings and on Sundays'.¹⁵³ He was successful in retaining Garner for the duration of the war, as was William Mason's employer who claimed that, as an engineer, Mason was 'assisting twenty other laundries to carry on'.¹⁵⁴ Demonstrating a willingness to collaborate was perhaps the best way for businessmen to retain their men.

That said, co-operation between laundries could be counter-productive if there was more than one male of military age in a consortium. In such cases it was the man who was seen as least likely to become an efficient soldier who was allowed to remain on the home front, especially if he had invested money in the business. Edward Turner was the proprietor of the Constant Hand Laundry in which 'the combined savings of my father and myself are invested'.¹⁵⁵ They had closed this laundry sometime before June 1917 and Turner moved his business into the Steamdale Laundry – run by Mr Salt. In 1915 Salt had secured the engineering skills of Charles Tadd who was called up in April 1918.¹⁵⁶ Turner had been 'rejected as unfit for any form of military service' and he may have joined forces with Salt for reasons of mutual necessity and/or opportunism.¹⁵⁷ Turner was presumably making a healthy-enough profit as, 'naturally thinking I should not be called upon, I bought, with my savings, the house known as 39, Whitehall Gardens, Acton Hill, on which

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ MH 47/69/37: William Mason, 29 November 1917.

¹⁵⁵ MH 47/97/44: Edward Turner, 27 January 1916.

¹⁵⁶ MH 47/100/80: Charles Tadd, 1 April 1918.

¹⁵⁷ MH 47/97/44: Edward Turner, 18 June 1917.

there is a mortgage of £300'.¹⁵⁸ Although the consortium lost Tadd to military service, there is no evidence that Turner was called up for military service.

Pierre Purseigle explains that 'the proximity of the dominant local activities to the war economy' had a 'significant impact on local well-being, and subsequently on the communities' involvement'.¹⁵⁹ However, evidence from the MH 47 archive suggests that this 'local well-being' was not a community-wide experience in Acton. Although the war created a booming trade in specialist laundry work, this point was used with varying results in attempts to retain the men who ensured its smooth operation.¹⁶⁰ The argument was on occasion augmented by the claim that the owner was a man with other war-time responsibilities, but this was not successful if the proprietor was relatively fit. Charles Pratt applied for exemption for his carman. His laundry was 'doing a fair quantity of war work including hospital work ... besides doing the washing for the Munition factory at Perivale, Park Royal'.¹⁶¹ Pratt was obliged to do some of the delivery work himself and he protested that this was not a valuable use of his time:

One other point I could emphasise, viz., I am on the Advisory Committee for this district, and giving a fair amount of my time to its duties, besides

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Purseigle, 'Beyond and Below the Nations', p. 112. Also McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 64-94.

¹⁶⁰ See for example MH 47/99/15: Ernest Jackson. Jackson was granted exemption on medical grounds on 28 November 1917 and remained exempt from military service. Also George Kirk who applied for both MH 47/31/45: John Edwards and MH 47/62/65: William Garner with this argument. He kept Garner for the duration of the war but Edwards was given a final three weeks' exemption on 28 March 1917.

¹⁶¹ MH 47/21/43: Albert Martin, 18 September 1916.

being a N.C.O. of the transport section of the M.V.R. and if I have to give up more of my time to the driving of my vans, I shall have to relinquish all my public work.¹⁶²

George Pratt (who may have been related to Charles Pratt above) appealed for his son by arguing that ‘it would be a very serious matter for me if my boy is called up’.¹⁶³ Like Charles Pratt, he emphasised his firm’s war work, stating that they ‘are now engaged on Army and Government Contract Work, having contracts with the Royal Horse Artillery and the Public Trustee Office – besides the washing for practically the whole of the Officers at Regents Park Barracks’.¹⁶⁴ Despite such arguments, both Charles and George Pratt – presumably fit men themselves – were required to manage without the services of the men for whom they applied.¹⁶⁵

A number of men based their applications for exemption on the argument that they had recently invested in a local laundry business. Despite tribunals’ professed sympathy for one-man businesses, such claims risked being seen as profiteering – or speculating – rather than as making a contribution to the wartime economy.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Ibid., 18 September 1916. For further detail about the Motor Volunteers – to which Pratt was referring (M. V. R.) – see chapter two.

¹⁶³ MH 47/89/7: Sydney Pratt, 15 May 1916.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Also MH 47/87/100: Charles Page.

¹⁶⁶ See Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 136-42 and 197-9, for the growing and increasingly negative rhetoric connected to ‘profiteers’. Also Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda*, p. 137, for the explanation that ‘profiteers’ were seen as criminals, engaging in activities that were ‘corrosive of community solidarity’; John Horne, ‘Social Identity in War’, p. 129, for the ‘serious disaggregation of agreed norms for civilian behaviour’ represented by the ‘speculator’.

Kent assiduously investigated such claims in his role as military representative.¹⁶⁷ Edward James was a married man with eight children. He had bought his laundry business in January 1915 for the sum of £200 'and of this price about £75 still remains owing'.¹⁶⁸ Kent successfully opposed the application, stating that James 'purchased it from Mrs Ferman who is still alive and would retake possession if he failed to keep up his instalments of the purchase money. His father is a Laundry Proprietor and might be able to manage both Laundries'.¹⁶⁹ Despite hiring a solicitor and pleading that 'I and my family are entirely dependent upon my laundry business for our support', James was called up.¹⁷⁰

A number of applications for exemption from military service included the claim that the man was doing war work and some laundry businesses were adapted, through the building of extensions and/or the installation of new machinery, in order to undertake lucrative hospital or military work. John Bailey bought the Alps Laundry from his mother-in-law in June 1916 and had increased his weekly turnover from £28 to £45 by 'doing hospital work which will probably last till the end of the war'.¹⁷¹ He claimed to be financially liable for the lease of other premises that were 'not sufficiently large to adequately meet these requirements'.¹⁷² As a result, he had invested £1000 in the new building (in which he had installed new plant) and he still owed nearly £500 to his joint creditors. He appealed to a 'sense of fairness that I may be exempted owing to the exclusive and useful work I am performing in a

¹⁶⁷ For example see MH 47/09/8: Herbert Lockie, 26 July 1916.

¹⁶⁸ MH 47/31/52: Edward James, 27 December 1916.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 9 January 1917.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 15 January 1917.

¹⁷¹ MH 47/32/9: John Bailey, 14 June 1916.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

civilian capacity'.¹⁷³ Kent successfully opposed his application, stating that 'the man was an Auctioneer's Porter at date of registration', thus implying that profit rather than 'usefulness' had prompted Bailey's entry into the laundry trade.¹⁷⁴

The war created business opportunities for laundrymen who were willing to take a financial risk, subsequently enabling such entrepreneurs and speculators to argue (often unsuccessfully) that they were of more value to the country on the home front than in the armed forces. The Sanitary Companies of the Royal Army Medical Corps were tasked with army hygiene: 'cleanliness not only improves the morale of an army, but reduces sick returns, and this being so the importance of the laundry at the front cannot be exaggerated.'¹⁷⁵ The home training camps were equally as insistent on high standards of cleanliness and this put extra pressure on a local laundry industry that had lost a significant proportion of its original male workforce. Robert Plowman was already running the Glenfield Laundry at 223 and 225 Acton Lane at the time of his first application and he opened the West London Service Laundry – 'the only Laundries in London solely devoted to Military Work' – two doors up at 229.¹⁷⁶ He claimed to:

hold 4 Army Contracts for Washing (+ fumigating where necessary) (4/7 Middlesex Regt. Purfleet – 4/8 Middlesex Regt, Aveley – 64 Battalion C.E.F. Shorncliffe 87 Battalion C.E.F Bramshott) representing washing for about 5000 troops. My Military Laundry is on the Official lists of Army

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 8 January 1917.

¹⁷⁵ Captain Dore, 'Baths and Laundries' in *The Yellow Band: The Journal of the 1st London (City of London) Sanitary Company, RAMC (T)*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1916), p. 7.

¹⁷⁶ MH 47/94/59: Robert Plowman, 3 February 1916.

Contractors and I have just tendered for camp work @ Tring and Aylesbury.¹⁷⁷

He explained that 'the Premises at 229 Acton Lane had been vacant over 2 years, as I hold a lease I had to pay rent £65 p.a. One can hardly be blamed when opportunity came to open these premises'.¹⁷⁸ He claimed to have been urged by the Secretary of the Laundries Association to 'enlarge the scope of my military business owing to the difficulties experienced ... by commanding officers to get the work satisfactorily done'.¹⁷⁹ Plowman received little sympathy from Kent, who argued that what he had presented as entrepreneurship was, in fact, an attempt to evade military service: 'since the Acton Tribunal granted him three months exemption ... he has opened another business, put on a traveller, secured new trade, got married and taken steps generally to strengthen his case for exemption rather than endeavouring to make arrangements so that he could take up military service'.¹⁸⁰ Despite his effort and enterprise, Plowman ultimately over-stretched his resources in very uncertain times and declared himself bankrupt early in 1917.¹⁸¹

Plowman's youth and marital status would have been a factor in the failure of his appeal for exemption. Although he was called up, one of his employees remained exempt on medical grounds. The West London Service Laundry had been managed on Plowman's behalf by Harry Heather 'since September 1914'.¹⁸² Heather was 'a married man with four young children, domestic necessity of an urgent nature would

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 15 May 1916.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 2 June 1916.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 14 June 1916.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 4 March 1917.

¹⁸² MH 47/78/92: Harry Heather, n.d., circa 29 June 1916.

arise [if he were to be called up], as he has only lately moved to Acton in order to carry out the work more effectively and has two houses on his hands in addition to heavy financial debts'.¹⁸³ Heather claimed that he was contracted by the Secretary of State for War and that, although he had tried to enlist on several occasions since August 1914, he had been repeatedly:

sent back because I was engaged on Military work ... [That] on three occasions I have answered the call of the Essex Territorial Force Association and each time I have been told to go on with my work as it was essential, that the Recruiting Officer who attested me and the Secretary of the Recruiting Committee each told me I was 'starred' as being in 'essential' work.¹⁸⁴

As mentioned above, tribunals appear to have used ground E (the health clause) to ensure permanent exemption from military service for some men of influence and there is evidence that Heather was a beneficiary of such practice. He had been a political agent – not a laundryman – in 1911 and, although no mention of his health was made in his tribunal applications before mid-1916, he was 'for the first time in my life ... rejected on medical grounds as unfit'.¹⁸⁵ This exemption remained unchallenged for the duration of the war.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 7 June 1916.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 22 July 1916. See also 1911 Census: Harry Heather.

¹⁸⁶ The topic of exemptions granted on medical grounds to men of wealth and influence is discussed in further detail in chapter five.

Conclusion

Of the sixty-three laundrymen whose applications for exemption appear in the MH 47 archive, most of the twenty-three who remained exempt from military service were the engineers and/or the owners or managers of large industrial laundries. These were businesses that could demonstrate to the local and appeal military service tribunals that they were doing work of local and national importance and/or were contributing significant amounts of revenue to the local authorities, playing a role in ensuring the district's – and consequently the nation's – economic and commercial stability.

The laundry trade was a predominantly female environment with specific roles for men, based on assumptions that women did not have the required physical strength or technical expertise that the jobs required. Perhaps ironically, appellants who stressed that they should be exempted from military service because they possessed masculine qualities that had been valued by the pre-war laundry trade – such as physical strength or knowledge of horses and motor vehicles – only increased their chances of being conscripted into an army that also desperately needed those attributes.

That said, if a laundryman had engineering skills he might be considered to be indispensable to the home front on the argument that a laundrywoman would be incapable of assuming responsibility for perplexing and potentially dangerous machinery. Male proprietors were deemed to be more capable of assuming the role of engineer in their establishment than their female counterparts; indeed, in many cases, they were required to do so. Men who were able to retain the services of an

engineer were expected to demonstrate their patriotic duty and self-sacrifice by lending their employee out to other businesses at their own expense.

The authorities were concerned about the number of laundry closures in the district but business failures were sometimes overlooked if the resultant closure did not have much impact beyond those employed therein. Family businesses were relatively small and, as such, were regarded as of lesser importance to the local economy than the industrial-sized laundries. Men who assisted their wives in small hand laundries were usually unsuccessful in their claims for exemption and families were expected to find resources among their members to keep the business going. Men who did remain exempt from within family units were those who could demonstrate that they had exceptional domestic difficulties and/or that they were especially active in work of a voluntary, patriotic and philanthropic nature in the local community.

Although widowed mothers could receive a favourable outcome for their sons, this was rarely the crux of the matter. Most of the claims from family-run businesses sought to keep a younger man to help his aging father (or brother) – especially if there was machinery to tend. If the father was relatively young or fit he would be very unlikely to keep his son. In addition, as the war escalated and the country's manpower crisis worsened, older and unfit men were increasingly expected to manage without young and healthy male employees.

The growing demand for military and hospital washing put additional pressure on a laundry trade that was depleted of both resources and personnel. Contributions to the local economy were important and entrepreneurship was not entirely disapproved of. However, collaboration between laundries was encouraged and all

business ventures – both old and new – were the subject of close scrutiny. If claimants were suspected of ‘profiteering’ or seeking to avoid military service, they received little sympathy from the tribunals. At the same time, there is evidence to suggest that businessmen with influence were granted exemptions on the basis of previously undisclosed medical conditions and remained exempt from military service for the duration of the war – a practice that will be explored further in chapter five.

Chapter Two – Taxi-Cab Owner-Drivers

Introduction

This chapter examines the cases of forty Acton taxi-cab drivers who appealed for exemption from military service. The car industry began to develop in British cities in the last decade of the nineteenth century and in London it was largely established in vacant sites to the west and south-west of the city.¹ In 1905 there were 16,000 motor-cars on the roads of Britain; this had increased to 23,000 by 1906 and by 1914 there were nearly 140,000.² The first petrol-powered cab was introduced in London in 1903, at which time there were 11,404 horse-drawn cabs on the streets of the capital.³ Within ten years these figures had altered dramatically, with 8,397 motor-cabs competing with the remaining 1,933 horse-drawn cabs for trade.⁴ A 1907 Act of Parliament required all motorised cabs to have a taximeter fitted, which introduced the expression 'taxi-cab'.⁵ The London Hackney Carriages Act of 1843 gave the Metropolitan Police overall control, through the Public Carriage Office, of issuing licenses to cab drivers. Before the First World War all licensed London taxi-cab

¹ Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century – A City and its People* (London: Vintage, 2008), p. 182; Michael Ball and David Sunderland, *An Economic History of London, 1800-1914* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 315.

² Sean O'Connell, *The Car in British Society – Class, Gender and Motoring 1896-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 15; William Plowden, *The Motor Car and Politics 1896-1970* (London: Bodley Head, 1971), pp. 14, 60 and 107.

³ Philip Warren and Malcolm Linksey, *Taxicabs – A Photographic History* (London: Almark, 1976), p. 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24. This expression will be used in this chapter.

drivers were male.⁶ In 1914 there were a total of 7746 taxi-cab licenses in London but this had decreased to 5813 by the end of January 1916.⁷

Kelly's Directory of 1911 details at least twenty-two motor garages and businesses in Acton, Chiswick and Ealing.⁸ Two of the largest motor manufacturing firms in this region were in Acton, situated on adjacent plots along Acton Vale. David Napier and Son [hereafter Napier] designed and built motor-cars from a factory that started production in Stanley Gardens from 1902/3 and was employing over 1000 people on an eight-acre site by 1906.⁹ A year later it had expanded again and was building over 100 motor-cars a year and employing 1,200 people.¹⁰ By 1913 the company were producing 700 motor-cars a year and supplying vehicles to the London taxi-cab trade.¹¹ This was a specialised branch of the car manufacturing industry, as these

⁶ The first London taxi-cab license to be issued to a woman was granted in October 1917. See *The Times*, 24 October 1917.

⁷ 'The Wheels of Industry' in *Commercial Motor*, vol. XXII, no. 572, 24 February 1916, p. 517. Available from <http://archive.commercialmotor.com> [Accessed 13 February 2018].

⁸ *Kelly's Directory – Ealing, Acton, Hanwell, Brentford, Gunnersbury and Chiswick, for 1911*. University of Leicester, Special Collections Online. Available from <http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/ref/collection/p16445coll4/id/167088> [Accessed 20 April 2018].

⁹ Diane Bolton, Patricia Croot and M. Hicks, 'Acton: Growth', in T. F. T. Baker and C. R. Elrington (eds.), *A History of the County of Middlesex, Volume 7, Acton, Chiswick, Ealing and Brentford, West Twyford, Willesden* (London: Victoria County History, 1982), pp. 23-30. Also 'Acton's Industry', Acton History Group. Available from www.actonhistory.co.uk/acton/page10.html [Accessed 31 January 2017].

¹⁰ 'D. Napier and Son', Grace's Guide to British Industrial History. Available from www.gracesguide.co.uk/Napier [Accessed 31 January 2017].

¹¹ *Ibid.*

vehicles were required to meet the strict 'Conditions of Fitness' laid down by the Public Carriage Office in 1906.¹²

The other large Acton Vale motor manufacturing company was W. and G. du Cros [hereafter du Cros], which occupied a huge garage, built in 1908 on the site of Essex Park Farm, with an imposing west-facing entrance on what would become Warple Way. These premises extended down to Valetta Road in the south, across to Larden Road in the east and up to Acton Vale in the north, from which there was a service entrance named Du Cros Road. This garage had vast machine and paint shops, engine-fitting and body-building facilities, and stock and workshops for the maintenance of a large fleet of vehicles. They stored over 130,000 gallons of petrol and had wells that could provide 150,000 gallons of water a day for vehicle washing. By early 1914 this Acton garage was employing over 3000 people, many of whom were making chassis and assembling bodies for light vans that were either sold or offered for hire.¹³ The company also ran a large fleet of taxi-cabs; one of the most successful of these public vehicles to ply for trade in London before the First World War was built by Napier and operated by du Cros.¹⁴

In November 1908 it was announced that du Cros had 'instituted a service of motor cabs of the most modern and approved design'.¹⁵ The garage had a fleet of 1000

¹² Philip Warren, *The History of the London Cab Trade: From 1600 to the Present Day* (London: Taxi Trade Promotions, 1995), pp. 126-7.

¹³ Ted Gaffney, 'The W & G Legend', in Nick Baldwin (ed.), *Vintage Lorry Annual: Number 1* (London: Marshall, Harris and Baldwin, 1979), no pagination.

¹⁴ Warren and Linksey, *Taxicabs*, p. 37.

¹⁵ *Middlesex and Surrey Express*, *West Middlesex Herald*, and *Southall Guardian*, 11 November 1908. Available from www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk [Accessed 21 March 2018].

motor-cabs and were employing 600 taxi-cab drivers by 1912.¹⁶ The du Cros men were required to wear a uniform and ‘the livery of the W & G du Cros cabs, with their yellow bonnets and “W & G” on the radiator, became widely recognised and their drivers were noted for their courteous behaviour’.¹⁷ Some of these men would have been ‘company drivers’: earning wages, tips and twenty-five per cent of their taxi-meter fare driving a du Cros fleet vehicle.¹⁸ Other men were ‘owner-drivers’: buying their taxi-cabs from du Cros on a hire purchase system and working for the company on a self-employed basis. Thirty-eight of the forty taxi-cab drivers considered in this chapter were owner-drivers.¹⁹ At least twenty-four of the owner-drivers worked for du Cros.²⁰ The other men either drove taxi-cabs for other local garages or were self-

¹⁶ Warren, *London Cab Trade*, p. 134.

¹⁷ Malcolm Bobbitt, *Taxi!: The Story of the London Taxicab* (Dorchester: Veloce, 2002 [1998]), p. 21. See Constance Peel, *How We Lived Then – A Sketch of Social and Domestic Life in England During the War* (London: Bodley Head, 1929), pp. 123 and 169, for less favourable comments about London’s taxi-cab drivers.

¹⁸ Gaffney, ‘The W & G Legend’, no pagination.

¹⁹ There is no evidence that either Albert Fuller or William Rhoades were owner-drivers. See The National Archives, Kew [hereafter TNA]: MH – Records Created or Inherited by the Ministry of Health and Successors, Local Government Boards and Related Bodies: MH 47 – Central Military Service Tribunal and Middlesex Appeal Tribunal - Minutes and Papers [hereafter MH 47]: MH 47/57/49: Albert Fuller; MH 47/89/62: William Rhoades.

²⁰ Although the evidence in their appeal documents is inconclusive, a further four very likely worked for du Cros. See MH 47/23/93: Frederick Allen; MH 47/22/86: John Ballard; MH 47/31/41: James Keeler; MH 47/87/48: Charles Wilde.

employed owner-drivers. As shown in Figure 2.1 below, many of these men were buying their vehicles on a hire purchase agreement.²¹

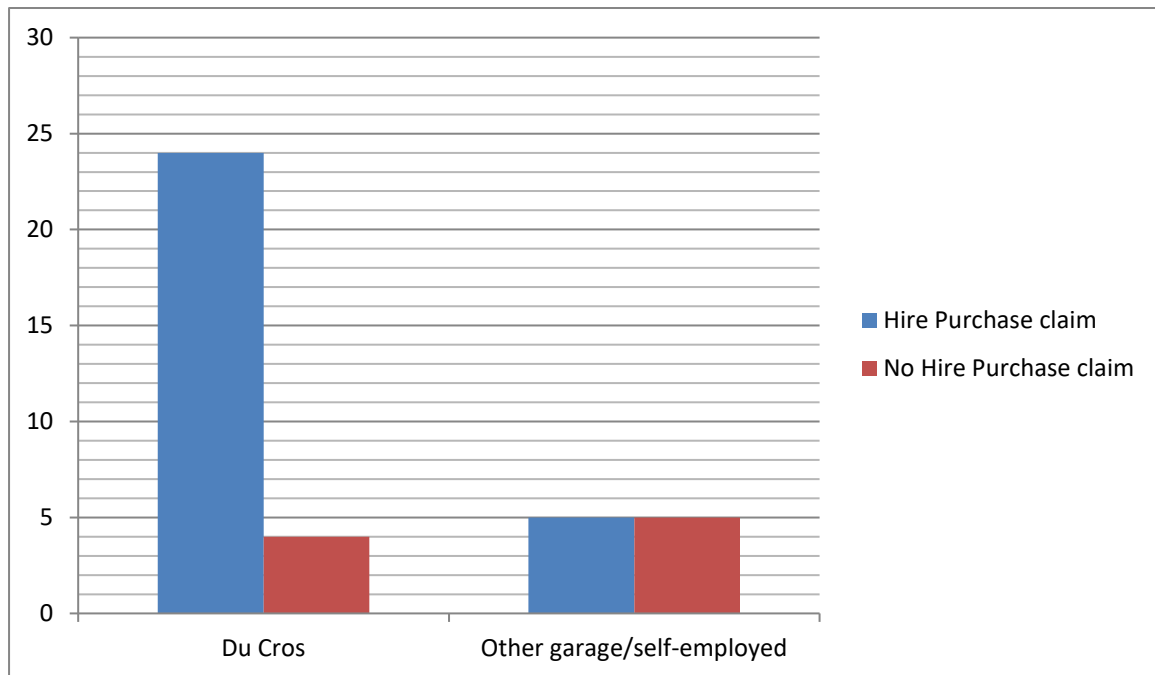


Figure 2.1 – Owner-drivers Buying their Vehicles on Hire Purchase. Source – MH 47 Archive.

A street sample of 360 Acton taxi-cab drivers, living within the vicinity of the du Cros garage at the time of the 1911 census, shows that 267 (seventy-four per cent) of them were married and, in the majority of these families, there was no occupation stated against the names of the wives.²² It can be assumed that, in contrast with the Acton laundrymen, most of these taxi-cab drivers were the main wage-earners in

²¹ Some of these owner-drivers possessed more than one vehicle and would have shared the repayment instalments with joint owners or employed other men to drive their vehicles. Both MH 47/49/14: Alfred Brazier and MH 47/21/48 Frederick Hudson worked for du Cros and owned more than one taxi-cab.

²² TNA: RG – Records of the General Register Office, Government Social Survey Department, and Office of Population Censuses and Surveys: RG 14 - General Register Office, 1911 Census Schedules. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 18 May 2016].

their families and had apparently achieved the masculine ideal of family breadwinner, supporting dependants without the need for supplementary income from either wife or children.²³ Thirty-three of the forty taxi-cab drivers considered in this chapter were married men (eighty-two per cent) and most of them claimed that they could not serve in the armed forces because of their business commitments and domestic responsibilities. These men arguably belonged to the section of the lower middle class that Geoffrey Crossick defined as 'the classic petty bourgeoisie of shopkeepers and small businessmen'.²⁴ Self-reliance and the ability to support their family in relative comfort were central to their identities, and it was widely acknowledged that such men faced significant financial problems when asked to enlist in the armed forces during the First World War. According to local newspaper

²³ Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 19; Arthur Marwick, *Women at War, 1914-1918* (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 16. Also Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War – British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 196, for the ideal of the single male breadwinner being central to the culture of much of the 'respectable' working class. Census records are, of course, notoriously unreliable as sources of information about women's economic activities but many of the laundrywomen did state their occupation.

²⁴ Geoffrey Crossick, *The Lower Middle-Class in Britain, 1870-1914* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016 [1977]), p. 12. Diversity within the middle-class is discussed in Laura Ugolini, *Civvies – Middle-Class Men on the English Home Front, 1914-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 7-10; Alan Kidd and David Nichols, 'Introduction: The Making of the British Middle Class?', in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class? – Studies of Regional and Cultural Diversity Since the Eighteenth Century* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), pp. xxiii-xxviii; Peter Bailey, 'White Collar, Gray Lives? The Lower Middle Class Revisited', in *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1999), pp. 274-6; Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War, England 1914-18* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987), pp. 34-75; Crossick, *Lower Middle-Class*, pp. 11-60.

comment in November 1915: 'what prevents many married men ... from enlisting is not a lack of patriotism but a lack of means. The middle-class man who is the mainstay of a home cannot leave his family to semi-starvation'.²⁵

All of the taxi-cab drivers considered in this chapter lodged their own applications and appeals for exemption. There is evidence that some du Cros owner-drivers collaborated with one another in the phrasing of their applications.²⁶ However, in direct contrast with many of the claims made by or on behalf of the laundrymen, the men considered in this chapter were all essentially self-employed, could expect no support in their claims for exemption from the garage at which they were based and

²⁵ *Acton and Chiswick Express* [hereafter *Express*], 12 November 1915. Also Jon Lawrence, 'Material Pressures on the Middle-Classes', pp. 229-254, in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War – Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For post-war comment on 'The Plight of the Middle Class', see Charles Masterman, *England After War – A Study* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922), pp. 48-83.

²⁶ Harry Dunn, Charles Hollett and Frederick Hudson all stated that they were driving a 'vehicle of public utility' and, citing Local Government Board Circular R.84, claimed that their business was therefore of 'public interest': MH 47/21/47: Harry Dunn; MH 47/49/13: Charles Hollett; MH 47/21/48: Frederick Hudson – all 22 June 1916. For Local Government Board [hereafter LGB] Circular R.84 see TNA: MH – Records Created or Inherited by the Ministry of Health and Successors, Local Government Boards and Related Bodies: MH 47 – Central Military Service Tribunal and Middlesex Appeal Tribunal, Minutes and Papers: MH 47/142 – Blank Forms, Circulars, Pamphlets Issued by the Local Government Board and Other Government Departments, With Printed Acts, Proclamations, Booklets, etc. [hereafter MH 47/142]: MH 47/142/2: LGB Circular R.84, 1 June 1916. Ernest Hewlett and Stanley Tandy both submitted lengthy applications and their explanations include whole paragraphs written verbatim: MH 47/15/5: Stanley Tandy, 10 July 1916; MH 47/69/44: Ernest Hewlett, 19 September 1916.

did not have a trade association to speak on their behalf. Indeed, while laundrymen's appeals seem to have received a good deal of support from employers, evidence suggests that these taxi-cab drivers would have been under considerable workplace pressure to enlist. Du Cros, in particular, made well-publicised claims about how it had complied with the demands of the war and (as will be discussed in chapter three) had turned over the manufacturing side of the business to the wholesale production of munitions by early 1915. In addition, an unspecified number of du Cros taxi-cab drivers voluntarily enlisted into the Army Service Corps [hereafter ASC] and went to France with three motor ambulance columns that were raised by the du Cros family between 1914 and 1916.²⁷

This chapter focuses on taxi-cab drivers who did not serve in this way. Its aim is to explore the arguments put forward by these men to justify their continued civilian status and the response they received from the tribunals. There are three sections and most of the taxi-cab drivers are considered under more than one heading. The first section examines claims made by twenty-two men who argued that they were the sole wage-earners of their families, that they had taken on a substantial debt in buying their taxi-cab under a hire purchase agreement and, in so doing, were attempting to secure their financial future and improve the standard of living of their families. This section assesses whether their argument that they stood to lose a

²⁷ Edwina Rees, 'Private Thomas John Vincent Underhill 5 MAC Army Service Corps - 5th Motor Ambulance Convoy', *Moseley History Society*. Available from <http://moseley-society.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Private-Thomas-John-Vincent-Underhill-2.pdf> [Accessed 9 December 2016]. Also *Express*, 4 December 1914. For civilian donations of motor ambulances in 1914 and 1915 see Jessica Meyer, *An Equal Burden – The Men of the Royal Army Medical Corps in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 139-140.

considerable financial investment if they served in the armed forces – and that they were thus at a unique disadvantage – proved sufficiently convincing to ensure their exemption from military service.²⁸

The second section assesses the part played by health in claims for exemption. It considers all of the taxi-cab drivers and is organised according to the medical grading that each man was given. Thirty-one of the forty men in this chapter stated that they were physically unfit for military service and/or that they were responsible for dependents in poor health (seventy-seven per cent). This section explores the responses and outcomes of such claims.

The third section examines the cases of twenty of the forty taxi-cab drivers whose volunteer activities on the home front were used to bolster exemption applications. This section considers the nature of the voluntary work undertaken by taxi-cab drivers and the place such work had in applications for exemption. This work could take many forms, but shared an emphasis on the use of vehicles and motoring skills. It included excursions for wounded soldiers from the early months of the war, essential infrastructure support within London's transport system, and/or emergency duties connected to aerial bombardment and the threat of invasion. This section investigates the ways in which unpaid work of national importance became a condition of many exemption certificates and how 'volunteering' became increasingly compulsory.

²⁸ For the problems connected to the conscription of self-employed men into the armed forces see James McDermott, *British Military Service Tribunals, 1916-1918 – 'A Very Much Abused Body of Men'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 131-155.

Financial Liabilities and Domestic Responsibilities

With two exceptions, all of the forty taxi-cab drivers in this chapter claimed exemption from military service at least partly on the ground that they were responsible for supporting wives, children, parents and/or siblings and, in one case, a business partner on active service.²⁹ Most of these men were the sole family breadwinner and some claimed to be living only just within their means, with high rent obligations and numerous family expenses. Thirty-eight of the forty men were the owner-drivers of their taxi-cabs and most emphasised the expenses involved in purchasing and running a taxi-cab, leading to further pressure on family finances. Du Cros vehicles cost £325, those from other firms were as much as £500 and taxi-cab owner-drivers stood to lose a considerable capital outlay if they were called up for military service.³⁰ As demonstrated in Figure 2.1 the majority of owner-drivers considered in this chapter were buying their vehicles in instalments on a hire purchase system. A number of the du Cros hire purchase contracts had been signed in 1913 and in some cases the repayments were almost complete.³¹ In addition to these contractual obligations there were other expenses connected to the vehicles in terms of maintenance and overhaul, storage, taximeter hire, wheel duty, taxes and licenses.

²⁹ Both MH 47/64/47: Ernest Dennis and MH 47/47/12: Alfred Smith claimed solely on the ground of their own ill-health.

³⁰ For £325 see MH 47/100/13: David Harding. For £500 see MH 47/35/4: Jeremiah Leyden.

³¹ See MH 47/100/13: David Harding, 12 June 1917; MH 47/41/73: Charles Poston, 17 June 1916; MH 47/47/31: Harry Sanders, 14 June 1916; MH 47/12/62: Arthur Waller, 6 June 1916.

Men who had been striving to provide their families with a standard of living above that of mere subsistence argued that they would be hard pressed to continue to do so on the army pay and separation allowance.³² Walter Clarke explained that '12s.6d. wouldn't pay my rent at home, and there would be nothing for the wife to live upon'.³³ Charles Poston had two children and had been 'allowing my wife 35/- per week Household expenses & 10/6 rent which I could not do under Army Pay Conditions'.³⁴ Such arguments had been met with a good deal of local sympathy in the early months of war. The *Acton and Chiswick Express* commented in late 1915 that 'the War Office allowance is ludicrously insufficient for the middle-class married man with no private means and, if his employer cannot help, the sacrifice he is asked to make is greater than he can bear'.³⁵

³² McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 136.

³³ MH 47/45/56: Walter Clarke, 6 June 1917. A private in an infantry unit of the British army earned approximately one shilling per day and in 1916 the weekly separation allowance for a man of this rank was 12s 6d for his spouse alone; 17s 6d for a wife with one child; 21s if there were two children; and 2s for each additional child: the soldier contributed as much as 3s 6d a week towards this from his army pay and higher rates of allowance were only available from the rank of Sergeant upwards. See MH 47/142/4/1: Army Form B.218P – 'Weekly Rates of Pay of Private Soldiers in the Regular Army and Special Reserve, 15 June 1915; 'Separation Allowance for Dependants of Soldiers – Revised to 1st July 1915'; 'Separation Allowance for Wives and Children of Soldiers – Revised to 1st December 1915', December 1915; 'Registration & Recruiting', 21 August 1916, p. 87. Also George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015 [2002]), p. 42. For distribution and eventual cost to the state of the separation allowance see Susan Pedersen, 'Gender, Welfare and Citizenship in Britain During the Great War', in *American Historical Review*, vol. 95, no. 4 (1990), pp. 984-6.

³⁴ MH 47/41/73: Charles Poston, 17 June 1916.

³⁵ *Express*, 12 November 1915.

Some men argued that they were fulfilling their masculine responsibility as the heads of their households by providing a solid foundation from which their children could thrive.³⁶ Frederick Butterworth had two children and declared that ‘it will be too great a sacrifice for the Wife to live on the Army allowance & bring the children into the world as they should be’.³⁷ Henry Abell had a wife and three children ‘entirely dependent on me, which I worked very hard for to try and bring up in proper manner’.³⁸ Ernest Hewlett contended that his wife could not go out to earn an income in his absence because their three children were under the age of five and, as a consequence, his family would suffer ‘a degree of poverty to which they are not accustomed’.³⁹

A number of taxi-cab owner-drivers explained that they were already struggling to meet their family’s expenses. David Harding had ‘three children, the eldest is afflicted with double curvature of the spine and has been under special treatment for over twelve months and must continue to receive treatment which involves me in considerable expense’.⁴⁰ Arthur Parkes was the sole support of his wife, four children and widowed mother-in-law and had incurred considerable debt: he explained that ‘my rent is high being 17.6 a week and I am in arrears with same. There is a bill of sale on the household effects which will take some time to discharge’.⁴¹ Walter Clarke owed money to ‘a number of tradesmen in Chiswick which would take me almost three months to settle ... My cab is now in overhaul & will take at least

³⁶ See for example MH 47/40/61: William Crockford, 7 June 1917.

³⁷ MH 47/23/69: Frederick Butterworth, 25 September 1916.

³⁸ MH 47/22/46: Henry Abell, 14 June 1916 and 30 September 1916.

³⁹ MH 47/69/44: Ernest Hewlett, 19 September 1916.

⁴⁰ MH 47/100/13: David Harding, 12 June 1917.

⁴¹ MH 47/24/1: Arthur Parkes, 3 October 1916.

another two or three weeks to complete before being able to have same passed as fit for service for public use'.⁴²

Unlike the food and fuel retailers considered in chapter four, there was no suggestion, either on the part of appellants or the tribunals, that female family members could take over the business for the duration. Furthermore, unlike the laundrymen considered in chapter one there is little evidence of co-operation between taxi-cab drivers. Owner-drivers who operated their vehicle on their own explained that they had not been able to find another driver to keep the vehicle running on their behalf and, even if they could, the proxy driver would not earn the owner a profit.⁴³ Men who were employing a driver weakened their own chances of remaining exempt: John Ballard had his appeal dismissed when the Ealing tribunal pointed out that he had 'a rejected man working for him, who it is suggested can continue to drive the Cab for the benefit of the appellant's wife and two children'.⁴⁴ Men rejected on the grounds of health who had offered to protect the interests of other owner-drivers while they were away were themselves affected by altered legislation about medical grading as the war continued: Frederick Bygrave was operating his own vehicle alongside two taxi-cabs belonging to a serving soldier but he was conscripted in August 1917 following a medical examination.⁴⁵ John Mulcaster operated two vehicles and employed three men but his claim that 'no one who was not an owner would work night & day to keep up the payments as I have to do' was not considered a sufficient reason for the military service tribunals to grant

⁴² MH 47/45/56: Walter Clark, 8 June 1917.

⁴³ See for example MH 47/23/69: Frederick Butterworth, 13 June 1916.

⁴⁴ MH 47/22/86: John Ballard, 6 October 1916.

⁴⁵ MH 47/41/75: Frederick Bygrave, 15 August 1917.

him exemption.⁴⁶ Indeed, such entrepreneurial spirit was viewed with suspicion: the military representative of the Ealing tribunal complained of Mulcaster that 'we all know the type of man who is anxious to hold his friend's coat and give him sporting advice while the friend does all the fighting'.⁴⁷

Despite such criticism of individual appellants and their motives, the claims of families for whom enlistment meant the loss of the sole wage-earner attracted some public and press sympathy. Nevertheless, none of the taxi-cab drivers considered in this chapter remained exempt from military service solely on the basis that they or their families would suffer economic hardship. War-time legislation, enacted by mid-1916 and designed to alleviate short-term financial loss, meant that claims of economic distress were somewhat lessened. Much of this legislation was a direct result of cases brought before the military service tribunals and there is evidence that some hearings were adjourned to enable the man to apply for available financial aid.⁴⁸

Taxi-cabs were strictly regulated as public vehicles and owner-drivers argued that they would continue to be responsible for the specific expenses connected with the motor-car while they were serving in the armed forces. In addition, many men

⁴⁶ MH 47/24/54: John Mulcaster, 19 October 1916. Also MH 47/49/14: Alfred Brazier; MH 47/40/61: William Crockford; MH 47/21/48: Frederick Hudson – all three owned more than one taxi-cab.

⁴⁷ MH 47/24/54: John Mulcaster, 23 October 1916.

⁴⁸ For example, MH 47/22/86: John Ballard had his hearing adjourned by the Ealing tribunal on 16 June 1916 to enable him 'to apply for relief'. His appeal was consequently dismissed on 25 October 1916.

complained that they would not be able to afford to put the vehicle back on the road when they returned from the war.⁴⁹ Stanley Tandy, a du Cros employee, explained:

If I had the money, which I have not, to pay the rent for storing my Cab and the necessary insurance premiums against fire and burglary the Cab itself, through not having been used and attended to daily, would be practically worthless at the end of the War. In any case, to say the least, before it could be worked again a complete set of tyres would be necessary and various parts of the Engine would doubtless have to be replaced and it would have to be completely overhauled and done up probably at a very consider [sic] cost and also various licences and insurance premiums would have to be paid. At the time of my discharge from the Army (should I have been called up) I should be entirely without funds to meet the expenses mentioned so as to enable me to start working my Cab again.⁵⁰

Another du Cros employee had already suffered financial loss as a result of enlistment. Walter Burrows had been mobilised as a reservist at the outbreak of war 'when I had to store my home and also Cab costing me £33 odd'.⁵¹ Burrows was discharged from the army on 3 August 1915, having served a prerequisite term of one year.⁵² He renewed his public vehicle licences, put his taxi-cab back on the road

⁴⁹ For example, see MH 47/41/73: Charles Poston, 17 June 1916.

⁵⁰ MH 47/15/5: Stanley Tandy, 10 July 1916. MH 47/69/44: Ernest Hewlett used the same argument almost verbatim on 19 September 1916.

⁵¹ MH 47/15/3: Walter Burrows, n.d., circa 23 June 1916.

⁵² TNA: WO – Records created or inherited by the War Office, Armed Forces, Judge Advocate General, and related bodies: Soldiers' Documents from Pension Claims,

and 'spent £50 on Furnishing my House'.⁵³ The Military Service Act, 1916 (Session 2), enacted on 25 May 1916, allowed for the 'prolongation of expiring terms of service'.⁵⁴ Unless a soldier had exceeded more than twelve years' service or was over the age of forty-one, he was now required to serve for the duration of the war.⁵⁵ Men like Burrows, who had been discharged as time-expired, were re-called for service. He applied for exemption and, when this was refused, he complained that 'after having done the bit I have it would be a great hardship on me to not even to be allowed time enough to recover some of the expenses I have had to meet through having already served my King and country'.⁵⁶

Although Burrows' claim was disallowed, tribunals were not unsympathetic to the arguments put forward by him and by other taxi-cab owner-drivers. In a cultural context where primacy was increasingly given to equality of sacrifice, it was clear that many of the men considered in this chapter were being asked, alongside their families, to suffer considerable losses. As a result, short of granting exemption from military service, tribunals were prepared to take steps to limit such losses. Burrows had stored his taxi-cab when he was re-called to the colours in 1914 but, despite the company's well-publicised patriotic credentials, du Cros seems to have been

First World War: Walter Thomas Burrows. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 9 January 2018]. See Appendix Three.

⁵³ MH 47/15/3: Walter Burrows, n.d., circa 23 June 1916.

⁵⁴ MH 47/142/1: Military Service Act, 1916 (Session 2), 25 May 1916, p. 2. Also Alison Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies – The Replacement of British Infantry Casualties on the Western Front, 1916-1918* (Warwick: Helion, 2018), pp. 65 and 104.

⁵⁵ MH 47/142/4/2: Army Council Instruction, No. 1160 of 1916, 9 June 1916, p. 2.

⁵⁶ MH 47/15/3: Walter Burrows, 10 July 1916. Burrows would have received a bounty payment when he re-joined the armed forces. See Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, pp. 104-5.

reluctant to offer any guarantees to their absent owner-drivers regarding the terms of storage. Arthur Waller told the Acton tribunal 'that the firm [du Cros] had been approached by a deputation on the subject, and had stated (so he heard) that under the present uncertain conditions, they could give no absolute guarantee to garage cars for an indefinite period'.⁵⁷ Waller's hearing was adjourned for a few hours while the Acton tribunal clerk telephoned du Cros, whereupon the company stated that 'they were prepared to store them [the vehicles] for the duration of the war or until the owner returned'.⁵⁸

The tribunal's intervention thus secured a concession from du Cros. That said, the firm did not offer any assurances as to the condition of the taxi-cabs if or when the men came back. Furthermore, du Cros did not store the vehicles free of charge: a rate was levied of 2s 6d per week (this fee was similar in other garages) but it can be assumed that this was a reduced price.⁵⁹ Despite such costs, taxi-cab owner-drivers who served with the armed forces were protected to a certain extent from financial ruin by government legislation. For example, the Postponement of Payments Act, passed on 3 August 1914, allowed for a moratorium on some contractual debts.⁶⁰ There is evidence that, certainly by March 1916, du Cros had suspended repayment instalments for owner-drivers who were on active service.⁶¹ Also, garages such as du Cros could not repossess any of their vehicles: the Courts (Emergency Powers)

⁵⁷ *Gazette*, 16 June 1916.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ MH 47/29/46: Walter Perry, 13 December 1916. For a charge of three shillings see MH 47/22/46: Henry Abell, 30 September 1916.

⁶⁰ Michael Lobban, 'The Great War and Private Law', in *Comparative Legal History*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2014), pp. 178-9.

⁶¹ MH 47/87/48: Charles Wilde, 17 March 1916.

Act of 17 October 1914 restricted the right of a creditor to recover a debt or repossess the home or property of anyone who was unable to make the payment on account of 'circumstances attributable, directly or indirectly, to the present war'.⁶² Reassurance was given specifically to taxi-cab owner-drivers in late 1916 by Walter Long in the House of Commons when he reiterated that 'such men are protected by the Courts Emergency Powers Acts. The vendor of a taxicab cannot take possession of such a vehicle without permission of the Court, and assistance may also be granted in respect of instalments'.⁶³

Nevertheless, there remained financial risks attached to the conscription of taxi-cab owner-drivers, risks of which local and appeal tribunals were well aware, and which led to one of the du Cros taxi-cab owner-drivers becoming the subject of a test case at the Central Tribunal in August 1916. According to a local newspaper, reporting a few weeks after the test case, the Acton tribunal had been 'perplexed as to the best way in which to deal with the cases of taxicab owner-drivers purchasing their vehicles on the instalment system'.⁶⁴ The newspaper went on to explain that the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal had also 'found itself in such a dilemma' and, as a consequence, had asked the Central Tribunal for a decision for one appellant.⁶⁵ The test case was an owner-driver named Albert Grubb – and eight other Acton men had

⁶² Lobban, 'Great War and Private Law', pp. 178-9.

⁶³ 'The Wheels of Industry', *Commercial Motor*, vol. XXIV, no. 612, 30 November 1916, p. 295. Available from <http://archive.commercialmotor.com> [Accessed 15 February 2018].

⁶⁴ *Express*, 15 September 1916.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

their hearings adjourned to await the verdict.⁶⁶ The Middlesex Appeal Tribunal informed the Central Tribunal:

the applicant ... has paid off £200 and another £125 remains to be paid.

The weekly payments are at the rate of £2.12.6. It was pointed out that the cab, if stored, must undoubtedly deteriorate considerably in value. It is understood that Messrs. Du Cros are willing to make arrangements for the storing of cabs for men called away to the war, but they will not give any guarantee as to their upkeep or as to the condition at the end of the time.

A considerable number of cases similar to this are expected to arise.⁶⁷

The Central Tribunal replied that 'instalments payable in respect of cabs purchased on the hire system and cost of storage would rank for grant under the scheme administered by the Civil Liabilities Committee'.⁶⁸ The Military Service (Civil Liabilities) Committee was established in May 1916 to provide financial assistance for men serving in the armed forces and this relief was also promised to appellants who failed to secure exemption from military service.⁶⁹ It could cover expenses such

⁶⁶ MH 47/15/3: Walter Burrows; MH 47/29/17: Arthur Giffin; MH 47/119/6: Albert Grubb; MH 47/16/1: Albert Hamsher; MH 47/49/13: Charles Hollett; MH 47/35/4: Jeremiah Leyden; MH 47/17/10: Tola Melliush; MH 47/15/5: Stanley Tandy; MH 47/12/62: Arthur Waller.

⁶⁷ MH 47/119/6: Albert Grubb, n.d.

⁶⁸ MH 47/142/4/3: LGB Circular R.100 – Taxi-Cab Owner-Drivers, 20 September 1916.

⁶⁹ MH 47/142/1: Regulations Made by the Military Service Civil Liabilities Committee, 17 May 1916.

as rents, rates, insurance premiums, interest payments and hire-purchase instalments up to a maximum of £104 a year.⁷⁰

During their deliberations regarding Grubb, the Central Tribunal wrote to the Metropolitan Police Licensing Authority to ask for a compromise relating to the conditions under which a taxi-cab could be re-licensed and put back on the road as a public vehicle after the owner-driver came back from the war. As Stanley Tandy had explained: 'when I came out of the Army the car would require overhauling at a probable cost of £25-£30 to put in order, so that the Police would pass it for Public Hire'.⁷¹ New Scotland Yard wrote to the Central Tribunal and conceded that, if the owner-driver had been called up before his license had expired, the authority would allow the vehicle to be re-licensed without further overhaul or charge if they were satisfied that the taxi-cab had not been used in the interim and that it did not demonstrate 'some manifest deterioration'.⁷²

Presumably as a result of this re-licensing concession and the promise of financial aid through the Civil Liabilities Committee, Grubb's test case concluded with the Central Tribunal directive 'that a man should not have exemption from military service solely on the ground that he was buying his cab'.⁷³ Consequently six of the nine men whose cases awaited this Central Tribunal decision were given one month

⁷⁰ The promise of this financial assistance proved to be a deciding factor in several cases. See MH 47/119/6: Albert Grubb, n.d., circa 20 September 1916; MH 47/29/46: Walter Perry, 31 December 1916; MH 47/47/31: Harry Sanders, 20 January 1917. MH 47/22/86: John Ballard was awarded £15 per annum, 4 October 1916; MH 47/69/44: Ernest Hewlett was awarded £17.10s per annum, 7 June 1917.

⁷¹ MH 47/15/5: Stanley Tandy, 21 June 1916.

⁷² MH 47/119/6: Albert Grubb, n.d., circa August 1916.

⁷³ *Express*, 15 September 1916.

to put their affairs in order before they were called up.⁷⁴ The other three appellants received extended exemptions on condition that they undertook voluntary work.

From September 1916, taxi-cab owner-drivers could no longer expect to receive exemption from military service solely on the argument that they would lose a financial investment and that their families would suffer as a result.⁷⁵ These men were called up once it was ascertained that financial support was available, thus suggesting that they were viewed with some considerable sympathy by the tribunals. Decisions were less clear-cut if the appellant or members of his family had significant health issues.

Medical Grading and Military Service

Scholarly study of the medical grading of army recruits during the First World War has tended to focus on the evidence that many (particularly working-class) men were unfit for active service in the armed forces.⁷⁶ However, although it might be assumed

⁷⁴ MH 47/15/3: Walter Burrows; MH 47/16/1: Albert Hamsher; MH 47/17/10: Tola Melliush; MH 47/15/5: Stanley Tandy; MH 47/12/62: Arthur Waller. There are no appeal tribunal documents for MH 47/119/6: Albert Grubb. Grubb's name appears on the 1918 Electoral Register, indicating that he may not have served in the armed forces. See London Metropolitan Archives, London, England, Electoral Registers. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 22 June 2020]. See Appendix Three. This register is discussed in chapter four.

⁷⁵ MH 47/142/4/3: LGB Circular R.100 – Taxi-Cab Owner-Divers, 20 September 1916.

⁷⁶ For example, see R. J. Clare, 'Fit to Fight? How the Physical Condition of the Conscripts Contributed to the Manpower Crisis of 1917-18' in *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, vol. 94 (2016), pp. 225-244; Jay Winter, 'Military Fitness and Civilian Health in Britain during the First World War', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 15, no. 5 (1980), pp. 215-223; Ina Zweiniger-

that poor health could lead to exemption, the men in this chapter demonstrate that the reality was more complex. Front-line combat duty was only one way in which a man could undertake military service and, as the war continued and the manpower situation worsened, poor health did not exclude men from serving in the armed forces. Indeed, although thirty-one of the forty taxi-cab drivers claimed ill-health as a part of their application – and nineteen of these thirty-one men argued that they were themselves unfit for military service – a place was found in the armed forces for at least thirty-three of them (see Figure 2.2 below).⁷⁷ The majority of those taxi-cab drivers who were conscripted served in the Mechanical Transport section of the ASC, where their skills and capabilities outweighed their physical limitations.⁷⁸

Bargielowska, *Managing the Body – Beauty, Health and Fitness in Britain, 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially pp. 62-104; G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency – A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Robb, *British Culture*, p. 43.

⁷⁷ See Appendix Three for this thesis' database.

⁷⁸ For newspaper advertising for motor drivers see *Bedford Park, Turnham Green, Acton Gazette and District Advertiser* [hereafter *Gazette*], 26 March 1915. Also MH 47/142/1: 'Registration and Recruiting', 21 August 1916, p. 56 for Army Council Instruction 1453 of 1916 – 'Skilled Motor Drivers and Tradesmen, at the ordinary Army Service Corps rates of pay, may be accepted for the Mechanical Transport, Army Service Corps, for the duration of the war'. Also Michael Young, *Army Service Corps, 1902-1918* (Nottingham: Partizan, 2018 [1988]), p. 91 for the evidence that, of the 350 men in 82 Company, Army Service Corps [hereafter ASC] (Mechanical Transport), 175 of them had been motor drivers when they enlisted. For evidence that members of the Institution of Automobile Engineers served predominantly with the ASC see Aimée Fox, *Learning to Fight – Military Innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 190.

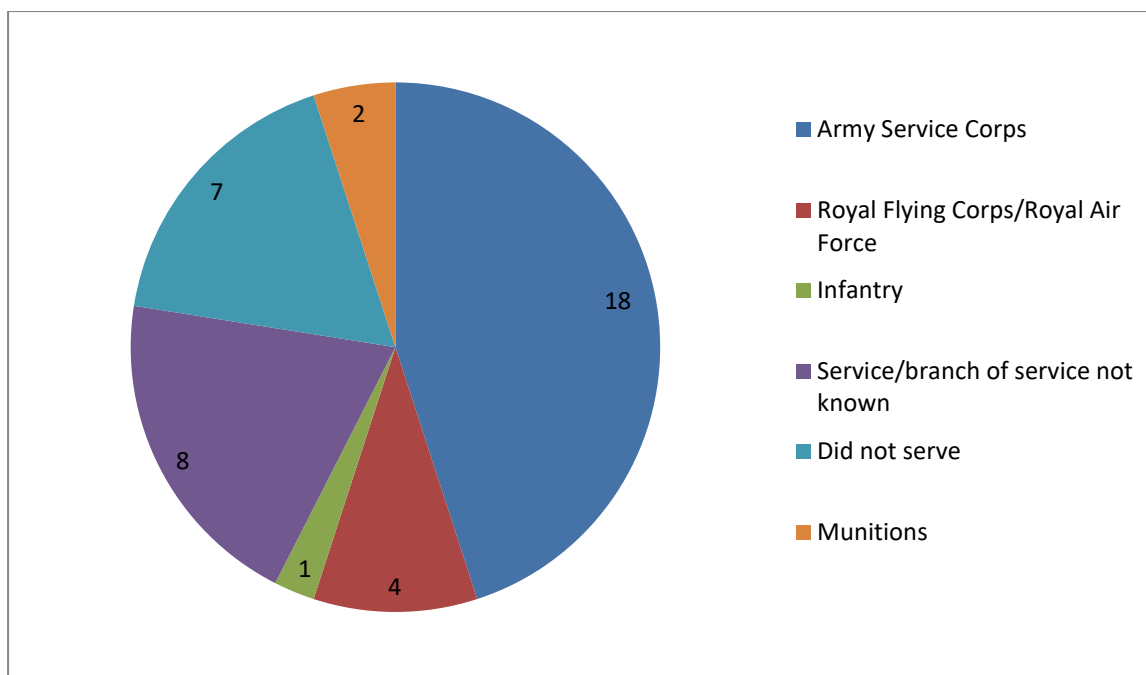


Figure 2.2 – Armed Forces Service of Acton's Taxi-Cab Drivers. Sources – MH 47 Archive; British Army WW1 Service Records, 1914-1918; WW1 Service Medal and Award Rolls, 1914-1920; British Army WW1 Pension Records, 1914-1920; UK Royal Air Force Airmen Records, 1918-1940.

In February 1916 the military service tribunals were informed that:

the military authorities have recently revised their standards and now certify recruits in different classes according to the work for which they are physically fit, and that a man may be accepted even though he may not be up to the standard required for active service and may be fit only for other military work.⁷⁹

See Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, p. 171, for the allocation of recruits from early 1917.

⁷⁹ MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.36 – Relating to the Constitution, Functions and Procedure of Local Tribunals, 3 February 1916, p. 5. This advice was further qualified by MH 47/142/4/2: LGB Circular R.80, 11 May 1916, p. 2 – 'a Tribunal should not grant exemption on the ground of physical infirmity unless they are satisfied that the man is incapacitated for *any kind* of military service'. See Keith

The medical classification system was altered several times during the course of the war but, broadly speaking, between May 1916 and October 1917 men could be graded 'A' to 'E'.⁸⁰ Most men who appeared before the tribunals were those who had been certified as physically capable of some form of immediate military service and these grades included: 'A' – general service; 'B1' – garrison service abroad; 'B2' – labour duties abroad; 'B3' – sedentary work abroad; 'C1' – garrison service at home; 'C2' – labour duties at home; 'C3' – sedentary work at home.⁸¹ On 17 November 1917 the Ministry of National Service introduced a simpler grading system whereby 'Grade 1' were men deemed 'fit for general service', 'Grade 2' were 'likely to improve with training' and 'Grade 3' were 'only fit for labouring duties or sedentary work'.⁸²

Figure 2.3 below shows the medical grading and resultant appeal outcome of the men in this chapter. Broadly speaking it shows that men who were graded above 'C' were unlikely to remain exempt from military service and this section will examine the reasons behind such tribunal decisions.

Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-1916* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 130-133.

⁸⁰ 'A': fit for general service; 'B': fit for garrison/support service abroad; 'C': fit for garrison/support service at home; 'D': likely to be fit for 'A', 'B' or 'C' after six months' training; and 'E': not likely to ever be fit for 'A', 'B' or 'C'.

⁸¹ See Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, pp. 307-310, for Appendix IV – Classification by Medical Categories. Also W. G. MacPherson, *Medical Services General History – Volume I* (London: HMSO, 1921), pp. 118-137.

⁸² Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, p. 310.

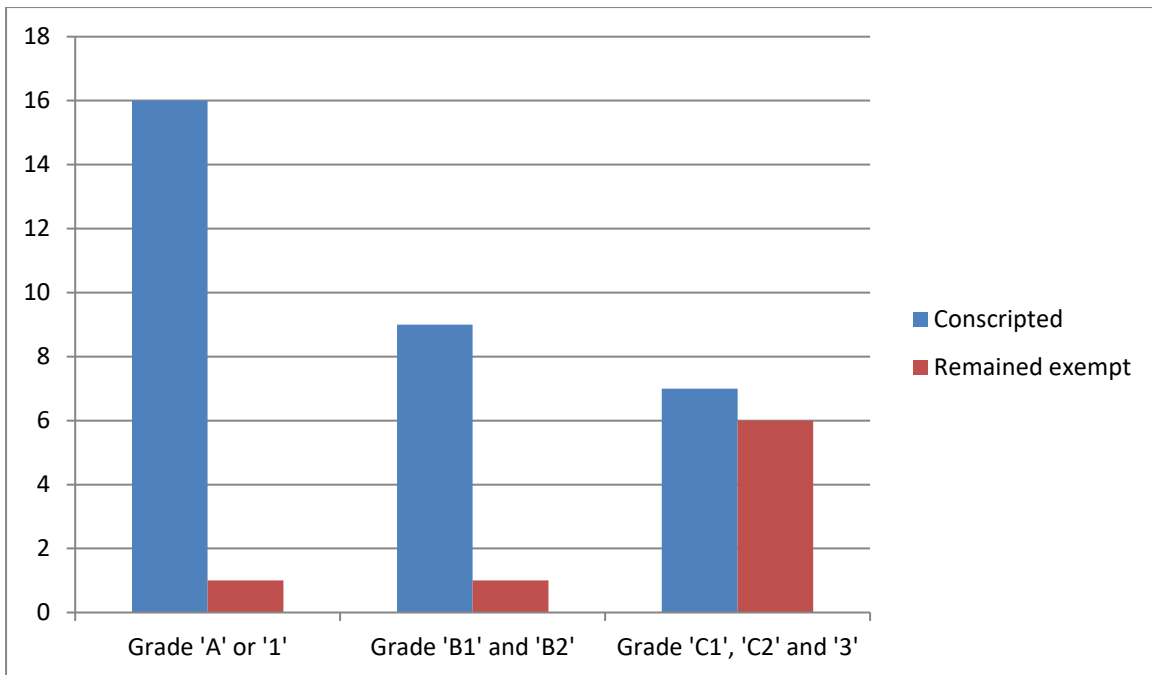


Figure 2.3 – Conscription According to Medical Grading. Source – MH 47 Archive.

At least ten – and possibly as many as seventeen – of the taxi-cab drivers were classified as 'A'. Seven of the forty men had no medical grading stated on their case-notes; this was presumably because their own health was not the issue in their claim and, without certification to the contrary, all seven of these men were probably fit for general service. Four of them were awaiting the Central Tribunal decision in the case of Grubb and, when their financial claims were dismissed, all four were called up.⁸³

The other three men with no stated medical grading all included in their applications that they were caring for members of their family, who themselves suffered from poor health. In this way they built on the image of taxi-cab owner-drivers as paterfamilias and family men with heavy domestic responsibilities; two of them with little success.

John Reynolds had been over military age until 1918 when, at the age of forty-five,

⁸³ MH 47/15/3: Walter Burrows; MH 47/119/6: Albert Grubb; MH 47/49/13: Charles Hollett; MH 47/15/5: Stanley Tandy. None of the cases awaiting the Central Tribunal decision included a claim based on the man's own ill health.

he was called up under the Military Service (No. 2) Act of April 1918. He contested his conscription by claiming that his wife was an invalid 'suffering from mental depression'.⁸⁴ His case was adjourned in late October 1918 for an unexplained medical examination but, by this time, the war was nearly over.⁸⁵ George Slater had a disabled brother for whom he was buying specialist equipment and, although the case was adjourned twice on account of this sibling, he had joined up by May 1916.⁸⁶ Charles Wilde was caring for his mother who had been in a mental hospital.⁸⁷ She wrote a pleading letter to the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal, asking 'of you not to take my son away from me' but he was called up in December 1916.⁸⁸

Ten of the forty taxi-cab drivers were graded 'A' by the medical authorities and all ten were eventually conscripted. Despite their grading, eight pleaded health concerns as a part of their application for exemption.⁸⁹ In four of these eight cases the claim concerned the man's wife.⁹⁰ Arthur Waller mentioned that his 'wife is a sufferer from

⁸⁴ MH 47/70/6: John Reynolds, 19 July 1918.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 23 October 1918.

⁸⁶ MH 47/10/47: George Slater.

⁸⁷ MH 47/87/48: Charles Wilde.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 26 December 1916.

⁸⁹ Neither MH 47/23/69: Frederick Butterworth nor MH 47/21/47: Harry Dunn claimed ill health for themselves or their families.

⁹⁰ The four who did not make a claim on behalf of their wives were MH 47/22/86: John Ballard who stated that he had a hernia and MH 47/89/62: William Rhoades who explained that he had a 'weak chest' and was supporting an invalid father. Both MH 47/41/75: Frederick Bygrave and MH 47/47/40/61: William Crockford were re-graded as 'A' following the Military Service (Review of Exemptions) Act, 1917 of 5 April 1917. Bygrave declared that he had a hernia, varicocele and psoriasis and Crockford argued that his 'lungs were affected'. None of the stated ailments were

Varicose Veins and is confirmed invalid' but his case was decided on the Central Tribunal judgement regarding Grubb.⁹¹ Tola Melliush, also connected to the Grubb enquiry, had a pregnant wife 'expecting to be confined in October' and asked 'for postponement from Military Service until after the confinement, as my wife will be alone'.⁹² When the Central Tribunal reached a decision, both Waller and Melliush were granted one month's exemption to get their affairs in order before joining the army.⁹³

The notion that taxi-cab drivers had heavy family and domestic responsibilities was not always viewed unsympathetically. Extended exemption was sometimes granted if the wife's ill-health was having an adverse effect on the family's finances but, if the man was fit for general service, this extension was likely to have a time limit. James Keeler's spouse was in hospital with 'internal trouble and having to pay 16/- weekly all the time she is a patient there'.⁹⁴ In addition to these expenses 'as my wife is ill I have to put the care of my child into anothers [sic] care and pay 8/- weekly my rent is 9/- weekly and altogether it is a hard struggle [sic] for me under existing circumstances to keep everything paid up'.⁹⁵ He was granted exemption for six months but when he re-applied John Kent, Acton's military representative, objected,

sufficient to keep these men out of the armed forces. See Appendix Three for their military service.

⁹¹ MH 47/12/62: Arthur Waller, 19 June 1916.

⁹² MH 47/17/10: Tola Melliush, 21 June 1916.

⁹³ MH 47/17/10: Tola Melliush; MH 47/12/62: Arthur Waller – both 12 September 1916.

⁹⁴ MH 47/31/41: James Keeler, 10 June 1916.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

'as this man is passed for general service'.⁹⁶ Despite this, Keeler was not called up until after his wife's operation.⁹⁷

Appellants could challenge the accuracy of their medical grading through the military service tribunals and there is evidence that this request was sometimes granted, particularly once the case reached the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal where Herbert Nield presided.⁹⁸ Arthur Parkes had four children under the age of seven, his wife was pregnant and 'delicate' and he also supported his aged and widowed mother-in-law.⁹⁹ He was granted exemption for three months, but his wife suffered a miscarriage and was 'now undergoing medical treatment for a nervous breakdown'.¹⁰⁰ He was in debt and claimed that 'my health is far from good although passed for general service following a perfunctory Medical Examination lasting about 3 minutes'.¹⁰¹ Parkes' case was adjourned to allow for him to be re-examined but he was eventually called up in February 1917.¹⁰² Perhaps unsurprisingly, physically fit taxi-cab drivers could expect to be conscripted into the armed forces.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 18 December 1916.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 6 March 1917.

⁹⁸ Herbert Nield, Conservative MP for Ealing and Chairman of Middlesex Appeal Tribunal, was one of those who campaigned for the revision of the medical grading system in late 1917. See Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985), pp. 50-64.

⁹⁹ MH 47/24/1: Arthur Parkes, 21 June 1916.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 3 October 1916.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., n.d., circa 19 October 1916.

¹⁰² Ibid., 16 November 1916 and 22 February 1917. For attempts to improve the standards of recruiting medical boards see MacPherson, *Medical Services General History*, p. 125.

Eight taxi-cab drivers were graded 'B1' – fit for garrison service abroad.¹⁰³ Six of these 'B1' taxi-cab drivers claimed ill health in their applications but nevertheless four – possibly five – of these six were conscripted into the ASC in the winter of 1916/17, probably as part of an initiative to release grade 'A' men for combat duty.¹⁰⁴ Despite suffering from painful or debilitating conditions, men with driving skills were increasingly sought out by the armed forces. Medical examiners were required to balance individuals' physical frailties with their military capabilities.¹⁰⁵ Ernest Hewlett suffered from rheumatism and bronchitis. He explained that his medical classification had been raised when the doctor found out that he was a motor driver. Drivers were not required to walk or march very far and:

I am never able to walk more than a few hundred yards at a time owing to shortness of breath and I am flat-footed ... The Doctor in the first instance passed me for Class B2 but upon hearing that I was a Motor Cab Driver

¹⁰³ Of the eight 'B1' men, only MH 47/29/17: Arthur Giffin and MH 47/24/54: John Mulcaster did not claim anyone's ill health in their application.

¹⁰⁴ MH 47/22/46: Henry Abell, 4 November 1916; MH 47/23/68: Thomas Dennis, 5 December 1916; MH 47/54/36: William Dunn, 19 March 1917; MH47/29/4: Walter Perry, 5 March 1917. Albert Hamsher was granted one month's exemption following the Grubb case but he has no obvious military records. See MH 47/16/1: Albert Hamsher, 12 September 1916. See Appendix Three. In May 1916 the Director of Supplies at the War Office initiated a scheme whereby soldiers in the ASC who were fit for active service were released for front line duties and replaced by men of a lower medical category – but this could not be done until sufficient numbers of 'B' and 'C' men were found and trained. See Young, *Army Service Corps*, pp. 89-90.

¹⁰⁵ See Winter, *The Great War*, p. 51.

he said I could drive a Motor Lorry and therefore classed me in B1 as mentioned.¹⁰⁶

Similarly, taxi-cab drivers who were graded 'B2' – fit for labour duties abroad – were considered to have skills that outweighed their physical limitations. For the past fifteen years Frederick Allen had been attending hospitals for the treatment of asthma and bronchitis: 'it takes me an hour every morning to rally myself round before I feel anyways fit to do anything'.¹⁰⁷ He contested his medical grading but nevertheless was recruited into the ASC as a driver.¹⁰⁸

Men who had been graded either 'A' or 'B' could expect to serve abroad. Until April 1917 men graded 'C' would be given a posting somewhere in Great Britain.¹⁰⁹ Three of the taxi-cab drivers were graded 'C1' – fit for garrison duty at home – and two of them went into munitions work.¹¹⁰ Nine of the taxi-cab drivers were graded 'C2' – fit

¹⁰⁶ MH 47/69/44: Ernest Hewlett, 19 September 1916.

¹⁰⁷ MH 47/23/93: Frederick Allen, 16 October 1916.

¹⁰⁸ Also MH 47/100/13: David Harding. See Appendix Three.

¹⁰⁹ Following investigations into military manpower by Lieutenant-General Lawson in the winter of 1916/17, grade 'C' was changed to 'Fit for service in garrison or labour units at home or in North Western Europe'. This released fitter men for the fighting line. See Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, p. 164.

¹¹⁰ There is no information about 'C1' man MH 47/36/75: Alfred Wright beyond 19 April 1917. MH 47/47/31: Harry Sanders went to the Perivale National Filling Factory but joined the Royal Air Force on 8 May 1918. TNA: AIR 79 - Royal Air Force Airmen Records, 1918-1940: Harry Sanders. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 14 June 2017]. See Appendix Three. It is plausible that this was a local Royal Air Force station as there was an aerodrome in Acton. See A. H. Goodlet, *The Story of Acton Aerodrome and the Alliance Factory* (Ealing: Central Reference Library, 1978). MH 47/55/13: Louis Woolcock went to work on aeroplane construction for Napier in

for labour duties at home.¹¹¹ Following legislation enacted by David Lloyd George's new administration in January 1917, military representatives came under renewed pressure to obtain men for the army.¹¹² Probably as a result of this pressure, Stephen Hibberd was conscripted into the ASC when Kent objected to any continued exemption: 'as the Army are requiring immediately 70,000 drivers of petrol and steam wagons'.¹¹³ Charles Poston was also conscripted into the ASC, despite 'having suffered with Hip Disease and undergone four operations', when Kent's assistant, Francis Glass, observed: 'I oppose as Motor Drivers are wanted for the Army in large numbers'.¹¹⁴

Some men withheld information about their health for fear that they would lose their taxi-cab license. Walter Clarke, also graded 'C2', had originally been rejected for military service and, having 'suffered since Aug 1913 with Gastritis & Gastric Ulcers service with the colours would be detrimental to a permanent cure, through mental worry in combination with food I should be required to partake'.¹¹⁵ His wife was 'not strong' and 'I have for the last 3 months suffered with neuritis in my right arm & am just getting use of same back'.¹¹⁶ He explained that he had not previously informed

February 1917 and remained exempt for the duration of the war. Sanders and Woolcock are discussed in further detail in chapter three.

¹¹¹ There is no information about the following 'C2' men after they lost their appeals against exemption: MH47/49/14: Alfred Brazier, 20 June 1918; MH 47/35/4: Jeremiah Leyden, 21 March 1917.

¹¹² MH 47/142/5/1: LGB Circular R.113, 20 January 1917. Also Grieves, *Politics of Manpower*, pp. 107-9.

¹¹³ MH 47/43/17: Stephen Hibbord [sic], 8 January 1917.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1917.

¹¹⁵ MH 47/45/56: Walter Clark, 1 June 1917.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the authorities about his neuritis as 'had I notified the Military Doctor, probably it would have caused me to have lost my license'.¹¹⁷ He joined the Motor Transport Volunteers in June 1917 and remained exempt until at least April 1918.

Clarke was one of the seven men graded 'C2' whose exemption (on account of their health) was granted on the understanding that they would undertake work of national importance; five of them remained exempt for the duration of the war.¹¹⁸ William Hayward argued that the strain of dealing with his family's ailments had had a detrimental effect on his own health. He claimed that 'my wife is not a very strong woman having undergone an operation last summer at St. Bart's for strangulated Hernia'.¹¹⁹ Two of his four children had gone through scarlet fever and one was still suffering from complications: 'I myself have to do a lot at home as the result, and with four children the wife would have a very hard time in my absence'.¹²⁰ His own health had deteriorated as a result and 'I did not submit my own personal complaints to the local tribunal thinking that I had sufficient ground for granting me some time without mentioning my trouble'.¹²¹ Hayward took up voluntary work with the City of London Motor Volunteers and remained exempt for the duration of the war.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6 June 1917. Also *Gazette*, 30 July 1915, for the report of a du Cros taxi-cab driver who committed suicide. He had been rejected from the army and, amongst other things, had worried that his disclosed heart condition would result in the loss of his taxi-cab license.

¹¹⁸ MH 47/21/48: Frederick Hudson joined the VTC; MH 47/47/12: Alfred Smith joined the City of London Motor Volunteers; MH 47/57/49: Albert Fuller and MH 47/64/47: Ernest Dennis both joined the Overseas Forces Reception Committee.

¹¹⁹ MH 47/48/26: William Hayward, 13 June 1916.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21 August 1916.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 2 October 1916.

In order to obtain a taxi-cab licence, drivers were required to demonstrate a certain level of physical fitness – indeed, men did on occasion hide illnesses out of fear of losing their licence. This physical fitness is reflected in the grading of at least ten out of the forty men considered in this chapter as ‘A’ and such men could expect to be conscripted and to serve abroad. That said, men suffering from debilitating and painful conditions could also be conscripted and ill health by itself did not ensure exemption. The contribution that men with driving skills could make to the military effort, particularly in the ASC, was seen to outweigh any physical frailties and the grading of men according to their physical capabilities was one of the ways in which the authorities attempted to solve the nation’s military and civilian manpower problems between 1916 and 1918.

Significantly, the few taxi-cab drivers whose exemptions were granted on grounds of ill-health carried the condition that they contributed to the war effort by starting or continuing to undertake voluntary work. The final section of this chapter examines the taxi-cab drivers’ efforts to combine their own business imperatives with that of obligatory – and unpaid – work of ‘national importance’.

‘Voluntary’ Work

Taxi-cab driving was not included in any of the lists of certified occupations that were published from 1916 to 1918. However, during the First World War the London transport system was under a great deal of pressure through manpower shortages and a lack of resources, at a time when troops, refugees and a huge wartime workforce were attempting to move around and through the metropolis.¹²² Twenty of

¹²² Simon Arbethny, ‘Moving Wartime London: Public Transport in the First World War’, in *London Journal*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2016), pp. 233-248.

the forty applications for exemption from taxi-cab drivers included the argument that the man was doing voluntary work that was deemed by the authorities to be of national importance and most of these men were working within London's transport network. Twelve of the twenty men were conscripted into the armed forces. Of the eight taxi-cab drivers who remained exempt for the duration of the war, all of them were volunteering their services in some way.

Taxi-cabs were and are public service vehicles, licensed by the police to ply for trade. During the First World War they were used as 'vehicles of public utility': providing transport for services such as fire brigades, police forces and hospitals.¹²³ In 1916 the Petrol Control Committee of the Board of Trade included 'motor cabs' in 'Class B' of the regulations regarding supply of 'motor spirit' (petrol).¹²⁴ In his application for exemption, Ernest Hewlett argued that:

the Government have to a certain extent recognised that the business is of National importance and that men in my position were entitled to special consideration by the fact that Cabs plying for trade were included in Class 'B' for the purposes of preference in obtaining supplies of petrol

¹²³ For example MH 47/22/86: John Ballard, 14 June 1916. 'Public and Public Utility Services' were described in the 'Official List of Certified Occupations' as including men declared by the chief officers of fire brigades, police forces and salvage corps to be indispensable. See for example MH 47/142/4/1: LGB Circular R.74 – List of Certified Occupations, 4 April 1916, p. 6. The list of public utility services was significantly altered by 1918 but still included men who worked in 'Salvage Corps (Fire)'. See MH 47/142/3: LGB Circular R.136 (Revised) List of Certified Occupations, 26 September 1918, p. 27.

¹²⁴ Petrol-users had been placed in three categories from 'A' to 'C', with 'A' being the most important. See 'Supply of Petrol' in *The British Medical Journal*, vol. 1 (1916), p. 823.

and by the fact that the Association of Owner Drivers, of which I am a Member, holds an authority from the Ministry of Munitions to obtain spare parts for Cabs under Class 'B'.¹²⁵

Hewlett added that he had been volunteering with his vehicle, driving wounded soldiers on excursions; such voluntary work was a way for civilians to signal that they were aiding the war effort in whatever way they felt they could.¹²⁶ Many men of military age sought thus to demonstrate their patriotic credentials, short of actually enlisting into the armed forces themselves. Once military conscription was introduced in early 1916 such volunteer activities acquired new meaning and it became imperative for appellants to be able to prove that they were contributing to the war effort; indeed, 'volunteering' was made increasingly compulsory. From mid-1916, exemption from military service could be made conditional upon the man doing some form of voluntary work. For example, the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal ordered Alfred Brazier to serve with the Special Constabulary as a condition of his six-month exemption.¹²⁷

Other appellants were required to serve with the Volunteer Training Corps [hereafter VTC] – the voluntary home defence civilian militia – and, by June 1917, 102,000 of the corps' 300,000 nationwide volunteers had been recruited through a military service tribunal.¹²⁸ Taxi-cab drivers were among those expected to join the VTC with some men stressing that such voluntary duties were onerous, pointing to their

¹²⁵ MH 47/69/44: Ernest Hewlett, 19 September 1916.

¹²⁶ See Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 95-100 – especially p. 99, for the entertainment of wounded soldiers. Also Ugolini, *Civvies*, pp. 158-161.

¹²⁷ MH 47/49/14: Alfred Brazier, 28 June 1916.

¹²⁸ Ian Beckett, *Britain's Part-Time Soldiers – The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558-1945* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2011 [1991]), p. 241.

financial cost. Harry Dunn argued that his attendance with the VTC had caused him 'to lose a lot of time from my business'.¹²⁹ The Volunteer Act, passed on 22 December 1916, compelled exempted men to undertake a statutory number of drills with the VTC per month.¹³⁰ Charles Poston had a diseased hip and explained 'I have been unable even to do the Volunteer Drills as I have to rest the day following therefore affecting my financial position'.¹³¹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, sixteen of the taxi-cab drivers under consideration in this section volunteered their service in a transport capacity and at least seven claimed to have been doing so from the early days of the war. James Keeler obtained a first aid certificate and joined the Voluntary Aid Detachment but also explained that he had 'always taken out the Wounded Soldiers'.¹³² In January 1915 an appeal had been placed in the local Acton newspaper for car owners to volunteer at their local hospital, taking out convalescent soldiers who 'appreciate a motor ride more than anything else, and there is nothing more likely to help them towards a recovery than short and gentle runs into the country now and then'.¹³³ Motoring associations emphasised that they were keen to help. Ernest Hewlett was a member of the Association of Owner Drivers and he explained that 'my Association organise regular weekly outings for our wounded Soldiers (the Drivers bearing the cost of petrol and

¹²⁹ MH 47/21/47: Harry Dunn, 18 September 1916. By 1918 the required number of drills was fourteen per month until proficient and ten thereafter. See *Express*, 1 March 1918.

¹³⁰ Beckett, *Part-Time Soldiers*, p. 239.

¹³¹ MH 47/41/73: Charles Poston, 14 July 1917.

¹³² MH 47/31/41: James Keeler, 9 January 1917. Also MH 47/45/56: Walter Clarke; MH 47/48/26: William Hayward; MH 47/69/44: Ernest Hewlett; MH 47/49/13: Charles Hollett; MH 47/21/48: Frederick Hudson; MH 47/24/1: Arthur Parkes.

¹³³ *Gazette*, 15 January 1915.

incidental running expenses themselves) and I assist in taking out these Soldiers for drives and excursions'.¹³⁴ The local newspaper reported that du Cros taxi-cab owner-drivers took part in this form of voluntary work and in October 1915 'some 400 men from the Full Military Hospital and St Mark's College Hospital, Chelsea, were driven out to Maidenhead, Taplow, and Windsor'.¹³⁵ When claiming exemption from military service, several du Cros owner-drivers asserted that they had been driving convalescent soldiers 'since the wounded first came home'.¹³⁶ In some cases, further exemption was granted on condition that they continued to do so.¹³⁷

However, such volunteer activities were not always straightforward. Petrol rationing was introduced as the war escalated and the Motor Spirit Restriction Order came into effect on 1 November 1917, cutting all petrol supplies 'for any other purpose except as in hereinafter expressly authorised'.¹³⁸ William Hayward pointed out that 'we have been cut down to the lowest quantity yet reached. I was consequently quite

¹³⁴ MH 47/69/44: Ernest Hewlett, 19 September 1916. For Royal Automobile Club [hereafter RAC] and Automobile Association [hereafter AA] pamphlets regarding war work see Castle Museum York – YORCM 2015 135 7: 'Statement of War Work Done by the Royal Automobile Club', 30 January 1918; YORCM 2015 135 8: 'Automobile Association: Manifesto to Motorists – The War Aims', April 1918. Also *Gazette*, 2 April 1915 for a letter from the Honorary Secretary of the Middlesex County Automobile Club, Pall Mall.

¹³⁵ *Gazette*, 15 October 1915.

¹³⁶ MH 47/48/26: William Hayward, n.d., circa 1 November 1917. Also MH 47/24/1: Arthur Parkes, n.d., circa 19 October 1916.

¹³⁷ See for example MH 47/49/13: Charles Hollett, 25 July 1916; MH 47/31/41: James Keeler, 9 January 1917.

¹³⁸ 'New Motor Spirit Restriction Order', *Commercial Motor*, vol. XXVI, no. 658, 18 October 1917, p. 172. Available from <http://archive.commercialmotor.com> [Accessed 2 February 2020].

unable to carry on in the direction which you asked of me viz: taking out wounded soldiers into the country'.¹³⁹ Hayward was caring for his ailing wife and children and explained that he was:

desirous of doing something within my reach and hearing of an appeal for men with cars in the National Motor Volunteers I at once was sworn in, the petrol trouble was overcome by an allowance which the government made to the Corps and we are supplied with such amount as covers the mileage run per car, otherwise our services are free.¹⁴⁰

From early 1915 London taxi-cab owner-drivers could volunteer, alongside other civilians, in the National Motor Volunteers (affiliated to the Central Association of the Volunteer Training Corps), providing their own vehicles and operating as a voluntary transport network for the Corps.¹⁴¹ The National Motor Volunteers organisation was incorporated into the newly-formed Motor Transport Volunteers on 15 February 1916 and the VTC was officially recognised by the War Office on 29 February 1916.¹⁴² Frederick Hudson served in the VTC as a condition of his exemption. He explained that 'for the last 12 months have been taking wounded soldiers out occasionally I have joined up in the 4th Middlesex Volunteers Regiment doing 2 drills a week'.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ MH 47/48/26: William Hayward, n.d., circa 1 November 1917.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., n.d.

¹⁴¹ Sainsbury, *Herts V. R.*, p. 7; Beckett, *Part-Time Soldiers*, pp. 242-3.

¹⁴² Unknown author, 'The Motor Transport Volunteers: An Excellent Auxiliary', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution*, vol. 62, no. 448 (1917), p. 812.

¹⁴³ MH 47/21/48: Frederick Hudson, 17 September 1916.

Walter Perry was granted exemption conditional on him joining 'any Aid Motor Transport Detachment'.¹⁴⁴

Following the Volunteer Act of 22 December 1916, some voluntary organisations came under increasing military control.¹⁴⁵ The Motor Transport Volunteer organisation was reorganised into the newly-formed County Motor Volunteer Corps on 14 January 1917 and, in London, this was known as Group II, City of London Motor Volunteer Corps (4/23rd Squadrons).¹⁴⁶ The Corps' squadrons were amalgamated from voluntary organisations such as the Commercial Motor Users Association and the Mechanical Transport Column of the City of London National Guard (VTC).¹⁴⁷ From July 1918, taxi-cab owner-drivers who volunteered for this service were deemed to be in the Army Service Corps Mechanical Transport (Volunteers). John Reynolds stated that he was 'a member of the County of London A S C M T Volunteers and do duty in whatever capacity I am required from week to week in addition to the regulation drills'.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ MH 47/29/46: Walter Perry, 28 August 1916.

¹⁴⁵ A. E. Manning Foster, *The National Guard in the Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Cope and Fenwick, 1920), pp. 62-8. Also 'Motor Volunteer Corps', in *Commercial Motor*, vol. XXIV, no. 622, 8 February 1917, p. 499. Available from <http://archive.commercialmotor.com> [Accessed 13 February 2018]. See also Beckett and Simpson, *Nation in Arms*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁶ 'Motor Transport Volunteers', pp. 812-815. For a history of the ASC Motor Volunteer Corps from 1903 see Young, *Army Service Corps*, pp. 19-24.

¹⁴⁷ 'The Wheels of Industry', in *Commercial Motor*, vol. XXV, no. 630, 5 April 1917, p. 120. Available from <http://archive.commercialmotor.com> [Accessed 13 February 2018].

¹⁴⁸ MH 47/70/6: John Reynolds, 19 July 1918.

These duties could be burdensome and inconvenient but voluntary work bolstered a man's argument for exemption. Walter Clarke suffered from 'gastric troubles' and, in June 1917, was granted an unconditional six month exemption by the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal.¹⁴⁹ However, he may have felt that he could strengthen any further claims for exemption by volunteering for the County of London Motor Volunteers Corps. He provided evidence that he and his vehicle were put to a great deal of use. Between 21 July 1917 and 19 December 1917 his voluntary services were demanded on at least eighteen occasions: at St George's Hospital, Waterloo Road to take wounded soldiers to the residence of Robert Mond, Sevenoaks;¹⁵⁰ at Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton to take wounded soldiers to The Cricketers, Chertsey;¹⁵¹ at St. Mark's Hospital, Chelsea to take wounded soldiers to the Conservative Club, Fulham;¹⁵² at Buckingham Palace Hostel for 'Orderly Duty';¹⁵³ at the Air-Raid Duty Station at Kings Cross Road;¹⁵⁴ and 'on duty at Victoria Station with car'.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ MH 47/45/56: Walter Clarke, 8 and 21 June 1917.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 21 July 1917 – the outward journey at '1.15 sharp'.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 12 August 1917 – the return journey at 6pm.

¹⁵² Ibid., 1 December 1917 – the outward journey at 1.30pm, returning at 5.30pm.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 29 August, 5 September, 12 September, 10 October, 24 October, 7 November, 21 November, 5 December, 12 December, 19 December – all 1917. All duties were from 8.45/9pm until 6am.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 30 October, 5 November, 27 November, 4 December – all 1917. He was to report at 6pm and the duties presumably lasted the night.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 26 November 1917 – this duty began at 9pm and presumably lasted the night. Although Clarke's appeal was dismissed on 14 March 1918, with the stipulation that he should not be called up for four weeks, there are no obvious military service records for him and he may never have served in the armed forces. Ibid., 14 March 1918. See Appendix Three.

From early in the war the Station Companies of London's 'National Guard' (amongst others) had provided a free transport service during the night at London's railway stations, conveying servicemen to their onward destinations when all other forms of public transport had ceased.¹⁵⁶ According to a motor trade magazine, taxi-cab drivers formed a part of the railway station motor volunteer service:

It appears that, from the very outset, quite considerable numbers of the owner drivers of taxi cabs have participated in the Motor Volunteer movement; they have worked in relays throughout the night taking men from the station on their arrival in London, to their destinations and assisting in every possible way those who are unfamiliar with the Metropolis. This work they have undertaken in a purely voluntary capacity, because they wish to feel that they were helping the men at the front and doing something for their country. It is no light matter for a man whose business it is to drive a cab in London for many hours every day to extend these hours of his own accord, and without any re-numeration whatever, but, on the other hand, at some expense to himself.¹⁵⁷

This station service had originally operated solely from Victoria station but from 4 December 1916 the Motor Transport Volunteers were asked to patrol other railway termini as well and, 'on one night, taken casually from the returns, a Sunday, the

¹⁵⁶ The unit's official title was 'The City of London National Guard Volunteers'. See Manning Foster, *National Guard*, pp. 98-103 and 246-272; K. W. Mitchinson, *Defending Albion: Britain's Home Army 1908-1919* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 120.

¹⁵⁷ 'National Work for Taxi-drivers', in *Commercial Motor*, vol. XXVI, no. 663, 22 November 1917, p. 268. Available from <http://archive.commercialmotor.com> [Accessed 13 February 2018]. Also 'Motor Transport Volunteers', p. 814.

corps had 16 lorries and 15 cars working; they transported 1,650 men and directed 120 more, and had the stations cleared by eight-thirty in the morning'.¹⁵⁸ Ernest Dennis suffered from a haemorrhaging duodenal ulcer and he did not serve in the armed forces but, like Walter Clarke, he volunteered with the City of London Motor Volunteer Corps. The Corps wrote to the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal stating that 'he is a regular attendant at drills, and a very energetic worker, and has repeatedly carried out the following duties: – Victoria Station duty, transporting troops to various rest houses'.¹⁵⁹

In 1918 Dennis' continued exemption was made conditional upon him volunteering with the 'Overseas Forces Reception Committee'.¹⁶⁰ This Committee was probably connected with Canadian and Australian soldiers, who apparently 'had the most money' and were particularly vulnerable to 'harpies, working in groups, whose whole objects were to rob and wreck the soldiers passing through town'.¹⁶¹ Dennis explained in a later application that he was 'doing work of National importance with the Canadian overseas forces giving the use of my Cab'.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ 'Motor Transport Volunteers', p. 813.

¹⁵⁹ MH 47/63/47: Ernest Dennis, 9 January 1918.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 7 March 1918.

¹⁶¹ Manning Foster, *National Guard*, p. 99. Also Jerry White, *Zeppelin Nights – London in the First World War* (London: Bodley Head, 2014), pp. 184-5; Adrian Gregory, 'Railway Stations: Gateways and Termini', in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War – London, Paris, Berlin, Volume 2: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 23-56 – especially pp. 51-2.

¹⁶² MH 47/63/47: Ernest Dennis, 23 August 1918.

Alongside their work at London's railway stations, the Motor Volunteers also provided 'men and vehicles for use in "national emergency"'.¹⁶³ The first Zeppelin attack on London took place on 31 May 1915 and the capital remained vulnerable to German aerial bombardment for the remainder of the war. Stanley Tandy explained that 'in case of Air raids we are in great request by Special constables, and other officials for quick conveyance to the various centres'.¹⁶⁴ The Chiswick tribunal asked Ernest Dennis how much time he gave to the Motor Volunteers and he replied:

I do drill once a week, and I go to Victoria Station whenever I am required to do so – I go to the Station generally about twice a month, and on every air raid I am called out. I have to go to the Police Station and wait there in case I am wanted. I go to Grays Inn Road, and they send me wherever I am wanted.¹⁶⁵

Arthur Giffin was one of the taxi-cab drivers connected to the Grubb test-case. He had seven children and was granted exemption for three months 'subject to commencing to perform emergency work connected with air raids'.¹⁶⁶ In his appeal, Walter Clarke explained that 'the war authorities have also accepted my car to be

¹⁶³ 'Wheels of Industry', in *Commercial Motor*, vol. XXVI, no. 662, 15 November 1917, p. 250. Available from <http://archive.commercialmotor.com> [Accessed 13 December 2018].

¹⁶⁴ MH 47/15/5: Stanley Tandy, 21 June 1916. See also MH 47/69/44: Ernest Hewlett, 19 September 1916; MH 47/23/69: Frederick Butterworth, 15 October 1916.

¹⁶⁵ MH 47/64/47: Ernest Dennis, 7 February 1918.

¹⁶⁶ MH 47/29/17: Arthur Giffin, 12 September 1916.

used in case of invasion & I have been instructed to report at Kensington Barracks with car upon receiving the call to mobilize'.¹⁶⁷

London's taxi-cab drivers were part of a network of civilian volunteers who emphasised that they had offered their services from the early days of the war. As the conflict continued this voluntary work was increasingly controlled by the authorities, who adapted existing systems and mobilised the home front for such duties as the smooth operation of London's transport infrastructure and the defence of the capital against enemy attack. Those taxi-cab drivers who received exemption from military service tribunals could expect their certificates to be subject to a condition that they gave both their time and their vehicle free of charge to the war effort.

Conclusion

As many as thirty-one of the forty taxi-cab drivers considered in this chapter were conscripted into the armed forces and the majority of them served as drivers in the ASC. Despite stressing their role as family breadwinners, responsible for their dependants' well-being, pleading financial problems and health issues, and offering their voluntary services to the home front, most of the taxi-cab drivers were considered by the tribunals to be of greater value to the country's manpower in the army than they were as civilians. Although there is evidence that individuals relied upon each other to construct their applications and appeals for exemption, unlike the laundrymen, these men were not supported in their claims for exemption by employers, trade associations, advocates or friends/relatives: indeed, taxi-cab drivers presented themselves as individualistic, entrepreneurial economic agents.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 16 December 1917.

These men were self-employed and most of them were buying their vehicle on a hire purchase system, arguably in order to secure their financial future and improve the standard of living of their wives and children. Unlike the laundrymen in chapter one and the food and fuel retail workers in chapter four, it was never suggested – by the appellants or the tribunals alike – that women could take over the business in the man's absence. These men were the main family wage-earners and claimed that their dependants would not manage on army pay and separation allowance. Taxi-cabs were subject to strict regulations as public vehicles; there were specific problems connected with storing the vehicle for an unspecified period of time and then putting it back on the road at a later date. The local and appeal tribunals were not unsympathetic to the claims of financial hardship made by these men.

Following a request from the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal to the Central Tribunal for advice, through the test case of an Acton taxi-cab owner-driver, it was decreed that a man could not expect to be exempted from military service simply because he was purchasing a vehicle in instalments. As a result of this judgement, many taxi-cab owner-drivers were eventually conscripted into the armed forces. However, the tribunal authorities conceded that taxi-cab owner-drivers were in a unique position with regard to the level of sacrifice that they and their families would have to suffer in order for the male breadwinner to serve in the armed forces. As a result legislative measures were introduced, designed not only to alleviate short-term financial difficulties but also to reassure taxi-cab owner-drivers that they would receive assistance to put their vehicles back on the road and restart their businesses when they returned from the war.

Many of the men in this chapter argued that they were unfit for frontline duties in the armed forces. Poor health did not, however, guarantee exemption from military

service. From 1915, the army authorities graded men according to their physical capabilities and then placed them into the units where they would be of most use. All of the men in this chapter were graded 'A', 'B' or 'C' and none were fit for sedentary duties alone. Taxi-cab drivers had to be relatively fit and at least a quarter of them were graded 'A'. Skilled men were actively sought by the armed forces and the ASC in particular could make good use of men who could drive motor vehicles (even if they could not walk or march very far) and men graded 'B' and 'C' were put into transport units at home and abroad. Those graded 'C' were more likely to remain exempt than those of a higher medical category and some were given voluntary work in their immediate vicinity or they found work in local munitions factories. Men who claimed the ill-health of a relative could receive exemption for a limited period of time but the army's need for drivers meant that the relative was increasingly overlooked and the man called up for military service.

Taxi-cab driving was not a certified occupation but anyone contributing to London's transport system was valued to a certain extent and many of the forty taxi-cab owner-drivers volunteered in one of the versions of the Motor Transport Volunteer organisations. From the beginning of the war owner-drivers were encouraged to volunteer in taking wounded soldiers on excursions. Motorists also assisted thousands of troops who embarked to or from London's railway stations at night when all other forms of transport had ceased and London's emergency services required their help in times of air raids. Many taxi-cab drivers were on duty throughout the night, in spite of their own ill health and regardless of having worked a full day previously. Men undertook a variety of volunteering activities, as they explained in their applications. These helped to bolster appeals to an extent but the authorities took increasing control of voluntary work. By mid-1916, many exemptions

from military service demanded a degree of commitment to volunteering in some way; indeed, volunteering became increasingly compulsory.

Chapter Three – The Munitions Trade

Introduction

The war-time development of the munitions industry had a significant impact on home front communities, creating a strong demand for labour both in munitions factories and in ancillary trades, and this chapter examines the appeals of sixty-eight men who were part of this labour pool, being connected in some way to Acton's munitions output.

Unrestricted voluntary enlistment into the armed forces in 1914 and 1915 resulted in a lack of skilled and semi-skilled men at a time when the nation needed to significantly develop and expand its output of munitions.¹ A great deal of comment and analysis, both contemporary and historical, focuses on the entry of women into the wartime munitions trade but, as this chapter demonstrates, men continued to constitute a significant part of the workforce throughout the war. Skilled men were moved from other industries to work in newly-developed munitions factories.²

¹ *History of the Ministry of Munitions* [hereafter *HMM*], *Volume I, Part I* (London: HMSO, 1922). See also Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty – British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 81-5; John Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1989), pp. 187-191; James Hinton, *Labour and Socialism – A History of the British Labour Movement, 1897-1974* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983), p. 96; John Williams, *The Other Battleground: The Home Fronts – Britain, France and Germany, 1914-1918* (Chicago: Regnery, 1972), pp. 49-52. Statistics suggest that the engineering industry, for example, had lost as much as twelve per cent of its pre-war workforce by October 1914. See Humbert Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), pp. 14-15.

² *HMM, Volume I, Part III* (London: HMSO, 1918), p. 3. See Wayne Osborne, 'Manufacturing and the Great War' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of

Unskilled men, as well as women, were recruited and trained in the manufacture of munitions.³ By July 1916 there were 2,104,000 previously unskilled people employed in the making and filling of shells and, of these, 1,753,000 were men (eighty-three per cent).⁴ Statistics produced by George Dewar in 1921 estimated that during the third quarter of 1918 – probably the peak production period of the war – there were 2,871,000 munitions workers in the metal and chemical industries, 2,046,000 of whom were male (seventy-one per cent).⁵

Loughborough, 2013), pp. 66-86, for a useful overview of the workforce brought in to make munitions.

³ Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls – Women Workers in World War 1* (London: Tauris 2000 [1998]), pp. 56-9; Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 45. The London County Council ran training classes in munitions-making. See Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend – Munitions Workers in the Great War* (London: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 92-3. The National Archives, Kew [hereafter TNA]: MH – Records Created or Inherited by the Ministry of Health and Successors, Local Government Boards and Related Bodies: MH 47 – Central Military Service Tribunal and Middlesex Appeal Tribunal – Minutes and Papers [hereafter MH 47]: MH 47/53/23: Herman Albers tried to obtain a place on this course but was informed that men were debarred unless they were exempt from military service. See *HMM, Volume IV, Part IV* (London: HMSO, 1918), pp. 58-73, especially p. 64.

⁴ *HMM, Volume IV, Part IV*, p. 16.

⁵ George Dewar, *The Great Munition Feat, 1914-1918* (London: Constable, 1921), p. 14. See also *HMM, Volume VI, Part IV*, p. 44. The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions estimated that ‘the production of munitions occupied ultimately at least 700,000 women and girls’. See *HMM, Volume V, Part III* (London: HMSO, 1919), p. 2.

The five chapters of this thesis all highlight the contemporary notions and debates concerning suitable wartime work for women.⁶ Penny Summerfield emphasises the difficulties involved in investigating the gendered nature of work carried out by female munitions workers in the First World War.⁷ However, it is clear that the employment of munitions workers was influenced by contemporary expectations, relative to the perceived capabilities of both male and female operatives. The novelist and author Hall Caine explained in 1916 that although women were doing ‘almost miraculous work’ in munitions factories they had limitations – one of which was ‘want of physical strength’.⁸ Such considerations had an impact on the type of work women were employed to do and ensured the continued employment of a large workforce of men. These male workers have received little historical attention and yet they played a significant part in the wartime munitions industry, including in Acton.⁹

Furthermore, the manufacture of armaments was only one form of war materiel output and it was not the only section of the munitions industry to continue to employ men. A leading Labour activist, Susan Lawrence, noted in 1915: ‘tents are munitions; boots are munitions; biscuits and jam are munitions; sacks and ropes are munitions;

⁶ See Gail Braybon, ‘Winners or Losers: Women’s Role in the War Story’, in Gail Braybon (ed.), *Evidence, History and the Great War – Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2008 [2002]), p. 91.

⁷ Penny Summerfield, ‘Women and War in the Twentieth Century’, in June Purvis (ed.), *Women’s History: Britain 1850-1945* (London: Routledge, 2000 [1997]), p. 321.

⁸ Hall Caine, *Our Girls – Their Work for the War* (London: Hutchinson, 1916), p. 49. See also James McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals, 1916-1918 – ‘A Very Much Abused Body of Men’* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 87-8.

⁹ See *HMM, Volume VIII, Part II*, pp. 158-175 for the ratio of male to female workers in National Filling Factories, demonstrating that the ‘heavy’ work (for example) was still being done by men in mid-1918.

drugs and bandages are munitions; socks and shirts and uniforms are munitions'.¹⁰ When advising military service tribunals as to work of national importance, the government admitted that 'considerable difficulty has arisen as to the exact designation of occupations required for the manufacture of munitions'.¹¹ Dewar estimated that 'those indirect munition hands' perhaps totalled '3,400,000, both sexes'.¹²

Acton became a significant munitions manufacturing centre during the First World War. As discussed in chapter two, it had developed rapidly as an industrial region from the mid-1800s and, by the early twentieth century, had become the centre of a flourishing motor-car industry.¹³ According to Thierry Bonzon, First World War-

¹⁰ Susan Lawrence, quoted in Gerry Rubin, *War, Law and Labour – The Munitions Acts, State Regulation, and the Unions 1915-1921* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), p. 17. Also *Bedford Park, Turnham Green, Acton Gazette and District Advertiser* [hereafter *Gazette*], 13 August 1915 for the article 'How "Tommy" is Clothed': a description of the Army Ordnance Department.

¹¹ TNA: MH – Records Created or Inherited by the Ministry of Health and Successors, Local Government Boards and Related Bodies: MH 47 – Central Military Service Tribunal and Middlesex Appeal Tribunal - Minutes and Papers: MH 47/142 – Blank Forms, Circulars, Pamphlets Issued by the Local Government Board and Other Government Departments, With Printed Acts, Proclamations, Booklets, etc. [hereafter MH 47/142]: MH 47/142/1: 'Group and Class Systems. Notes on Administration, Issued by the Director-General of Recruiting', February 1916, p. 9. Also Dewar, *Great Munition Feat*, pp. 13-14.

¹² Dewar, *Great Munition Feat*, p. 14.

¹³ Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century – A City and its People* (London: Vintage, 2008), p. 182; Michael Ball and David Sunderland, *An Economic History of London, 1800-1914* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 315; Diane Bolton, Patricia Croot and M. Hicks, 'Acton – Economic history', in T. F. T. Baker and C. R. Elrington (eds.), *A History of the County of Middlesex, Volume 7* (London: Victoria County History,

related industrial development in London comprised four zones, one of which was 'the zone extending in the west from Willesden to Hayes, passing through Acton and Ealing'.¹⁴ P. G. Hall described the 'Wembley-Willesden-Park Royal-Perivale-Greenford triangle ... [as] the greatest single concentration of manufacturing industry in southern England' and argued that industrial growth in this region owed its origin to the development of government munitions factories at Park Royal during the First World War.¹⁵

Private engineering firms across the country had been making munitions since early 1915 and Acton's local workshops and factories were engaged in the production of a wide range of military equipment.¹⁶ One of the main centres of ordnance

1982), pp. 23-30; Michael Robbins, *Middlesex – A New Survey of England* (London: Collins, 1953), p. 56.

¹⁴ Thierry Bonzon, 'The Labour Market and Industrial Mobilization, 1915-1917', in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War – Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 193. Also Jerry White, *Zeppelin Nights – London in the First World War* (London: Bodley Head, 2014), pp.103-6.

¹⁵ P. G. Hall, *The Industries of London since 1861* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007 [1962]), p. 127. Also Robbins, *Middlesex*, pp. 219-20; White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p. 186. Park Royal is situated in North Acton and extends to Stonebridge and Harlesden in the north, is bounded on the east by Wormwood Scrubs and on the west by Alperton and Ealing. As well as being a site for the construction of munition factories, it was used as a horse compound for the Army Service Corps [hereafter ASC] and a pilot training ground for the Royal Flying Corps [hereafter RFC]. See MH 47/78/87: William Davenport – an Acton estate agent whose application for exemption from military service included detail of local land acquisition for the manufacture of munitions.

¹⁶ Thomas Fyfe, *Employers and Workmen under the Munitions of War Acts, 1915-1917: Third Edition* (London: Hodge, 1918), pp. 111-125. The Ministry of Munitions,

manufacture during the war was situated in the motor engineering district of Warple Way and these factories saw not only a considerable influx of women, but also the continued employment of a large number of men. W. and G. du Cros [hereafter du Cros] turned its factory over to the manufacture of 4.5 inch and 6 inch high explosive shell-casings and, according to the *Directory of Manufacturers in Engineering and Allied Trades*, by 1918 had a workforce comprising 1897 men and 720 women.¹⁷ As John Buckley explains, the British aero industry grew from 60,000 workers in August 1916 to 347,000 by November 1918 and 'the demands of air power on home industries and economics were arguably more pronounced than any other aspect of war production'.¹⁸ Acton's factories played a key role in the manufacture of aircraft: David Napier and Son [hereafter Napier] spent the war years designing and manufacturing aeroplane engines and built a significant number of aeroplanes for the Royal Aircraft Factory and the Sopwith Aviation Company.¹⁹ Like du Cros, in 1918

created under the leadership of David Lloyd George on 25 May 1915, imposed state control over the country's industrial output. There were a total of three Munitions of War Acts: 2 July 1915; 27 January 1916; and 21 August 1917.

¹⁷ 'W. & G. du Cros', *Directory of Manufacturers in Engineering and Allied Trades*, 1918, p. 217. Available from www.gracesguide.co.uk [Accessed 21 July 2018]; *Gazette*, 23 August 1918.

¹⁸ John Buckley, *Air Power in the Age of Total War* (London: UCL Press, 1999), p. 62. Also Keith Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-18* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), pp. 31 and 54.

¹⁹ J. M. Bruce, *British Aeroplanes 1914-1918* (London: Bodley Head, 1969), cited in A. H. Goodlet, *The Story of Acton Aerodrome and the Alliance Factory* (Central Reference Library: Ealing, 1978), p. 16.

Napier was employing a predominantly male workforce: 1624 men and 556 women.²⁰

A third Warple Way motor engineering firm – C. A. Vandervell [hereafter CAV] – were electrical and motor ignition specialists, manufacturing starting mechanisms and lighting sets for a range of vehicles, and in 1914 it employed 2000 people in its Acton factory. During the war it turned to the manufacture of a wide range of devices for military use, including grenades and aerial torpedoes, signalling lamps, aero and cycle magnetos, and starting sets for heavy commercial and military vehicles. By the end of the war the firm had extended its factory and was employing 1473 men and 1350 women.²¹ Also in the Warple Way district was Wilkinson Sword, a family-run armaments firm established in the late eighteenth century. As well as making swords – and safety razors – it began manufacturing motor-cycles and motor-cars in newly-acquired large premises on Southfield Road in Acton in 1905. During the war the firm employed 600 men and an unspecified number of women (possibly none), making bayonets and gun-sights.²²

²⁰ 'David Napier and Son', *Directory of Manufacturers*, p. 489. Available from www.gracesguide.co.uk [Accessed 21 July 2018].

²¹ 'C. A. Vandervell and Co.', *Directory of Manufacturers*, p. 693. Available from www.gracesguide.co.uk [Accessed 21 July 2018]. A reporter from the *Acton and Chiswick Express* [hereafter *Express*] visited CAV in September 1916: 'Girls were to be seen in overalls at the drilling machines, formerly worked wholly by men', 15 September 1916. It can be assumed that CAV employed a predominantly – perhaps even solely – male workforce before the war.

²² 'Wilkinson Sword', *Directory of Manufacturers*, p. 734. Available from www.gracesguide.co.uk [Accessed 3 June 2018].

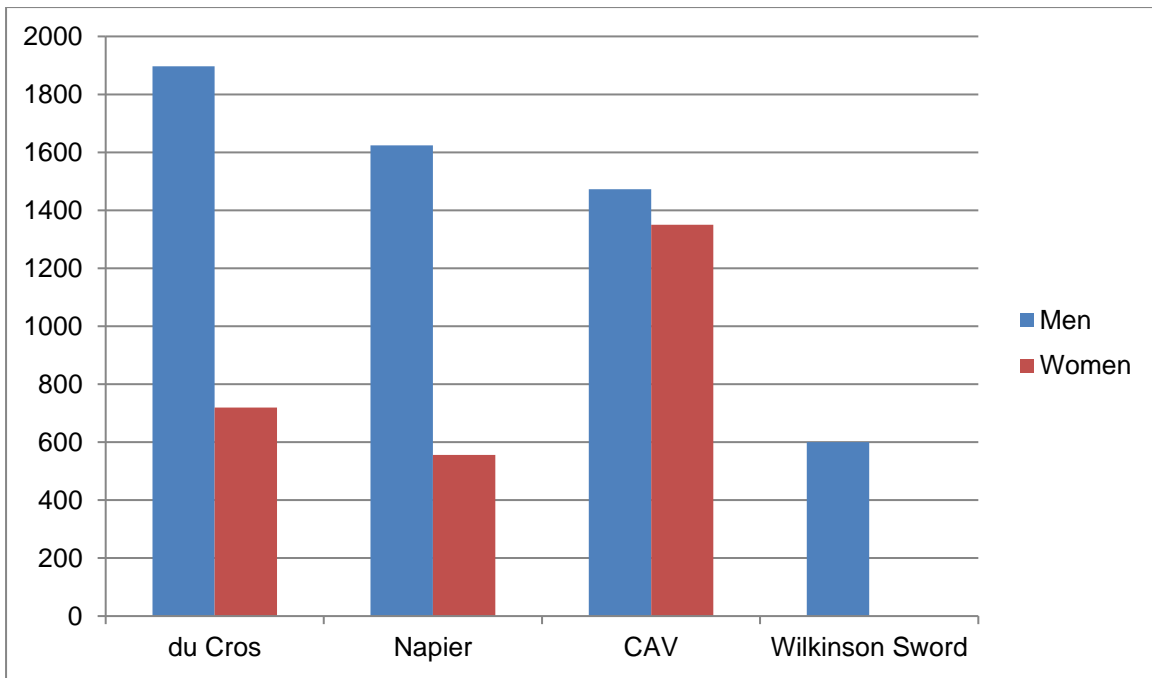


Figure 3.3 – Men and Women Employed in Munitions Manufacture in Warple Way in 1918. Source – Ministry of Munitions: Engineering Department: 1918 Directory of Manufacturers in Engineering and Allied Trades.

As Figure 3.1 shows, in a workforce of at least 8,220 people employed within the four Warple Way factories as many as 5,594 were men (sixty-eight per cent).²³ It can be assumed that some of these men were either above or below military age and that others were medically rejected. Munitions factories offered competitive rates of pay and skilled and semi-skilled men were drawn from other local industries. Skilled and semi-skilled operatives were in great demand and such men could expect to remain exempt from military service in government-controlled factories. Many men would have come from outside Acton and some would have been ‘Class W’

²³ These figures correlate with the statistics produced in the *HMM, Volume VI, Part IV*, p. 44 – of an estimated workforce of 4,964,000 people employed by the government on ‘industrial concerns’ in July 1918, 1,536,000 were women (thirty-one per cent).

reservists, sent to whichever factory required their services.²⁴ It is possible that the Warple Way factories employed 'foreign labour' and there is certainly evidence that other Acton manufacturing companies did so.²⁵ Many of the men working in these factories who were liable for military service had their exemptions considered *en masse* and there is evidence from one Acton newspaper that du Cros, for example, were regularly required to reapply for men 'to remain with the firm after their terms of

²⁴ Army Order 203 of 1916 introduced Army Reserve Class W under Section 12 of the Military Service Act, 1916 (Session 2): 'for all those soldiers whose services are deemed to be more valuable to the country in civil rather than military employment'. See Chris Baker, 'British Army Reserves and Reservists', *The Long Long Trail, Researching Soldiers of the British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918*. Available from www.longlongtrail.co.uk [Accessed 24 June 2019]. MH 47/76/2: Edgar Curtiss became a Class W reservist after his call-up and was sent to the National Cartridge Factory in Dagenham. See his service records at TNA: WO – Records created or inherited by the War Office, Armed Forces, Judge Advocate General, and related bodies: Soldiers' Documents, First World War 'Burnt Documents': Edgar Franklin Curtiss. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 28 May 2017]. Also Appendix Three.

²⁵ MH 47/96/121: Richard Davey, 5 March 1917. Davey worked for BAR Engineering in Acton and they claimed that he was 'the only Englishman employed'. Also Grieves, *Politics of Manpower*, p. 31. Some munitions workers would have been Belgian refugees. See *HMM, Vol. I, Part II* (London: HMSO, 1918), pp. 15-16; Wolfe, *Labour Supply*, pp. 82-3; unknown author, *The Condition of the Belgian Workmen now Refugees in England* (London: Unwin, 1917). See Pierre Purseigle, 'Beyond and Below the Nations: Towards a Comparative Analysis of Local Communities at War', in Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle (eds.), *Uncovered Fields – Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 113-4, for growing tensions between refugees and citizens.

engagement had expired'.²⁶ Seventeen of the sixty-eight Acton men considered in this chapter worked within the Warple Way munitions hub and these men were perhaps, by the very fact that they appealed individually, atypical of the majority of Acton's male munitions workers.

This chapter consists of two sections, the first of which considers the appeals of thirty-seven Acton men who made munitions in Acton and the surrounding area during the war. It is constructed in a broadly chronological order, paying especial attention to the impact of the Ministry of Munitions and the Defence of the Realm [hereafter DORA] legislation which empowered the government to requisition private engineering firms in order to organise and maximise the nation's output of war materiel. This section focuses on the impact on appeals of the complex and ever-shifting legislation that sought to organise and distribute local skilled and semi-skilled manpower, as well as of initiatives designed to protect skilled and semi-skilled men from military conscription such as the badging system, the 'starring' of men as a result of the National Registration Act in August 1915 and the frequently-changing lists of certified and protected occupations.

The second section focuses on thirty-one skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled men who were not directly involved in the making of munitions but who were employed in industries that built and/or serviced the munitions factories. These men included merchants and builders and this section includes the appeals of men who were involved in the building trade and public services in Acton. The section pays particular attention to the problems highlighted in these appeals concerning Acton's

²⁶ *Express*, 22 September 1916. Also *Gazette*, 10 March 1916. The Acton military representative (presumably John Kent) agreed to 'all but 2 or 3 cases' of eighty-five men at du Cros who were 'said to be engaged in a certified occupation'.

domestic infrastructure and by the challenges faced by the Acton Urban District Council [hereafter AUDC] with regard to maintenance and sanitation, shedding light on how applications for exemption were dealt with by a tribunal panel of men who had strong business and administrative links to the local infrastructure.

Munitions work

With regard to industrial manpower there were two periods of legislative development during the war: the first, lasting until early 1916, when the objective was to prevent essential skilled men from enlisting or being recruited into the armed forces and the second, from the introduction of military conscription in January 1916, when men eligible for military service were taken – or, to use a contemporary term, ‘combed’ – out of munitions factories.²⁷ This section is arranged in a broadly chronological order to explore the impact of such legislation on the appeals made by thirty-seven men living and working in Acton.

These thirty-seven men were employed as munitions workers and all but two of them were engaged in the production of military weapons in local factories and workshops.²⁸

²⁷ Wolfe, *Labour Supply*, p. 20. Wolfe explained that both periods were ‘excessively confused’ and that ‘the various stages overlapped and co-existed’.

²⁸ The two exceptions were Charles Wood and Cecil Steggall. MH 47/105/44: Charles Wood was a motor driver and mechanic for T. G. Tickler, a fruit preserving company. He was granted exemption on 30 May 1916 ‘so long as he remains in present employment’. Tickler’s tins of plum and apple jam are enduringly associated with the British army in the First World War. See John Brophy and Eric Partridge, *Dictionary of Tommies’ Songs and Slang, 1914-1918* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2008 [1930]), pp. 59 and 192. MH 47/82/17: Cecil Steggall was a hair carder for

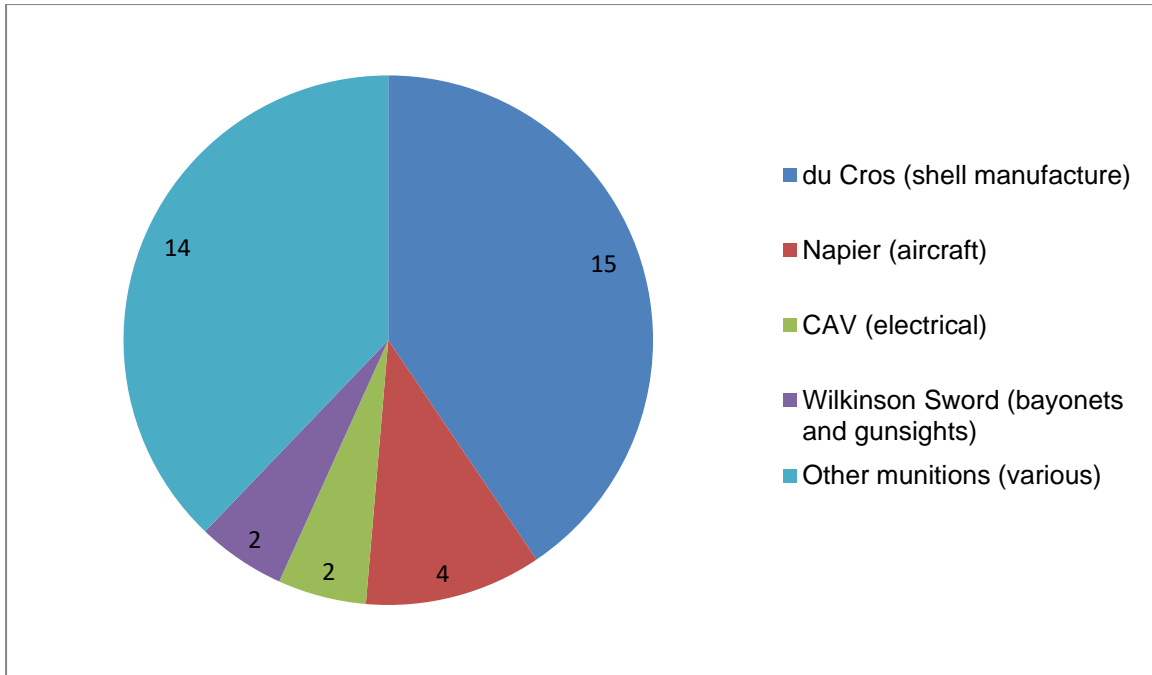


Figure 3.2 – Acton Appellants Working in Warple Way and Other Local Munitions Factories and Workshops. Source – MH 47 Archive.

Eighteen of these thirty-seven men had been skilled carpenters, mechanics, engineers or craftsmen before the war and simply transferred their skills into the making of munitions. The other nineteen moved to munitions manufacture from other trades. Twenty-two of the thirty-seven men remained exempt from military service for the duration of the war and three others were not called up until mid- or late 1918. Thus, sixty-eight per cent of the men in this section remained exempt through their work in the munitions trade for most, if not all, of the war (see Figure 3.3 below).

Waring and Gillow, Hammersmith, who were making seamen's beds for the Admiralty. He was called up for military service on 13 December 1916.

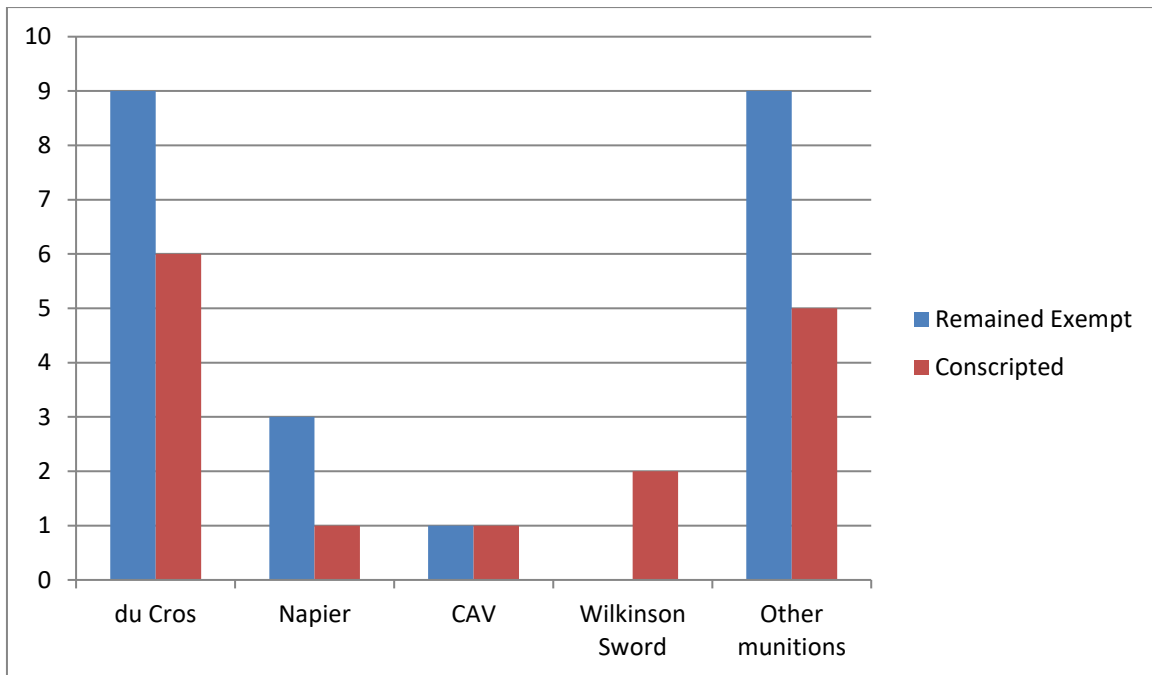


Figure 3.4 – Exemption and Conscription Ratios of Acton Appellants Working in Local Munitions Factories. Source – MH 47 Archive.

Some of these thirty-seven men also appear in other chapters, as munitions workers came from a wide variety of pre-war trades – arguably to avoid military service. Five laundrymen took up work in the local munitions trade: William Simpson, Thomas Davey and John Goodchild were all skilled men who undertook munitions-related work for which they were qualified; Frank Henry and Frederick Mills went to munitions factories, presumably as semi-skilled men.²⁹ Harry Sanders and Louis

²⁹ MH 47/50/91: William Simpson, born in 1874, returned to work as a fitter in an unnamed factory in September 1918; MH 47/102/66: John Goodchild worked for Gwynnes Ltd., Mechanical and Hydraulic Engineers in Hammersmith from February 1917; MH 47/58/17: Frank Henry worked for Napier from January 1918 – all three remained exempt for the duration of the war; MH 47/96/121: Thomas Davey was a laundry engineer who took up work for BAR engineering from 1915 and was called up in July 1917; MH 47/102/94: Frederick Mills was a laundry proprietor who had been working for du Cros since 1915 and was called up in July 1918. See Appendix Three.

Woolcock were taxi-cab owner-drivers with 'delicate' wives and both went to work in munitions factories, probably in order to avoid conscription.³⁰ Five food retail workers who claimed ill health went to work in local munitions factories in order to bolster their appeals for exemption: both Alfred Goding and Herbert Dickens left the retail trade and worked full-time in munitions factories; James Yolland and Alfred Cooper were both open about the fact that they had taken up munitions work to stay at home and run their businesses in whatever spare time they had; Sidney Turvey worked part-time in a munitions factory as a condition of his continued exemption.³¹ Three white-collar workers remained exempt for the duration of the war by undertaking munitions work: Herman Albers and Charles Fevez took up aeroplane construction and Alfred Greene became a supervisor at du Cros.³²

³⁰ MH 47/47/31: Harry Sanders worked as a toolsetter for Perivale NFF from February 1917 until May 1918; MH 47/55/13: Louis Woolcock took up aeroplane construction for Napier from February 1917 until the end of the war. See Appendix Three.

³¹ MH 47/60/44: Alfred Goding did a 64-hour week for CAV from June 1917; MH 47/102/31: Herbert Dickens left H. J. Heinz Co. to work 12-hour days for du Cros in October 1916; MH 47/60/27: James Yolland worked thirty hours 'as a fitter in the construction of aeroplane parts', circa June 1917; MH 47/53/22: Alfred Cooper had only one eye and was permitted to find munitions work in the locality in September 1916; MH 47/55/9: Sidney Turvey was blind in one eye and worked a sixteen-hour week packing magnetos for Parker and Rice from 27 February 1917. Dickens was called up in May 1918 but the other four remained exempt for the duration of the war.

³² MH 47/53/23: Herman Albers, was a commission agent who worked for the Whitehead Aircraft Factory in Richmond from September 1916; MH 47/69/38: Charles Fevez was an accountant's clerk who worked for Napier from August 1917; MH 47/78/1: Albert Greene was a theatrical agent and became a 'viewer of shells' for du Cros, presumably sometime in 1915. See Appendix Three.

The Defence of the Realm (Amendment) (No. 2) Act of 16 March 1915 gave the authorities increased powers to requisition factories, and/or machinery and men, if they were not at least partly engaged on essential war production.³³ Small companies tried to adapt but there is evidence that some were forced to close as the munitions trade became increasingly state-controlled. Alexander Anderson, his partner and two employees were steam laundry manufacturers but the company had been making casings for 18-pounder high explosive shells since late 1915. On 31 May 1916 the Ministry of Munitions withdrew the company's supply of steel as 'all small works were stopped from making shells. We also obtained a badge and certificate from the Ministry for the above work. These certificates have now been called in'.³⁴ The two employees joined the army and Anderson's partner became a munitions worker at Wilkinson Sword. Anderson attempted to keep the laundry manufacturing business going but his appeal was dismissed on 30 September 1916 and it can be assumed that the firm closed.³⁵

Of the thirty-seven men, nine were single and thus liable for service in the armed forces under the first Military Service Act, which was enacted on 27 January 1916 and came into effect on 10 February 1916.³⁶ Single men were deemed to have enlisted into the armed forces if they had not applied for exemption and/or been exempted from military service by 2 March 1916.³⁷ Despite claiming to be doing work

³³ *HMM, Volume I, Part III*, pp. 58-68.

³⁴ MH 47/21/6: Alexander Anderson, 30 August 1916.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 30 September 1916.

³⁶ MH 47/142/1: Military Service Act, 27 January 1916.

³⁷ Single men were classified as those who had been either unmarried or widowed with no dependent children on 2 November 1915. Conscripts also had to be over the

of national importance, unmarried skilled men could be conscripted if they had no domestic responsibilities – especially if the firm for which they worked was not an established enterprise. Twenty-three-year-old Alfred Rice was one of two partners in a small company of electrical instrument makers in Acton who were engaged on work for the Mechanical Transport section of the Army Service Corps [hereafter ASC].³⁸ They had expanded their premises and were ‘expecting larger orders shortly from the Admiralty’.³⁹ John Kent, the Acton military representative, argued that ‘the Country needs both men. It should certainly have one. Rice appears to have no domestic difficulties’.⁴⁰

Some single men were not required to apply to their local military service tribunal for exemption by 2 March 1916 because they were deemed to be doing work of national importance under Section 2 (2) of the Military Service Act.⁴¹ Recruiting officers could issue certificates of exemption to men who provided ‘satisfactory evidence’ that they were undertaking work of national importance.⁴² It was not until a revised list of

age of eighteen and under the age of forty-one and ‘ordinarily resident in Great Britain’ on 15 August 1915.

³⁸ MH 47/8/103: Alfred Rice, 14 February 1916.

³⁹ Ibid., 3 March 1916.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 28 February 1916. Although Rice was conscripted his company were making magneto spare parts, high tension windings and X-ray apparatus in 1918 and employing twenty-one men and fifteen women: ‘Parker & Rice’, *Directory of Manufacturers*, p. 515. Available from www.gracesguide.co.uk [Accessed 28 April 2020]. One of these men would have been MH 47/55/9: Sidney Turvey – the food retail worker who took up munitions work as a condition of his continued exemption in February 1917, mentioned above.

⁴¹ MH 47/142/1: Military Service Act, 27 January 1916, p. 3.

⁴² MH 47/142/1: ‘Registration and Recruiting’, 21 August 1916, p. 36.

certified occupations was published on 1 May 1916 that some 'skilled workpeople' found themselves obliged to apply to a tribunal for exemption.⁴³

Twenty-one-year-old Richard Gouldthorpe, one of four unmarried skilled men working for Woolnough, Lang Limited, was one such man. His firm made their first application for his exemption on 20 May 1916.⁴⁴ They provided the tribunal with a list of thirteen men and boys who worked for the company, only four of whom were over the age of seventeen. Of the four men who were eligible for military service (including Gouldthorpe), all were single and skilled. Two had tribunal certificates and one a medical certificate and, although Gouldthorpe had no such documentation, his employer stated that 'till lately [he] was exempt because he was in a certified industry or occupation'.⁴⁵ The company were awaiting a decision from the Ministry of Munitions with regard to badges when Gouldthorpe was called up on 15 July 1916.⁴⁶

'Badging' was adopted by the Admiralty in December 1914 and the War Office had followed suit by March 1915 in an attempt to retain skilled men in essential trades. However, this was an unregulated arrangement with the onus on the individual employer to distinguish which men came within the remit of the exemption criteria.⁴⁷ On 23 July 1915 the Ministry of Munitions took control of the issue of badges,

⁴³ MH 47/142/4/1: Local Government Board [hereafter LGB] Circular R.78: Certified Occupations, 1 May 1916. Also: MH 47/142/4/2: LGB Circular R.81, 23 May 1916.

⁴⁴ MH 47/78/2: Richard Gouldthorpe, 20 May 1916.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 13 June 1916.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 July 1916.

⁴⁷ *HMM, Volume I, Part II*, p. 4. The War Office defined the terms as 'all skilled draughtsmen or technical assistants in the office, and supervising staff and all skilled workmen, but not to include the grades of labour usually classed as unskilled': Wolfe, *Labour Supply*, p. 24.

although their distribution was still based on recommendations from employers and was, according to Keith Grieves, ‘open to abuse’.⁴⁸ ‘War Service Badges’ – as they became known – were issued by the Ministry of Munitions, ‘numbered with a letter indicating the series’ and accompanied by a certificate.⁴⁹

Delays by the Ministry of Munitions in processing badge applications created confusion within the military service tribunals.⁵⁰ It was sometimes possible for a man’s application for exemption on personal grounds to over-lap with another application from his employer who was awaiting a badging decision. David Webber was a carpenter for H. C. Cleaver Ltd., a company specialising in the manufacture of

⁴⁸ Grieves, *Politics of Manpower*, p. 15. Also Wolfe, *Labour Supply*, pp. 310-312.

⁴⁹ MH 47/142/1: ‘Registration and Recruiting’, 21 August 1916, p. 25. War Service Badges replaced War Office and Admiralty badges, although some War Office and Admiralty badges remained valid. Men with badges were known as ‘badged’ men and should not be confused with ‘starred’ men who had an asterisk placed next to their name on the National Register of 15 August 1915: *HMM, Volume IV, Part III, Appendix IV: The Starred Occupations* (London: HMSO, 1919), pp. 95-7. In October 1915 it was discovered that of 5,158,211 registered men, 1,519,432 were ‘starred’: Wolfe, *Labour Supply*, p. 33. Also Grieves, *Politics of Manpower*, p. 21; Juliette Pattinson, “‘Shirkers’, ‘Scrimjacks’ and ‘Scrimshanks’?: British Civilian Masculinity and Reserved Occupations, 1914-45’, in *Gender and History*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2016), p. 711.

⁵⁰ In July 1916 the *Gazette* reported on a group application from General Motors for twenty-one men. The company were awaiting a badge decision from the Ministry of Munitions and the application had been delayed in the Acton tribunal. The solicitor representing the firm stated that ‘in the absence of the Press I could tell you some tales about the MM that would put your hair on end’: *Gazette*, 14 July 1916. Also *HMM, Volume VI, Part I* (London: HMSO, 1918), pp. 11-2, for October 1916 legislation determining that badges should no longer be granted to men who had applications pending or temporary exemption only. See MH 47/53/23: Herman Albers, 3 and 6 December 1916.

aeroplane propellers.⁵¹ Webber explained that he had ‘taken charge in the works’ but his main argument to the Acton tribunal was that he was medically unfit for military service.⁵² He was unsuccessful in his personal application in front of both the Acton tribunal (on 18 July 1916) and the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal (on 1 August 1916) and his case was dismissed. However, Webber and several other men from Cleaver were brought before the Willesden tribunal on 17 July 1916. The company were given a month to see if they could find replacements who were not of military age.⁵³ Thus, Webber had his case dismissed from one local tribunal within twenty-four hours of his firm receiving temporary exemption on his behalf by another local tribunal. The company were successful in acquiring a badge for Webber in September 1916 and he was not required to reappear in front of the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal.⁵⁴

Government initiatives to regulate and limit the issuing of badges resulted in all firms being required to keep a register of their men from early April 1916.⁵⁵ The Ministry of Munitions had established a ‘Combing-Out Commission’ in mid-1916 and ‘de-badging inspectors’ made visits to firms that had been granted badges for their

⁵¹ MH 47/20/33: David Webber, 22 June 1916. For post-war commendation of the achievements of this firm see *Flight*, 15 January 1925, p. 33. Available from www.flightglobal.com [Accessed 3 October 2018].

⁵² MH 47/20/33: David Webber, 22 June 1916.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 17 July 1916.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 26 September 1916.

⁵⁵ *HMM, Vol. IV, Part III*, pp. 66-71 and 77-83, for the work of the Cabinet Committee on Exemptions and the Badge Department; MH 47/142/4/1: Army Council Instruction [hereafter ACI] No. 890 of 1916, ‘Registration of Male Employees and Inspection of Badged Firms’, 28 April 1916; Grievs, *Politics of Manpower*, pp. 32-7 and 44.

employees.⁵⁶ Munitions firms were criticised in an Acton newspaper for employing young single men and in March 1916 the *Gazette* commented that ‘there are thousands of young unmarried men engaged on “munitions” who had no skill in their manufacture before they took refuge from Lord Kitchener behind the Minister of Munitions. These must be rooted out and replaced by older or married workers’.⁵⁷ Leonard Keen seems to have been the type of man targeted for such censure. He was unmarried, twenty-eight years of age and had been a cinema artist at Ealing Studios before he found work as a munitions worker with du Cros in January 1916.⁵⁸ Keen’s medical grading kept him out of the armed forces until October 1916, at which time he was conscripted.⁵⁹

The Military Service Act, 1916 (Session 2) was enacted on 25 May 1916. It extended compulsory enlistment to all married men aged between eighteen and forty-one who were deemed to have enlisted into the armed forces if they had not been exempted or applied for exemption by 24 June 1916.⁶⁰ In September 1916 it became known that 880,176 men of military age held War Service badges and that at least 300,000

⁵⁶ MH 47/142/1: ‘Registration and Recruiting’, 21 August 1916, p. 26; MH 47/142/4/2: LGB Circular R.81, 23 May 1916; MH 47/142/4/2: Army Council Instruction No. 1119 of 1916, 2 June 1916: ‘Special Badge Appeals’ were heard by a ‘small Committee’ regarding ‘flagrant cases of improper badging’. Also Grieves, *Politics of Manpower*, p. 47.

⁵⁷ *Gazette*, 3 March 1916. Also Laura Ugolini, ‘The “Recruiting Muddle”: Married Men, Conscription and Masculinity in First World War England’, in *First World War Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2018), pp. 84-5.

⁵⁸ MH 47/82/135: Leonard Keen, 18 August 1916 – at which time he claimed to have been working for du Cros for eight months.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5 October 1916. Also MH 47/88/17: Thomas Appleby, 18 January 1917.

⁶⁰ MH 47/142/1: Military Service Act, 1916 (Session 2), 25 May 1916, p. 1.

were held by men under the age of thirty.⁶¹ The Manpower Distribution Board was established on 22 August 1916 and on 6 October 1916 the tribunals were informed that 'the men who are of the highest value to the Army at the present time are young men who are fit for general service'.⁶² Men (whether married or single) could lose their badge if they were under the age of thirty and some of these de-badged men sought exemption from the military service tribunals.⁶³ Alfred Garrett was twenty-seven and Ernest James was thirty when they were de-badged in September and October 1916. Both men were married, worked for Wilkinson Sword, and both were graded 'A'. Each man complained that he had been de-badged despite there still being single men working in the same department.⁶⁴ In both cases the applications were dismissed by the Acton tribunal and although each man was supported in appeals lodged by their employer neither remained exempt from military service.⁶⁵

In October 1916 the Board of Trade noted wryly that 'after much expenditure of time and money men have been combed out at one place and have readily found work elsewhere'.⁶⁶ This comment was part of an expression of frustration at the 'game of musical chairs' that enabled munitions workers to switch from one factory to another, often within the same neighbourhood.⁶⁷ William Avery was a carpenter who claimed

⁶¹ *HMM, Vol. VI, Part I* (London: HMSO, 1922), pp. 5-6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 2-5. Also MH 47/142/4/3: LGB Circular R.102, p. 2; Grievés, *Politics of Manpower*, p. 58; Wolfe, *Labour Supply*, p. 92.

⁶³ Grievés, *Politics of Manpower*, p. 31; McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 68-71.

⁶⁴ MH 47/28/36: Alfred Garrett, 27 October 1916; MH 47/85/37: Ernest James, circa 17 October 1916.

⁶⁵ Garrett was called up on 15 February 1917 and James on 8 December 1916.

⁶⁶ Grievés, *Politics of Manpower*, p. 50.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

that he 'gave up good berth when men were appealed for to work on Munitions'.⁶⁸ He began working for Peters and Sons (coachbuilders in Warple Way) in October 1915 where he was 'employed on motor lorries and ambulance vans'.⁶⁹ A short time later he moved on to make shells for du Cros, where he was given a War Service badge.⁷⁰ He remained exempt on condition that he continued this war work and, after twelve months' employment with du Cros, Avery switched jobs again – this time to Napier.⁷¹ On 22 January 1917 he appealed – adopting the same tone as Garrett and James – that 'it does not seem fair to me, with my responsibilities, to be called up, when there are so many single men still at the same firm, on the same work'.⁷² Avery was medically graded 'A' and lost his exemption.⁷³

Contemporary gender conventions generated the assumption that some munitions work was too heavy for women and required physically fit men to lift and manoeuvre bulky items.⁷⁴ However, men who were fit for general service were also urgently needed in the armed forces and could be 'combed out' of munitions factories. Du

⁶⁸ MH 47/92/8: William Avery, 22 January 1917. Avery presumably signed up as a 'War Munitions Volunteer' – men who voluntarily undertook (paid) munitions work. For details of these volunteers see: *HMM, Volume I, Part IV* (London: HMSO, 1918), pp. 29-38; *HMM, Volume IV, Part I* (London: HMSO, 1918), pp. 5-7; *Gazette*, 25 June 1915.

⁶⁹ MH 47/92/8: William Avery, 22 February 1917.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 9 March 1916.

⁷¹ See Buckley, *Air Power*, pp. 62-5, for home front labour in the aircraft industry.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 22 January 1917.

⁷³ Avery enlisted into the Royal Naval Air Service on 31 March 1917. See TNA: AIR 79 – Royal Air Force Airmen Records, 1918-1940: William Henry Avery, 31 March 1917. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 28 May 2017]. See Appendix Three.

⁷⁴ Caine, *Our Girls*, p. 49.

Cros produced large calibre shells and explained that 'this work is only being done by men'.⁷⁵ Henry Hunt argued that he was 'an Operator on heavy shells which is partly skilled & quite impossible for Women'.⁷⁶ Hunt was graded 'A' and was called up in September 1917.⁷⁷ Men of a low medical grade could be retained in munitions factories and although Hunt protested that discharged soldiers would find the work too physically demanding there is evidence that du Cros did employ ex-servicemen: Alfred Harris had been released from the army in December 1914 as he suffered from 'disease of Right Ear causing Parallisis [sic] behind the eyes. Causes Giddiness when overworked'.⁷⁸ He was not fit to serve in the armed forces – and presumably could not lift heavy weights – but du Cros found work for him.⁷⁹

Not all munitions work involved heavy physical labour and men could be employed on tasks to suit their physical condition. Charles Fevez had been twice medically rejected but was passed 'C2' following the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act of 5 April 1917.⁸⁰ He took up munitions work immediately afterwards but found

⁷⁵ MH 47/30/8: Walter Bird, 31 March 1917.

⁷⁶ MH 47/98/60: Henry Hunt, 7 August 1917. Also MH 47/78/1: Alfred Greene, who worked as a supervisor for du Cros and argued that 'there are no women employed on this work owing to the great weight of the shells', circa 15 June 1916. Women were employed by du Cros in the manufacture of smaller 4.5 inch shells. For example, see the *Bal Maidens and Mining Women* database available from www.balmaiden.co.uk [Accessed 24 June 2018].

⁷⁷ MH 47/98/60: Henry Hunt, 13 September 1917.

⁷⁸ MH 47/56/39: Alfred Harris, 25 May 1917.

⁷⁹ See also MH 47/30/8: Walter Bird who, on 16 November 1916, was rejected by an 'Army Ear Specialist' and was employed in 'boring shells' at du Cros by December 1916.

⁸⁰ MH 47/142/2: Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act, 1917. This Act, amongst other things, enabled the medical re-examination of men previously

the work too heavy on account of having tuberculosis of the knee. He secured suitable employment with Napier, working on the 'wires or girders for aeroplane wings' and was granted conditional exemption.⁸¹ By April 1918 Fevez had acquired further technical skills – fixing electrical fittings onto aeroplane dashboards – and had a letter of support from Napier asking for his exemption to be renewed.⁸² He was required to undergo regular medical examinations throughout 1918 but remained exempt for the duration of the war.

In October 1916 the Manpower Distribution Board introduced a scheme of 'substitution', whereby men were placed in munitions factories in order to release others for the armed forces.⁸³ The substitutes were known as Army Reserve Munition Workers [hereafter ARMW], of which there were two classes. Henry Beech and John Goodchild were both fit for general service and became ARMW1: men who were skilled and considered by the tribunals to be of more use to the country as munitions workers than any service they could render in the armed forces.⁸⁴ ARMW2 were men who were semi-skilled or unskilled but were often of a low medical grade and could replace semi-skilled or unskilled men who were fit for general service. James Norris was graded 'C1', 'having deformed feet & a weak heart'.⁸⁵ Keen to establish his

rejected from military service. See Alison Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies – The Replacement of British Infantry Casualties on the Western Front, 1916-1918* (Warwick: Helion, 2018), pp. 311-2.

⁸¹ MH 47/69/38: Charles Fevez, 17 August 1917.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 10 April 1918.

⁸³ *HMM, Vol. VI, Part I*, pp. 64-91; Wolfe, *Labour Supply*, pp. 91-8; Grieves, *Politics of Manpower*, pp. 48-55.

⁸⁴ MH 47/47/43: Henry Beech, 22 February 1917; MH 47/102/66: John Goodchild, 27 February 1917.

⁸⁵ MH 47/53/57: James Norris, 7 November 1916.

patriotic credentials, he stated that he was 'quite willing to undertake light mechanical work in munitions if by so doing I can render assistance to my country'.⁸⁶ Norris enrolled as an ARMW2 on 5 December 1916 and started work at Evershed and Vignoles a month later, replacing a man named E. A. Eppy.⁸⁷

It can be assumed that Norris was employed full-time at Evershed and Vignoles. The average working day (or night) in a munitions factory was twelve hours long and although many men, particularly business owners, seem to have attempted to keep up their pre-war employment while working in munitions, this often proved impossible.⁸⁸ Businesses could be kept going if the wife or another relative was able to work while the man was making munitions: John Wilkins was a travelling draper and outfitter, selling 'boots and serviceable clothing' to 'superior mechanics'.⁸⁹ He found employment with du Cros 'and during nearly 2 years I have never been late or absent once which the firms [sic] records will prove. Although working 12 hours day or night I have with the aid of my wife been able to keep my business going'.⁹⁰

The Schedule of Protected Occupations was introduced by the War Cabinet on 7 May 1917 and from then on the only occupations protected were those in 'Admiralty, War Office or Munitions Work, or in Railway Workshops'.⁹¹ The Schedule

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 4 January 1917. Also MH 47/102/31: Herbert Dickens, 10 October 1916; MH 47/105/25: Frederick Nichols, 20 February 1917.

⁸⁸ MH 47/102/31: Herbert Dickens; MH 47/60/44: Alfred Goding; MH 47/78/1: Alfred Greene; MH 47/85/37: Ernest James.

⁸⁹ MH 47/14/67: John Wilkins, 19 June 1916.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 18 May 1918. Also MH 47/99/14: Albert Treble.

⁹¹ MH 47/142/2: Schedule of Protected Occupations, 7 May 1917, p. 6. This schedule is not to be confused with the frequently altered 'List of Certified

superseded all War Service badges and essential men were now issued with certificates of protection.⁹² John Goodchild held a 'Red Card (Protection) (Engineering)' as a skilled man.⁹³ On 15 May 1917 John Wilkins received a 'black protection certificate', which was issued to men who were not directly protected by the Schedule but had other reasons, including ill health, for being retained in munitions or railway employment.⁹⁴ Wilkins was graded '1' on 18 May 1918 but claimed that this was 'in direct opposition to medical certificates to the contrary'.⁹⁵ He explained in a letter to Herbert Nield that he was 'on work of national importance viz 6" shells working as a tool setter and in addition I have 15/6 per week deducted from my wages for war savings certificates so you can readily understand I am in no ways a slacker'.⁹⁶ He received a reply from one of the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal joint-

Occupations' that specified other civilian work considered by the authorities to be essential. See chapter four.

⁹² Ibid. *HMM, Volume VI, Part I*, pp. 83-7. Also Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, pp. 157-8.

⁹³ MH 47/102/66: John Goodchild, circa 6 June 1918. Also MH 47/47/43: Henry Beech, 24 April 1918; MH 47/50/91: William Simpson, 24 September 1918. This was Army Form 3476A which was red in colour. See MH 47/142/5/2: MM139 [hereafter MM139], Ministry of Munitions of War, Protected Occupations, A Short Guide to the Schedule, 15 May 1917.

⁹⁴ MH 47/14/67: John Wilkins. This was Army Form 3476B which was black in colour. See MH 47/142/5/2: MM139. Also *HMM, Volume VI, Part I*, p. 87.

⁹⁵ MH 47/14/67: John Wilkins, 18 May 1918.

⁹⁶ Ibid. See David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda – The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014 [2012]), p. 181, for war bonds and savings certificates. Also Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War – British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 220-33, for analysis of the 'Tank Banks' and the 'geography of patriotism'; Pierre Purseigle, 'Whither the Local? Nationalization, Modernization, and

secretaries stating that 'so long as you hold your protection card you are quite safe'.⁹⁷

Winston Churchill was appointed Minister of Munitions in July 1917 and the third Munitions of War Act was passed on 21 August 1917.⁹⁸ Sir Auckland Geddes, the former Director of Recruiting, became the Minister of National Service in August 1917 and his appointment marked the beginning of a period of consolidation that organised the nation's available manpower more thoroughly than at any other time during the war.⁹⁹ In agreement with Churchill, Geddes established the National Labour Priority Committee which represented all the departments that were vying for civilian manpower.

Probably as a direct result of these changes some of Acton's munitions workers appeared before their local military service tribunal for the first time in July and August 1917.¹⁰⁰ Archibald Hewett was a capstan lathe mechanic, making electrical parts for the army and the Admiralty. His employer claimed that Hewett was indispensable as he was doing work on one lathe that actually required three different lathes and 'a new hand even if with as long an experience as this man

the Mobilization of Urban Communities in England and France, c. 1900-18', in William Whyte and Oliver Zimmer (eds.), *Nationalism and the Reshaping of Urban Communities in Europe, 1848-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 195, for 'patriotic days that explicitly pandered to civic pride'.

⁹⁷ MH 47/14/67: John Wilkins, 29 May 1918.

⁹⁸ *HMM, Volume II, Part I* (London: HMSO, 1921), pp. 75-106, especially pp. 90-4.

⁹⁹ Grieves, *Politics of Manpower*, pp. 149-180; Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, pp. 159-62; McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 27-8.

¹⁰⁰ MH 47/110/9: Archibald Hewett, 13 July 1917; MH 47/98/60: Henry Hunt, 20 July 1917; MH 47/102/94: Frederick Mills, 9 July 1917; MH 47/43/6: William Stancombe, 27 August 1917; MH 47/99/14: Albert Treble, 18 August 1917.

would not be able to do this, as he has to do work which the Lathe is unsuitable for'.¹⁰¹ The case was adjourned on several occasions and the final temporary exemption lasted until the closing weeks of the war.¹⁰²

Hewett remained exempt arguably because he was an irreplaceable skilled man. He had a medical grading of '3' and this was probably a deciding factor in his case.¹⁰³ Men who were unskilled or semi-skilled and fit for general service were not likely to remain exempt under the new manpower legislation and were called up at this time.¹⁰⁴ However, it is clear that some men, although conscripted, were not called up immediately, perhaps because they had domestic problems: Frederick Mills was fit for general service but had a pregnant wife and four very young children. On 12 July 1917 he was granted temporary exemption for two months but was still making shells at du Cros when he was required to reapply for exemption on 23 April 1918.¹⁰⁵

The Revised Schedule of Protected Occupations came into force on 1 February 1918 and the Military Service Act, 1918 was enacted five days later.¹⁰⁶ These two

¹⁰¹ MH 47/110/9: Archibald Hewett, 13 July 1917.

¹⁰² Ibid., 13 September 1917; 14 and 28 November 1917; 30 May 1918; 30 June 1918 and 4 October 1918.

¹⁰³ Grieves, *Politics of Manpower*, p. 152.

¹⁰⁴ MH 47/98/60: Henry Hunt, 13 September 1917; MH 47/43/6: William Stancombe, 11 October 1917; MH 47/99/14: Albert Treble, 26 September 1917.

¹⁰⁵ MH 47/102/94: Frederick Mills, 12 July 1917.

¹⁰⁶ MH 47/142/3: MM 130 (Revised) Schedule of Protected Occupations, 1 February 1918; Parliamentary Archives: HL/PO/PU/1/1918/7&8G5c66, Military Service Act, 6 February 1918. Available from www.legislation.gov.uk [Accessed 21 June 2010]. This Act, amongst other things, enabled the withdrawal of occupational certificates of exemption and reduced from two months to two weeks the 'grace period' between a

legislative measures provided a manpower policy platform from which the government responded to the German Spring Offensive, launched on the Western Front on 21 March 1918.¹⁰⁷ The Military Service (No. 2) Act, 1918 was enacted on 18 April 1918. It raised the age limit for military service from forty-one to fifty, with an allowance for a further extension to men aged fifty-five.¹⁰⁸ A number of men thus found themselves included within the remit of the military service acts for the first time. William Simpson was forty-four when he made his initial application for exemption on 1 June 1918. He was a laundry proprietor but returned to his skilled trade as a fitter and remained exempt from military service.¹⁰⁹

Men like Simpson argued to the military service tribunals that they should remain exempt from military service on account of their work in the munitions trade. On the whole, they were successful. The next section considers the appeals of men who claimed that, although they were not actually making munitions, they were supporting the munitions trade in its local factories and workshops.

Munitions-Related and Local Infrastructure Work

This section discusses the appeals of thirty-one men who were working in Acton as builders, carpenters, plumbers, merchants and deliverymen. Only six of these thirty-

man being conscripted and his actual call-up. See Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies*, pp. 235-6 and 312.

¹⁰⁷ Grieves, *Politics of Manpower*, p. 183.

¹⁰⁸ MH 47/142/3: Military Service (No. 2) Act, 1918, 18 April 1918, pp. 2-3. See McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁹ MH 47/50/91: William Simpson, 1 June 1918. Also MH 47/47/31: Harry Sanders was forty-two when he was called up in May 1918.

one man remained exempt (nineteen per cent) and, with one exception, all six were unfit for front-line military service.¹¹⁰

As early as October 1914 the AUDC reported that the war had caused ‘the recent large extension of factories in the district’.¹¹¹ After a period of disruption at the beginning of the war, men who were involved in the local building trade found work in building, renovating, extending and repairing factories for the manufacture of munitions.¹¹² On the whole, however, builders were unlikely to remain exempt from military service for long, although some men were retained as members of a factory’s support staff: Richard Steers was a bricklayer’s labourer originally employed by the building firm Robert McAlpine on the construction of Perivale NFF.¹¹³ There is no evidence that Steers made munitions but he remained exempt for the duration of the war, presumably as a support worker in the factory. His application was endorsed by Fred Larder, the Senior Bond Officer at Perivale Inspection Bond – a rifle ammunition testing and quality-control facility based at Perivale NFF. Larder

¹¹⁰ These six men were MH 47/103/48: David Brazier (graded ‘2’ in 1918); MH 47/22/38: Walter Dewdney (medically rejected); MH 47/108/20: William Goddard (graded ‘C3’); MH 47/97/47: George Gowers (graded ‘C2’) and MH 47/12/66: Alfred North (medically rejected). MH 47/47/43: Henry Beech became an ARMW1 munitions worker.

¹¹¹ Ealing Local History Centre and Borough Archive, Ealing Central Library: Urban District Council of Acton, Proceedings of the Council and of the Several Committees of the Council [hereafter AUDC Proceedings] (April 1914 to April 1915), 6 October 1914, p. 451.

¹¹² Dewar, *Great Munition Feat*, p. 14; *HMM, Volume VIII, Part I*, pp. 33-72.

¹¹³ This factory was built by McAlpine between 26 August 1915 and 1 December 1915. See *HMM, Volume VIII, Part II*, pp. 151 and 173.

stated that 'he is one of the best labourers I have, particularly because of his extreme willingness'.¹¹⁴

Larder's claim that Steers was indispensable as a labourer in a national testing facility was recognised by the military service tribunals. However, builders and labourers engaged on work that was considered by the authorities to be non-essential were unlikely to remain exempt from military service. It is estimated that the number of men employed in the British building trade in July 1914 was 920,000. By July 1918 this figure had been depleted by approximately 480,000 men (fifty-two per cent); 430,000 of whom had joined the armed forces.¹¹⁵ The depression in the building industry at the beginning of the war persuaded many men to enlist, while others were encouraged by regular hours and higher wages to sign up for work in munitions factories.¹¹⁶

Legislation was introduced in 1916 that restricted the building trade: DORA Regulation 8E was enacted on 12 July 1916 and prohibited all building and construction work 'without a licence from the Director-General [of National Service]'.¹¹⁷ On 29 September 1916 the Manpower Distribution Board published a

¹¹⁴ MH 47/109/2: Richard Steers, 8 August 1916.

¹¹⁵ *HMM: Volume VI, Part IV*, pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁶ *HMM: Volume V, Part I* (London: HMSO, 1922), pp. 205-6. See also Peter Dewey, 'Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force during the First World War', in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 27, no. 1 (1984), pp. 208-9. London builders had been on strike from 24 January to early July 1914: White, *Zeppelin Nights*, pp. 9-10; Stephan Goebel and Jerry White, 'London and the First World War', in *The London Journal*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2016), p. 208.

¹¹⁷ *Manuals of Emergency Legislation, Defence of the Realm Manual, 6th Edition, Revised to August 31st, 1918* (London: HMSO, 1918), p. 89. Also *HMM: Volume V, Part I*, pp. 208-9; *HMM, Volume VII, Part I* (London: HMSO, 1922), pp. 61-66.

memorandum that stated: 'it is essential that a large part of the labour now engaged on private work should be diverted to Government orders or released for the Army'.¹¹⁸ Henry Criddle, Philip Hudson and George Squire were all sole proprietors of small building companies. All were engaged on private building work and, despite the fact that all three had significant domestic responsibilities, all were conscripted between July and October 1916.¹¹⁹

There were no guarantees that men who switched from private to government building work would be able to remain exempt from military service. Charles Peppiatt claimed a pre-war annual turnover of £30,000 to £40,000 but lost his partner, his clerk, over twenty of his workmen and his London office.¹²⁰ In June 1916 he claimed that he was managing the business single-handed and his three remaining workmen of military age would shortly be joining up. He stressed that he had ceased any private-contract building work and was engaged on war contracts for the Admiralty, building cottages for dock labourers, accommodation blocks for aircraft munitions workers at the Naval Air Station in Hendon and constructing a new aerodrome at Kingsbury.¹²¹ Kent opposed his application as 'he is not a direct Contractor. He has subcontracts which he expects to complete in about two months ... He will no doubt

'Building and construction work' was defined as 'the construction, alteration, repair, decoration, or demolition of buildings, and the construction, reconstruction, or alteration of railways, docks, harbours, canals, embankments, bridges, tunnels, piers, and other works of construction or engineering'.

¹¹⁸ MH 47/142/4/3: Manpower Distribution Board Memorandum (29 September 1916) attached to LGB Circular R.102, 6 October 1916.

¹¹⁹ MH 47/20/23: Henry Criddle, 13 September 1916; MH 47/14/69: Philip Hudson, 24 July 1916; MH 47/82/116: George Squire, 5 October 1916.

¹²⁰ MH 47/31/56: Charles Peppiatt, 23 June 1916.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 23 June 1916 and 23 December 1916.

appeal and by the time the appeal is decided his present subcontracts should be completed'.¹²²

Peppiatt had a medical grade of 'A' and this would have been a significant factor in his eventual conscription in February 1917.¹²³ Some builders with a low medical grading remained exempt if they could demonstrate that they were engaged on work of national importance. Walter Dewdney was a carpenter and Frank Shopland a bricklayer, both employed in June 1916 by a Westminster building firm who were constructing a factory extension for the Aircraft Manufacturing Company at Hendon. Shopland was graded 'A' and was conscripted; Dewdney was 'rejected' and remained exempt.¹²⁴ Alfred North was a master builder with 'a large Business Contract for the Wilkinson Sword Co. Ltd.'¹²⁵ He suffered from bronchitis and rheumatism and his appeal was withdrawn when he was rejected on medical grounds.¹²⁶

In June 1916 North was carrying out 'Sanitary [sewerage] work for the Wilkinson Sword Co. Ltd. in their Factories and Flats' and he had 'orders for Sanitary Work unfinished for 2 Local Estates'.¹²⁷ The munitions industry created an acute housing

¹²² Ibid., 4 January 1917.

¹²³ Ibid., 7 February 1917. Also MH 47/89/17: Harry Wallis, 26 January 1917; MH 47/93/21: Charles Beer, 22 March 1917.

¹²⁴ MH 47/22/38: Walter Dewdney; MH 47/22/36: Frank Shopland – both 31 October 1916.

¹²⁵ MH 47/12/66: Alfred North, 7 June 1916.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 4 July 1916.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 19 June 1916.

problem, particularly in already overpopulated industrial regions like Acton.¹²⁸ As was widely acknowledged, over-crowding resulted in insanitary conditions but, despite the pressing need for builders, only men who were not fit for military service were retained in their civilian occupations to carry out such work.¹²⁹ North remained exempt from military service on account of his health, but other men working on sewerage infrastructure were conscripted.¹³⁰

The loss of military manpower during the Battle of the Somme (1 July – 18 November 1916) resulted in tribunals being advised on 20 January 1917 that all men who could be spared ‘without serious detriment to work of essential national importance or who have not other very strong grounds for exemption should be

¹²⁸ *HMM, Volume V, Part V* (London: HMSO, 1921), pp. 1-32. It had been assumed by the authorities that NFFs would be run by local female labour but ‘no class of factory has involved such large movement of labour or raised more serious and difficult housing problems’. *Ibid.*, p. 27. The Perivale NFF munitions workers were housed in a local workhouse from 1917. *Ibid.*, p. 81. See Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 196-7, for housing problems in Barrow-in-Furness – the ‘company town’ supporting Vickers arms and naval works.

¹²⁹ MH 47/97/47: George Gowers was rejected as ‘totally unfit’ for military service on 23 May 1916, was granted six months exemption on 12 July 1917 and there his case notes end.

¹³⁰ Warple Way was subject to severe flooding in 1915 due to a sewer system that pre-dated the area’s industrial development. This flooding caused serious disruption to the munitions factories therein and the AUDC were hard-pressed to find sufficient labour to address the problem. See *Gazette*, 21 May 1915; 23 July 1915; 13 August 1915; 8 October 1915; AUDC Proceedings (April 1915-April 1916), 6 July 1915, pp. 268-272. The AUDC Surveyor explained that sewerage problems were also due to the normal population of Acton being ‘hugely increased by a daily influx of munition workers’: AUDC Proceedings (April 1916-April 1917), n.d., circa late April/early May 1916, p. 25.

made available for military service as soon as possible'.¹³¹ Henry Harding was graded 'B1' and although he was 'employed on about a hundred tenement houses keeping drains, WCs, general sanitary arrangements and all other necessary repairs and renovations' he was called up on 1 March 1917.¹³²

Manual workers in the building trade sometimes remained exempt for longer than their white-collar managers. Harding worked for Ernest Nichols who was house agent for the West London Estates Limited. He remained exempt longer than Nichols, who lost his exemption certificate on 24 July 1916.¹³³ In their application for Nichols, West London Estates explained that they were 'the owners of 103 homes and there are 215 tenants. The properties are situated in working class districts and require great tact in management'.¹³⁴ This was not a sufficiently robust argument for Nichols' continued exemption and it was perhaps assumed that another manager could be found from within the company itself. Alternatively this other manager could be found from within the family operating the business: Thomas Woollard was the sole remaining managing director of a large Acton family-run building firm. By the

¹³¹ MH 47/142/5/1: LGB Circular R.113, 20 January 1917. Also *Defence of the Realm Manual, 6th Edition*: pp. 165-6. DORA Regulation 41A required employers to keep a record of all male employees over the age of sixteen from 20 January 1917.

¹³² MH 47/34/3: Henry Harding, 3 March 1917.

¹³³ MH 47/14/60: Ernest Nichols, 24 July 1916. Also MH 47/76/2: Edgar Curtiss was the manager of 'The Elms' estate and was called up in November 1916. MH 47/97/47: George Gowers was Curtiss' foreman and he remained exempt on medical grounds.

¹³⁴ MH 47/14/60: Ernest Nichols, 4 July 1916. See also MH 47/15/4: George Parsons, 10 July 1916. Parsons claimed that he and his wife dealt with 'the rougher and poorer class of Acton who, very often drink not wisely but too well, and consequently it requires our combined efforts to keep and restore order'. Nichols was conscripted on 24 July 1916 and Parsons one day later.

end of 1916 the Woollard company had lost two of its three directors and seventeen of its twenty-three workmen, including the only one for whom an application had been made: the foreman, Harry Heeley. Woollard was himself substituted in the firm by a brother who was invalided out of the armed forces in February 1917.¹³⁵

Heeley was absent from the appeal lodged on his behalf by Woollard in July 1916 and this absence perhaps indicates a reluctance or inability to continue with his case.¹³⁶ Appearing before a military service tribunal may have been an intimidating experience and some men, after enduring a local tribunal hearing, may have balked at the idea of attending the county tribunal – particularly if they had no support from their employer. Henry Daley was a gas service layer. His employer stated that ‘although his services are of value to the company, I cannot say that he is indispensable or that it is essential to retain him’.¹³⁷ Daley was granted enough time to get married and was absent from his own appeal.¹³⁸ Samuel Harridge was a ‘jobbing’ labourer who claimed to be supporting his widowed mother and sister but Kent observed that as Harridge was on a low wage his sister could get a job and the

¹³⁵ MH 47/78/3: Harry Heeley, 19 July 1916; MH 47/30/58: Thomas Woollard, 1 February 1917.

¹³⁶ Also MH 47/88/2: Samuel Clarke, 12 January 1917. Clarke left his job just before his employer’s appeal. It is plausible that he joined a munitions factory as his name appears on the 1918 Electoral Register. See London Metropolitan Archives, London, England, Electoral Register. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 21 June 2020]. This register is discussed in chapter four. See Appendix Three.

¹³⁷ MH 47/9/31: Henry Daley, 3 March 1916.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 28 March 1916 and 1 May 1916.

family would not suffer any serious financial hardship as a result of his absence.¹³⁹

The appeal was dismissed as Harridge was 'not present'.¹⁴⁰

Daley and Harridge were both young and single men, presumably fit for general service. As discussed in chapter one, young and unmarried men who were appealed for by their family were unlikely to be granted exemption, particularly if they worked for their father. This seems to have been the case for the men considered in this section too: despite arguing that a son was needed for munitions-related labour, older men were usually expected to cope on their own. William Shepherdly was a carter and his father claimed that he needed his son to help him fulfil building contracts for Evershed and Vignoles.¹⁴¹ Shepherdly Senior was left to manage with the 'few old men' he had left when William was called up on 10 April 1916.¹⁴²

As evident in previous chapters, an appeal lodged on behalf of a widowed mother might receive more sympathy from the military service tribunals than that from a (presumably physically fit) father. However, even if the claim included the argument that the woman's son was undertaking essential munitions-related work, an exemption would only be granted if he was not fit for active military service. In July 1918 William Goddard explained that his father had died in November 1914, his mother suffered from rheumatism and he claimed to be supporting both her and his

¹³⁹ MH 47/72/75: Samuel Harridge, 11 March 1916.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 19 April 1916.

¹⁴¹ 'Evershed and Vignoles, Ltd.', *Directory of Manufacturers*, p. 240. Available from www.gracesguide.co.uk [Accessed 21 July 2018]. This company made control gear for the Admiralty and employed 440 men and 170 women in 1918.

¹⁴² MH 47/9/20: William Shepherdly, 14 March 1916. Also MH 47/12/61: Edwin Newton, 28 June 1916. Newton's father claimed that his son was carting essential goods for CAV and was unsuccessful in retaining his services.

younger sisters. He was the manager of the family's long-established sawdust business, 'supplying government factories with sawdust for use in the manufacture of Munitions including the Wilkinson Sword factory, Evershed & Vignoles, Vandervell & Co., Llewellyn Dent & Co.'¹⁴³ The firm had lost three men since the beginning of the war and they had taken on an ex-soldier who was 'often unable to work owing to the complaint through which he was discharged from the army'.¹⁴⁴ Goddard was graded 'C3' and remained exempt for the duration of the war.¹⁴⁵

Richard Hutchins was in a similar domestic position to Goddard but he was physically fit for general military service. His father had died in late 1916 and his mother claimed in December 1916 that Hutchins was the sole support of his younger siblings. He was providing carting services to local munitions factories, including the Ogston Motor Co. Ltd. [hereafter Ogston].¹⁴⁶ Hutchins' appeal was supported by the National Federation of Laundry Associations so he was presumably carting for the local laundries as well. Working for the munitions trade and the laundry industry ensured his exemption for a while. However, despite claims of essential home front

¹⁴³ MH 47/108/20: William Goddard, 7 July 1918. See 'Dent, H. Llewellyn', *Directory of Manufacturers*, p. 222. Available from www.gracesguide.co.uk [Accessed 21 July 2018]. This company made grenades and bombs, mine sinking parts, valves and fuses and employed 90 men and 280 women in 1918.

¹⁴⁴ MH 47/108/20: William Goddard, 7 July 1918.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26 July 1918.

¹⁴⁶ 'Ogston Motor Co., Ltd., The', *Directory of Manufacturers*, p. 506. Available from www.gracesguide.co.uk [Accessed 21 July 2018]. This company made depth charges, bomb dropping gears, aero engines and aeroplane parts – employing 250 men and 150 women in 1918.

work and domestic responsibilities, he was graded 'A' and was eventually called up on 31 May 1917.¹⁴⁷

There is evidence that some carters were retained to undertake essential work for the AUDC. A local newspaper report of an Acton tribunal hearing in May 1916 stated that 'there were three dust fillers and one car man, engaged on dust collection, for whom it was proposed to claim exemption. There were seven men of military age employed on dust collection, and they proposed to ask exemption for these four, who had been with the Council before the war broke out'.¹⁴⁸ David Brazier was a 'dust carman' and presumably one of the abovementioned men.¹⁴⁹ He was granted conditional exemption on 25 May 1916 and his certificate was not challenged until 1 July 1918. The Acton tribunal withdrew the exemption on 4 July 1918 and the AUDC appealed successfully to the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal, claiming that Brazier's services 'should in the interests of public health be retained'.¹⁵⁰

The AUDC probably managed to keep some of its key workers, at least in part because the Acton tribunal was comprised (in the main) of local Acton council officials.¹⁵¹ This outcome was accepted by the authorities – and the public – perhaps

¹⁴⁷ MH 47/93/87: Richard Hutchins, 31 May 1917. Also MH 47/35/10: Richard Bartlett, 22 March 1917.

¹⁴⁸ *Gazette*, 19 May 1916. This hearing also reported on the AUDC's applications for the exemption of their 'indoor staff'. Chapter five examines the conflict of interest between the Acton tribunal and the AUDC in relation to council employees.

¹⁴⁹ MH 47/103/48: David Brazier, 5 July 1918.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ See David Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards in the Great War – Determining the Fate of Britain's and New Zealand's Conscripts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p. 114, for comment on Yorkshire tribunals and their dealings with local council personnel.

because these men were considered to be necessary to the local infrastructure.¹⁵² Brazier's exemption on the ground that he was providing an essential service to the local community through the AUDC was approved in 1916 by the Acton tribunal and remained unchallenged for most of the war. Although the certificate was withdrawn at local level in mid-1918, it was then ratified by the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal. At this appeal, the AUDC explained to the county tribunal that they needed Brazier because 'the Contractor on whom the Council has depended for team labour, is unable to supply sufficient horses and men for the work of the district'.¹⁵³

This 'Contractor' was probably Samuel Beech, who claimed to be running the largest heavy haulage business in the district.¹⁵⁴ Beech applied for the exemption of his son Henry and the appeal made much of the complexities involved in providing essential local services – including dust collecting. Beech argued that he was attempting to maintain existing council carting services despite a lack of manpower, horsepower and resources while at the same time attempting to provide delivery and collection services for a hugely expanded industrial community. Beech's case was ultimately

¹⁵² See *Gazette*, 21 May 1915, for a complaint from a 'mother-of-three' about flies around uncollected rubbish. Also *Gazette*, 3 September 1915, for a complaint about large holes in the road 'between Acton Town Station and Avenue-road. There are some holes which might have been made by a "Jack Johnson", and others in which a platoon of soldiers could take refuge'.

¹⁵³ MH 47/103/48: David Brazier, 5 July 1918.

¹⁵⁴ Samuel Beech wrote to the AUDC regarding the scarcity of horses and men to fulfil contracts. See AUDC Proceedings (April 1914 – April 1915), 19 February 1915, pp. 838-9. For Samuel Beech providing horse teams to the AUDC see, for example, AUDC Proceedings (April 1916 – April 1917), 9 May 1916, p. 40; 13 June 1916, pp. 92 and 94; 11 July 1916, pp. 142 and 144; 14 November 1916, pp. 325-6; 12 December 1916, p. 393; 9 January 1917, pp. 437-8.

resolved with a compromise – Henry went to work in a munitions factory in February 1917 and presumably continued to work for his father in his spare time.¹⁵⁵

Beech's argument that he needed the help of his son was met with a degree of approval by the Acton tribunal, in contrast with most appeals for sons made by other fathers. However, Henry only remained exempt from military service by taking up skilled munitions work. This compromise – suggested by Samuel and agreed to by the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal – is worth considering in some detail. The case file contains a large number of supporting documents from the AUDC, local businesses and Acton's munitions factories. Samuel claimed that the family firm would not be able to operate without Henry: fifteen of his men had joined the colours by June 1916 – and four more were about to go – 'and old men cannot, and will not, do some of the work that has to be done'.¹⁵⁶ He also pointed out that employing boys meant that the business required 'much more attention and management' than had previously been the case.¹⁵⁷ Samuel claimed that Henry was the only man capable of tending the horses and repairing the machinery. He argued that Henry 'manages the men, as well as all the correspondence, estimating and book-keeping, which I cannot do, and do not understand at all' and 'there is no woman in the family capable of managing the books'.¹⁵⁸ Samuel claimed that he had carting contracts with 'the Council [AUDC], which occupies 75% of the business'.¹⁵⁹ He provided horse labour for watering the roads, scavenging, collecting dust and rubbish, and delivering goods –

¹⁵⁵ MH 47/47/43: Henry Beech, 20 February 1917.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 June 1916.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 28 December 1916.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 11 January 1917.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 28 June 1916.

and this amounted to approximately 5000 teams a year.¹⁶⁰ He was asked by the AUDC to employ local men 'who know the district for street watering, otherwise it leads to great confusion'.¹⁶¹ He was employed on street repairs and provided evidence that the AUDC were insisting that 'with regard to the work in Willesden Lane, this is considered to be of Class "A" importance, and it is absolutely essential that the road leading to No. 3 Filling Factory, and the Small Arms Ammunition Works should be made and kept in a thoroughly satisfactory condition'.¹⁶²

Samuel also claimed that he was providing an essential collection and delivery service to the local government-controlled munition factories, including Napier, du Cros, Wilkinson Sword, Ogston and Perivale NFF. Samuel provided horse teams to supply coal and coke to these factories from a merchant called Belcher and Gibbons in Southall and the case file contains six letters from this firm complaining that deliveries were being delayed for lack of sufficient horse labour to haul their wagons.¹⁶³ Both Napier and du Cros provided Samuel with written evidence that his services were essential to their continued ability to produce munitions: Napier insisted that he 'give immediate attention to the carting away of rubbish from these Works. This especially refers to the site of the new buildings ... [or] our thoroughfare

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 15 and 28 June 1916.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 16 May 1916.

¹⁶² Ibid., 21 December 1916. Munitions work was graded in order of its national importance from A to C, with A being the most critical. See *HMM, Volume VII, Part I*, pp. 46 and 115-7. Several applications include the claim that the man was undertaking Class A munition work. See for example MH 47/96/12: Richard Davey, 5 March 1917; MH 47/78/2: Richard Gouldthorpe, 20 May 1916; MH 47/110/9: Archibald Hewett, 3 August 1917.

¹⁶³ MH 47/47/43: Henry Beech, 22 February, 8 August, 14 October, 25 October, 13 November and 22 December – all 1916.

will be entirely stopped'.¹⁶⁴ Du Cros were concerned that he should still be 'able to continue the cartage of the refuse, slump, etc, from our Factory, as with so many employees here it is absolutely necessary, from a sanitary point, that this should be cleared every day'.¹⁶⁵ He also carted clinker (waste from coal and coke furnaces) from the local laundries to Perivale Inspection Bond where it was being used to make building slabs.¹⁶⁶

The Acton tribunal granted Henry a temporary exemption but this was withdrawn on 11 January 1917.¹⁶⁷ Henry was a qualified engineer and Samuel appealed, with a suggested compromise: 'this business of Carting Contractor could possibly be still carried on in a smaller way if this man were employed at his trade in the neighbourhood and enabled to give some time to the carting business'.¹⁶⁸ Henry, who was a qualified engineer, was directed by the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal to 'find within 21 days ... employment on munitions or other work of essential national importance'.¹⁶⁹ He was engaged as an ARMW1 by Ogston on 20 February 1917 'on War Contracts which are of a very urgent nature' and he remained with them for the

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 27 January 1916.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 20 December 1916.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 12 October 1916. For the importance of waste collection and recycling in the munitions trade see also MH 47/85/85: Arthur Webster, 17 October 1916; *HMM: Volume VII: Part V* (London: HMSO, 1921), pp. 47-63.

¹⁶⁷ MH 47/47/43: Henry Beech, 11 January 1917.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 15 January 1917.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

duration of the war.¹⁷⁰ Despite working a fifty-two-hour week with Ogston, Henry presumably continued to help his father.¹⁷¹

Applications lodged by or on behalf of men who worked in the food and fuel retail trade are considered in chapter four, but it is worth mentioning here that shop assistants who worked in businesses claiming to support the munitions trade were unlikely to remain exempt from military service. Thomas Bell and August Hollocks both worked for T. Poore and Son, a building contractor, builder's merchant and ironmonger with an extensive shop front on Acton High Street. The company were an important part of the supply chain for the men – and horses – stationed in the ASC camps at Park Royal.¹⁷² They also had 'contracts ... for the erection, and maintenance of Searchlight Stations, Observation Stations, and Gun Stations, etc., in connection with the Anti-Aircraft London Defences'.¹⁷³ Despite such claims, both Bell and Hollocks were under the age of thirty and fit for general service and neither remained exempt from military service.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 20 February 1917.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 24 April 1918.

¹⁷² T. and A. Harper Smith, *Poores of Acton – The Story of a Business* (Acton History Group, 2014), p. 12. Poore were employing about sixty men at the end of 1915: *Gazette*, 24 December 1915. They claimed to have lost 'about 20 of our employees' by 1916. See MH 47/75/34: Thomas Bell, 11 April 1916

¹⁷³ MH 47/90/84: August Hollocks [sic], 10 January 1917.

¹⁷⁴ MH 47/75/34: Thomas Bell's appeal was dismissed on 31 May 1916; MH 47/90/84: August Hollocks [sic] was given a final fourteen days' exemption on 14 February 1917.

Conclusion

Civilian men who were of military age were increasingly obliged to justify their position on the home front as the war progressed. As the country's civilian and military manpower problems increased, men skilled in the engineering trade were actively sought by the munitions industry for their expertise. As this chapter has shown, however, in the early months of conscription skilled men were recruited into the armed forces if they were young and had no domestic responsibilities. This was particularly the case if the firm for which they worked was not an established munitions enterprise or was a small operation. From mid-1916 a change occurred, as skilled men were being brought back from the army as 'Class W' reservists or they remained exempt from military service through government initiatives such as badging, the Army Reserve Munition Workers scheme, the List of Certified Occupations and the Schedule of Protected Occupations.

Decisions made by the military service tribunals concerning skilled men in the munitions trade were relatively straight-forward. Sometimes a skilled man's application for exemption on grounds other than his trade qualifications was resolved by the tribunals imposing a condition that he took up work for which he was trained within Acton's munitions factories. In other cases, men made use of their qualifications in order to remain on the home front to care for their families and run their other businesses in whatever time they could spare. From mid-1916 skilled men of any medical grade working in munitions could expect to remain exempt from military service for the duration of the war.

Acton's engineering businesses were deprived of much of their autonomy but some firms were successful in maintaining a degree of influence with regard to their

workforce and output. Large factories were better equipped than small firms to withstand the demands made upon them by the Ministry of Munitions and men probably applied for positions within these companies in order to present a more compelling argument for their exemption from military service.

Some semi-skilled and unskilled men went into the munitions trade in order to bolster their appeals for exemption, especially if they were not able to remain exempt in their original job. Such men were required to learn new trades and there is evidence that some were able to prove to the tribunals that they had acquired and developed essential new skills. Alongside skills in munitions-making, the physical fitness and age of these men was a determining factor in the success or failure of their appeals against conscription.¹⁷⁵ Men who were under the age of thirty and/or fit for active front-line military duties were 'combed-out' of munitions factories in mid-1916 and early 1917 – as a direct result of the Battle of the Somme. As the war progressed, a system of substitution was introduced whereby not only women but also semi-skilled and unskilled men who were not fit for military service were placed in munitions factories to replace those who were physically able to undertake front-line fighting duties.

Munitions factories created a great deal of extra work in a community that had already had its infrastructure undermined by a lack of manpower and materials. Nevertheless, men who worked in the building or support trades were unlikely to remain exempt from military service unless they were unfit for active duties. The building trade was restricted from mid-1916 and, although some men claimed to be undertaking building work of national importance, this was not enough to keep them

¹⁷⁵ For reference, see Appendix Three for the age and medical gradings of the men in this thesis.

out of the armed forces. Men who worked in family businesses for their fathers or widowed mothers were unlikely to remain exempt from military service if they were young and physically fit. The AUDC had to provide an essential public service and presumably managed this with men either above or below military age and with those who were not fit for active military service. It is possible that the Acton tribunal board members – many of whom also sat as local councillors – used their position to retain essential council workers but there is little evidence in the MH 47 archive that this was a widespread practice.

The decisions made by tribunals about Acton men involved in the munitions and related trades were made against the background of the regulations and guide-lines issued by the Ministry of Munitions. Although it had its faults, the Ministry was a platform from which guidance could be given in claims for exemption from men who worked within the munitions trade. Indeed, tribunals were often bombarded with ever-changing regulations and were highly regulated from a central authority. This was not the case with men working in the food and fuel retail trades. The next chapter demonstrates that the Ministry of Food, established in February 1917, did not impose the same kind of overall control and tribunals often had to make policy decisions themselves.

Chapter Four – Food and Fuel Retail Workers

Introduction

This chapter considers eighty men who worked in the retail food and fuel industry in Acton and who made their appeals in the context of serious food and fuel shortages and distribution problems. James McDermott suggests that by early 1917 tribunals were ‘at least as exercised by the perceived threat to the food supply as by the needs of the BEF’ and this chapter considers whether this was a significant element in Acton appeals.¹

One of the problems facing the British government at the outbreak of war was the maintenance of imported foodstuffs in the face of disruption to international trade.² Not only did the nation need to ensure that its civilians did not go hungry but it also had growing new armies to provision.³ Before the war about sixty per cent of the energy value of the British diet – and about eighty per cent of all breadstuffs – were

¹ James McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals, 1916-1918 – ‘A Very Much Abused Body of Men’* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 152.

² Thierry Bonzon and Belinda Davis, ‘Feeding the Cities’, in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 310. Also Peter Dewey, ‘Nutrition and Living Standards in Wartime Britain’, in Richard Wall and Jay Winter (eds.), *The Upheaval of War – Family, Work and Welfare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 216.

³ Stefan Goebel, ‘Cities’, in Jay Winter, Charles Stille and the Editorial Committee of the International Research Centre of the Historial de la Grande Guerre (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War, Volume II – The State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 364-5.

imported.⁴ The beet-sugar industry of England and Wales was first established in 1912 and the country relied heavily on imported sugar at the beginning of the First World War.⁵

There were no substantial food shortages in the first two years of the war.⁶ However, unrest and criticism of the government over the cost and availability of basic goods, such as sugar, bread, fats and meat, began to escalate in London from the beginning of 1916.⁷ Distribution problems and hoarding caused food prices to rise and by June 1916 retail food prices were fifty-nine per cent above those of July 1914.⁸ The failure of H. H. Asquith's coalition government to effectively control the distribution and price of food essentials was one of the many factors that caused his

⁴ Ian Gazeley and Andrew Newell, 'The First World War and Working-Class Food Consumption in Britain', in *European Review of Economic History*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2013), p. 73.

⁵ H. D. Watts, 'The Location of the Beet-Sugar Industry in England and Wales, 1912-36', in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 53 (1971), p. 96. William Beveridge, *British Food Control* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 6.

⁶ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War – British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 196. See also Beveridge, *British Food Control*, p. 1.

⁷ Bonzon and Davis, 'Feeding the Cities', pp. 329-30.

⁸ Beveridge, *British Food Control*, p. 19. Also Dorothy Peel, *How We Lived Then: A Sketch of Social and Domestic Life in England During the War* (London: Bodley Head, 1929), p. 78. The cost of living of an unskilled workman's family rose by eighty-one per cent between July 1914 and July 1918. See Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge – British Society and the First World War* (New York: Norton, 1970 [1965]), pp. 195-6. Also Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 193 and 197.

downfall in December 1916.⁹ David Lloyd George became the new British Prime Minister on 7 December and enacted The New Ministries and Secretaries Act on 22 December 1916.¹⁰ This Act created (amongst other things) the Ministry of Food.¹¹ Lord Devonport was appointed as the so-called 'Food Controller' on 26 December 1916 and given power under new Defence of the Realm [hereafter DORA] Regulations on 10 January 1917.¹²

A significant further problem for British food supply occurred when the Germans declared a campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare on 1 February 1917.¹³ The first food queues appeared in London in the spring of 1917.¹⁴ Ultimately, Devonport's administration did little to alleviate food problems in real terms and he was

⁹ Beveridge, *British Food Control*, p. 29. Also John Turner, *British Politics and the Great War – Coalition and Conflict 1915-1918* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 49-151.

¹⁰ John Turner, *Lloyd George's Secretariat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 46-59.

¹¹ *Manuals of Emergency Legislation: Food Supply Manual: Revised to July, 31st, 1918* (London: HMSO, 1918), pp. 1-4.

¹² Beveridge, *British Food Control*, p. 33.

¹³ Alan Kramer, 'Blockade and Economic Warfare', in Winter, et al (eds.), *Cambridge History of the First World War*, pp. 486-7. Merchant shipping losses rose from 153,512 in January 1917 to 545,282 in April 1917. See David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain – The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014 [2012]), p. 21.

¹⁴ See Ian Beckett, *Home Front, 1914-1918 – How Britain Survived the Great War* (Kew: The National Archives, 2006), p. 144; Bernard Waite, *A Class Society at War* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987) p. 227; Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 196 and 214-6; Roberts, *Classic Slum*, pp. 209-10.

succeeded by Lord Rhondda on 15 June 1917.¹⁵ Local Food Control Committees were established in August 1917.¹⁶ The Acton Food Control Committee emphasised the scale of local problems. In January 1918 it described the prodigious amount of administrative work it had done and stated emphatically that ‘nothing but a system of compulsory rationing would meet the circumstances’.¹⁷ Nationwide sugar rationing was introduced on 31 December 1917.¹⁸ Meat, butter and margarine were rationed in London and the Home Counties on 25 February 1918.¹⁹ The rationing of meat, fats and sugar was standardised throughout the country on 14 July 1918.²⁰

While food supplies were known to be vulnerable, coal supplies did not seem to be under similar threat at the beginning of the war. In 1913 Britain produced over 287,000,000 tons of coal (one fifth of the world’s output) and exported roughly one third of it.²¹ However, production of coal fell when large numbers of coal-miners

¹⁵ Rhondda’s administration introduced control of supplies and distribution, regulation of prices and rationing. See Beveridge, *British Food Control*, pp. 81-232.

¹⁶ Beveridge, *British Food Control*, pp. 57-9; Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 194. There were 1,903 of these Committees nationwide by November 1917, empowered by the Food Control Committees (Constitution) Order of 22 August 1917. See *Food Supply Manual*, pp. 621-5. Also David Monger, ‘Tangible Patriotism during the First World War: Individuals and the Nation in British Propaganda’, in *War and Society*, vol. 37, no. 4 (2018), pp. 244-261, for a useful overview of food economy campaigns in 1917 and 1918.

¹⁷ *Bedford Park, Turnham Green, Acton Gazette and District Advertiser* [hereafter *Gazette*], 25 January and 8 February 1918.

¹⁸ Beveridge, *British Food Control*, p. 190.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-217.

²¹ Samuel Hurwitz, *State Intervention in Great Britain – Study of Economic Control and Social Response, 1914-1919* (London: Routledge, 2013 [1949]), pp. 165-6.

enlisted into the armed forces in the early months of the war.²² At the same time there was a greatly increased demand for coal from the Admiralty, the British munitions industry and Britain's allies (notably France). When the South Wales miners went out on strike on 12 July 1915, in protest over pay and the perceived profiteering of their employers, the conflict was brought to a swift conclusion by the government (in favour of the miners) and signalled the beginning of an increasingly state-controlled wartime industry.²³ Wholesale and retail coal prices were first regulated on 29 July 1915 by the Price of Coal (Limitation) Act.²⁴

At the same time, attempts were made by the government to limit demand.²⁵ DORA Regulation 2D: Priority in Supply of Coal and Coke was passed on 27 June 1916.²⁶ The Summer Time Act of 17 May 1916 and DORA Regulation 10B – Power to Order Early Closing (of shops) – of 24 October 1916 were both passed, at least in part, to

²² Richard Redmayne, *The British Coal-Mining Industry During the War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), pp. 9, 11, 22-5, 29, 72-5. Redmayne was on the Coal-Mining Organisation Committee, established early in the war, and they estimated in 1915 that forty per cent of miners of military age had enlisted (nineteen per cent of the total workforce).

²³ Barry Supple, 'War Economies', in Winter, et al (eds.), *Cambridge History of the First World War*, p. 310. Also Barry Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry, Volume IV, 1913-1946 – The Political Economy of Decline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [1987]), pp. 65-78. See Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 187-8.

²⁴ Hurwitz, *State Intervention*, p. 172. Further legislation was introduced in 1917 and 1918 to control the price of coal: *Manuals of Emergency Legislation, Defence of the Realm Manual, 7th Edition, Revised to March 31st, 1919* (London: HMSO, 1919): Retail Coal Prices Order, 1917 – passed 11 September 1917, pp. 207-11; Household Fuel and Lighting Order, 1918 – passed 28 July 1918, pp. 226-33.

²⁵ Redmayne, *Coal-Mining Industry*, p. 79; Hurwitz, *State Intervention*, p. 175.

²⁶ *Defence of the Realm Manual, 7th Edition*, p. 47.

reduce the consumption of coal for heating and lighting purposes.²⁷ The severe winter of 1916/7 caused profound hardship in London, particularly in working-class districts. The city had insufficient stocks of coal and there were distribution problems caused not only by a lack of deliverymen but also a shortage of labourers to clear the streets of snow and ice.²⁸

Acton was also affected. On 11 July 1917, the Acton Food Economy Campaign Committee called upon the Acton Urban District Council [hereafter AUDC] to take immediate action to store one thousand tons of coal 'in the view of the difficulty in obtaining coal, especially in small quantities, and the consequent distress of the poorer working classes'.²⁹ The Household Coal Distribution Order of 10 August 1917 introduced coal rationing in London, allotting specific amounts according to the size of the dwelling.³⁰ By 1918 coal shortages had reduced the domestic supply by twenty-five per cent of its pre-war average.³¹ The Household Fuel and Lighting Order of 28 June 1918 extended coal rationing to the whole nation.³² This Order – and the

²⁷ Hurwitz, *State Intervention*, p. 175. See *Hansard: House of Lords Debates*, vol. 21, column no. 1039-48, 16 May 1916. Available from <https://parliament.uk/historic-hansard/index.html> [Accessed 18 May 2019]. Also *Defence of the Realm Manual, 7th Edition*, p. 97.

²⁸ Armin Triebel, 'Coal and the Metropolis', in Winter and Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War*, pp. 358-9.

²⁹ Ealing Local History Centre and Borough Archive, Ealing Central Library: Urban District Council of Acton, Proceedings of the Council and of the Several Committees of the Council [hereafter AUDC Proceedings] (April 1917 – April 1918), 17 July 1917, p. 183.

³⁰ *Defence of the Realm Manual, 7th Edition*, pp. 305-321. For a table showing domestic allowances see Redmayne, *Coal Mining Industry*, p. 111.

³¹ Hurwitz, *State Intervention*, p. 173.

³² *Defence of the Realm Manual, 7th Edition*, pp. 226-71.

cessation of hostilities on 11 November 1918 – meant that a threatened coal famine was narrowly averted.³³

It was in this context of food and fuel shortages and distribution problems that the men under consideration in this chapter made their appeals for exemption from military service. Indeed, fourteen of the eighty cases considered in this chapter included the argument that the man was essential to the domestic food and fuel supply chain and ten of these eighty men were retained on the home front as a direct result of these problems. Perhaps surprisingly, however, most of the individuals considered in this chapter appealed on rather different grounds. These appellants were, to a greater or lesser degree, businessmen and the majority either claimed that the business in question would fail in the absence of an essential employee or that, as a sole proprietor, the man would be forced to give up his hard-earned enterprise and lose his livelihood if called up for military service. As a result, his dependants would suffer serious financial and domestic hardship. Thus, it can be said of the majority of men in this chapter that they were, on the whole, looking out for their own interests in attempting to keep their businesses afloat. Only fifteen of the eighty men considered in this chapter were granted exemption from military service by the tribunals (nineteen per cent).

As James McDermott explains, ‘the businessmen/sole proprietor was, and remained, the non-existent “group”’.³⁴ He argues that attempts to find a collective method of considering such men and streamlining local food retail supplies in Northamptonshire failed because of a lack of willingness on the part of individual tradesmen to give up their businesses, lose their livelihood and run the risk of being conscripted, and a

³³ Redmayne, *Coal Mining Industry*, p. 198.

³⁴ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 152.

lack of incentive on the part of the tribunals to spend time and effort on recruitment schemes that would only yield men for the armed forces one at a time.³⁵ This chapter considers such conclusions with regard to the food and fuel retail businessmen and sole proprietors of Acton.

The first section considers thirty-six men who worked as employees in the retail food and fuel industry, and explores the complex interplay between the claims made that these men were providing essential services and arguments that included other factors, such as gender, age and marital status. It pays particular attention to contemporary gendered expectations within an industry that was employing increasingly large numbers of women. This section also examines the impact on appeals of the numerous and frequently altered 'Lists of Certified Occupations' that were published during the war and considers the place of retail employment in the context of the country's ever-changing manpower problems. It pays attention to any arguments put forward by appellants that specifically concerned food and fuel shortages. Equality of sacrifice and notions of patriotism are considered, especially in the context of the pressure brought to bear on employers to release men for the armed forces.

The second section considers the cases of forty-four men who were the sole proprietors of their enterprises. It discusses the ways in which these self-employed men responded to conscription – and the prospect of losing their livelihoods – and how these arguments were received by the authorities and their fellow Acton citizens. This section looks at men who went into the munitions trade in order to remain at home and protect their businesses and families. It also analyses the extent

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 152-3.

to which the women of the domestic unit were expected to take over the business in the man's absence. It considers whether some food and fuel enterprises were more or less important than others in terms of the granting of exemptions. It also looks at the conditions under which the authorities kept men back from military service at times of nationwide civilian manpower emergencies.

Retail Employees

This section considers the cases of thirty-six food and fuel retail workers. All were employed by others or worked in a family run business. Figure 4.1 below shows the various trades within the retail food and fuel industry in which these men worked.

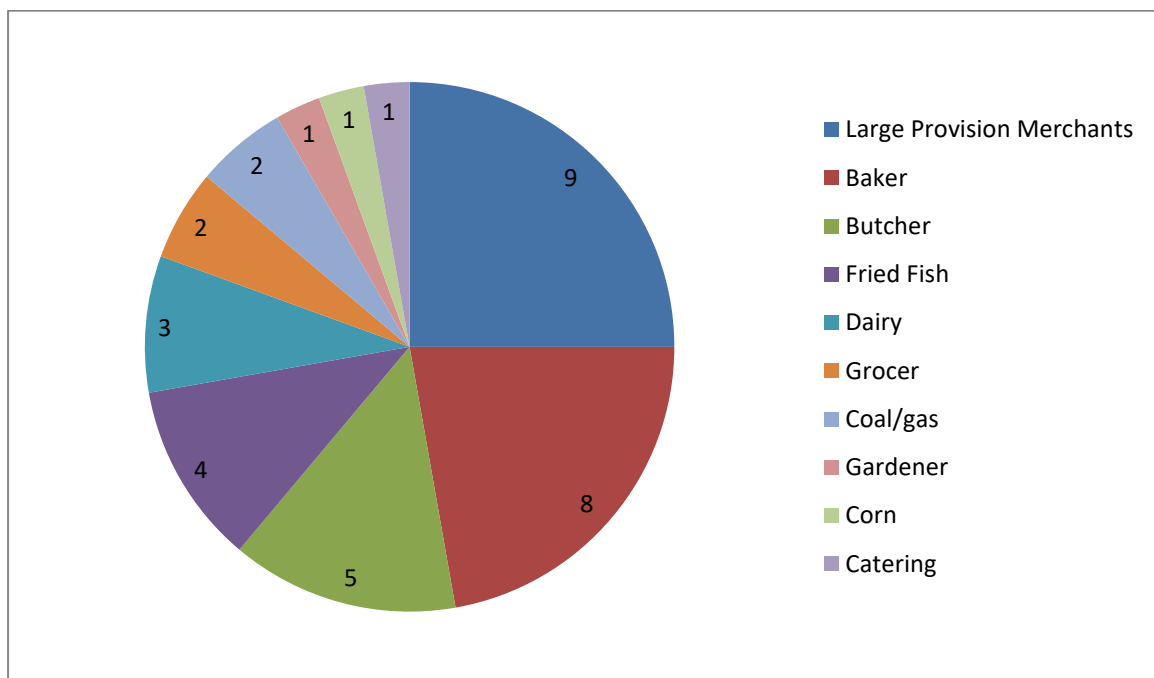


Figure 4.1 – Trades of Acton's Food and Fuel Retailers' Employees. Source – MH 47 Archive.

Despite the country's significant problems with food supply and distribution, detailed above, only eight of these thirty-six men remained exempt for the duration of the war (twenty-two per cent). One of these men moved to work in munitions and another

worked on war contracts.³⁶ One was unfit for military service.³⁷ Only five worked in retail outlets that were regarded by the tribunals to be of sufficient importance to the community to justify their exemption from military service. Three of these five were connected to bread baking and one was a fish curer, all of which were occupations that were considered by the authorities to be essential throughout the war.³⁸ The fifth successful appellant worked for a nationwide retail dairy business.

Gordon Henderson was a departmental manager and inspector for the Maypole Dairy Company Limited, which appealed on his behalf. Founded in Wolverhampton in 1887 to cater for working-class customers, Maypole Dairy had 985 retail branches across the UK by 1915.³⁹ James McDermott suggests that for an appeal to be

³⁶ The National Archives, Kew [hereafter TNA]: MH – Records Created or Inherited by the Ministry of Health and Successors, Local Government Boards and Related Bodies: MH 47 – Central Military Service Tribunal and Middlesex Appeal Tribunal, Minutes and Papers [hereafter MH 47]: MH 47/102/31: Herbert Dickens left H. J. Heinz Company to work for du Cros in October 1916; MH 47/105/44: Charles Wood worked for T. G. Tickler, a fruit preserving company with an important War Office contract.

³⁷ MH 47/109/26: Alfred Townsend.

³⁸ MH 47/62/8: Reuben Hooker and MH 47/40/56: Ernest Sheehan both worked as carters for an industrial bakery; MH 47/104/15: William Webb was a bread baker. MH 47/81/2: George Hamilton was a fish curer who claimed to be catering for ‘the Hammersmith Military Hospital, Park Royal Camp, and the needs of the public supplied through three shops’.

³⁹ Thomas Farrell, ‘Milking the Profits: Maypole Dairy’. Available from www.letslookagain.com [Accessed 9 June 2019]. The company manufactured margarine in two factories in Grimsby and Southall and were supplying one third of the country’s margarine supply by 1914. See David Clare, ‘Maypole Dairies’. Available from www.historywebsite.co.uk [Accessed 9 June 2019]. See Marwick,

successful in front of a tribunal the enterprise had to be regarded as sufficiently important in the national interest and the man recognised as being an essential element of its continued functioning.⁴⁰ However, in Henderson's case the decision to retain his civilian services on the home front was made by the recruiting (military) authorities rather than the tribunals. Henderson was in charge of '36 Retail Shops' and in September 1916 the company claimed to have lost 'over 1880 men' to the armed forces.⁴¹ They argued that Henderson was indispensable due to his 'technical and intimate knowledge and the managerial and directing character of his work'.⁴² On 10 October 1916 the Ealing recruiting officer asked for the deferral of Henderson's case 'until a complete list of the Maypole Dairy employees has been submitted to this office as I find it will be necessary to give and take under the scheme of substitution'.⁴³ Henderson's appeal was withdrawn as the 'Military

Deluge, pp. 194-5 for a description of margarine queues in London in December 1917.

⁴⁰ See McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 135-6, for an example from Harpole Co-operative Society that 'the importance of the business preceded that of the man within it'.

⁴¹ MH 47/23/92: Gordon Henderson, 15 September 1916. By June 1918 the firm had lost 'over 2,600' male members of staff to 'one or other of His Majesty's Forces'. See MH 47/108/8: William Latty, 13 June 1918.

⁴² MH 47/23/92: Gordon Henderson, 15 September 1916. The wording of this claim was taken verbatim from the list of certified occupations. See MH 47/142/4/1: Local Government Board [hereafter LGB] Circular R.40, 'Certified Occupations', February 1916, p. 6. Henderson's application contained no personal information and his employers stated that they were 'not asking for his exemption on frivolous grounds': *Ibid.*, 15 September 1916.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10 October 1916.

Authorities ... are dealing with the matter'.⁴⁴ He was considered indispensable to a nationally important food retail business and did not serve in the armed forces.

According to Maypole Dairies, an essential part of Gordon Henderson's job was to 'train new members of our Staffs (the greater portion of whom are now females and boys, or men over Military age) with no previous experience of the business'.⁴⁵ Much has been written about the employment of women during the war but there is little information about those who became shop assistants.⁴⁶ There is evidence that retail work was not a popular option for women who registered to undertake war work in 1915, although the industry eventually saw a notable degree of wartime feminisation.⁴⁷ In October 1916, Maypole Dairy claimed that 'we now employ at our

⁴⁴ Ibid., 9 November 1916.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 15 September 1916.

⁴⁶ For female shop assistants see Janet McCalman, 'The Impact of the First World War on Female Employment in England', in *Labour History*, vol. 21 (1971), p. 42; Irene Andrews and Margaret Hobbs, *Economic Effects of the World War upon Women and Children in Great Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 33. In April 1915, the Board of Trade appealed to women to enter themselves on the Register of Women for War Work. See Edith Abbott, 'The War and Women's Work in England', in *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 25, no. 7 (1917), p. 654.

⁴⁷ TNA: RG – Records of the General Register Office, Government Social Survey Department, and Office of Population Censuses and Surveys: RG 28 – General Register Office, National Registration, Correspondence and Papers [hereafter RG 28]: RG 28/9 – Subseries within RG 28 – National Register (Lansdowne) Committee, 1915-1916 [hereafter RG 28/9]: RG 28/9: Report of the Shops Committee (London: HMSO, 1915). The Shops Committee was appointed by the Home Secretary in early 1915 to report on the condition of the retail trade with a view to securing more men for the armed forces and it was disclosed in the above report that there were nearly 90,000 women on the Register of Women for War Work by August 1915, '3000 of whom had declared their readiness for employment in shop work'.

branches over 1840 females, whereas before the war the staff consisted of males without a solitary exception'.⁴⁸

A number of appeals considered in this section emphasised that the work could only be undertaken by men but tribunals were sceptical of claims that women were not capable of shop work. The issue of physical strength, and especially the heavy lifting that the work often required, proved a contentious one.⁴⁹ In some cases tribunals were initially sympathetic but this sympathy declined as military needs increased. Henry Norman was the managing director of an Acton grocery business and in November 1916 applied for Bertie Smith, one of his branch managers. The firm had replaced all eight of its male shop assistants with women and Smith was doing the warehouse work alongside his managerial duties. Norman claimed that due to old age and illness he was himself unable to lift heavy weights and that Smith was 'the only healthy man I have to rely upon... [and] it is practically impossible to carry on a business such as mine with only female labour'.⁵⁰ Following the Battle of the Somme (1 July 1916 – 18 November 1916), military manpower needs took precedence over those of domestic concerns and Smith's masculine strength was demanded by an army that had been greatly depleted of fighting men. Norman was granted exemption for Smith until March 1917, after which time he was called up.⁵¹ On the other hand

⁴⁸ MH 47/23/92: Gordon Henderson, 14 October 1916.

⁴⁹ See for example MH 47/99/32: Oliver Lockyer; MH 47/22/72: Henry Marriott; MH 47/13/19: Lionel Mudge.

⁵⁰ MH 47/89/19: Bertie Smith, 29 November 1916.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 26 January 1917. Also MH 47/13/19: Lionel Mudge, corn merchant, who was passed for general service and called up on 22 March 1917 despite arguing that women could not lift sacks of flour and cereals.

Norman was able to keep his Ealing branch manager, Alfred Townsend, who was allegedly 'not much of a man now as regards health, but he keeps the shop going'.⁵²

Men who worked simply as shop assistants in Acton's food trade do not seem to have thought it worth their while to apply for exemption at appeal level, presumably because they judged their chances of success to be slim: there is no evidence in the MH 47 archive of applications by any of Acton's male shop assistants. Employers were expected, in the interest of equality of sacrifice, to make every effort to economise on labour and release men for military service. In the opinion of the Local Government Board, tribunals had a role to play in this too and 'must administer even-handed justice, and in the interests of the community must bring pressure to bear on the laggard employer'.⁵³

Firms anxious to demonstrate their compliance and patriotism left their male staff with few options but to join the armed forces or – at the very least – attest under the Derby Scheme.⁵⁴ Wallace Waite was the managing director of Waitrose, Limited. Founded in Acton in 1904, by the time the war broke out Waitrose had a head office and warehouse at 265 High Street, Acton and eight branches, two of which were in Acton.⁵⁵ Waite claimed that 'every encouragement has been given to our staff to

⁵² MH 47/109/26: Alfred Townsend, 26 January 1917. Also MH 47/99/32: Oliver Lockyer who was medically graded 'C2' and retained by his employer until 17 October 1917.

⁵³ MH 47/142/4/2: LGB Circular R.84, 1 June 1916, p. 5. See Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 108.

⁵⁴ Sixty-nine per cent of the men in this section were attested, arguably because they had been given little choice by their employers.

⁵⁵ See Henry England, MH 47/91/21 for letterhead notepaper. Also 'Company History'. Available from waitrose.com [Accessed 8 June 2019].

enlist' and the company only employed 'female labour and junior assistants under Military age'.⁵⁶ Waite explained that 'we have released all our single men without appealing and all married men have attested voluntarily in our employ and the majority will be called up for service this month'.⁵⁷

While it was expected that shop assistants (especially those who were unmarried) should be called up, managers were a different matter. The importance of managers was recognised by their inclusion in the list of certified occupations, but this was increasingly eroded as the war went on – as reflected in some Acton cases. Waite, for example, did not apply for the exemption of any of his shop assistants, but he did appeal for five of the firm's branch managers. Applications on behalf of retail grocery managers were lodged in accordance with the 'Official List of Certified Occupations'.⁵⁸ In February 1916 this list allowed for the exemption of the proprietor

⁵⁶ MH 47/75/168: Edmund Brown, 28 March 1916. Also MH 47/76/35: John Charity, 28 March 1916.

⁵⁷ MH 47/75/168: Edmund Brown, 15 May 1916.

⁵⁸ Prior to conscription, men attested under the Derby Scheme could be exempted from military service if they were 'starred' at National Registration (15 August 1915) as munitions, coal mining, railway or agricultural workers. In addition a list of 'reserved occupations' was prepared from which 'in the public interest, from the point of view of the export trade or for other reasons, it is desirable to extend some measure of protection, either because the persons included in them, though relatively few in number, are engaged in work which could not be interrupted without serious dislocation or because the industries affected are such that it would be unwise to take more men from them without special investigation. This list is not to be regarded as complete and will be revised from time to time as circumstances require'. See MH 47/142/4/1: LGB Circular R.2, 19 November 1915, p. 2. This list of 'reserved occupations' became the 'Official List of Certified Occupations' in February 1916 and this 'List' was updated and altered on 4 April 1916, 7 July 1916, 20

or manager of grocery and provision shops 'normally employing two or more Assistants'.⁵⁹ In the cases of Edmund Brown and Henry England, Waite asked only for three months' exemption in order that they could train the firm's female replacements and he was successful in both appeals.⁶⁰ Unmarried retail grocery managers were removed from this list on 4 April 1916 when the age at which exemption could be granted for such men was raised to forty-one.⁶¹ By July 1916 the minimum age of their married counterparts had been raised to twenty-five.⁶² By November 1916 retail grocery managers had been taken off the list altogether.⁶³

November 1916, 1 February 1917, 21 June 1917 and 26 September 1918. The 'List of Certified Occupations' is not to be confused with the 'Schedule of Protected Occupations' (considered in chapter three), first published on 7 May 1917 and revised on 1 February 1918, which superseded all war badges and henceforth protected only those in 'Admiralty, War Office or Munitions Work, or in Railway Workshops'. See MH 47/142/2: Schedule of Protected Occupations, 7 May 1917. There was also a list of 'Work of National Importance' (considered in chapter five), first published in April 1916 and designed to show work suitable for conscientious objectors. See MH 47/142/4/1: 'Committee on Work of National Importance – Preliminary List of Occupations Which the Committee Recommend to the Tribunals as Being of National Importance', 14 April 1916.

⁵⁹ MH 47/142/4/1: LGB Circular R.40 – Certified Occupations, February 1916, p. 6. See also MH 47/23/92: Gordon Henderson, 14 October 1916. Henderson's employers explained to the tribunal that 'we ... do not intend to appeal on behalf of any man at either or any of our Branch Shops in a position subordinate to that of a Manager'.

⁶⁰ MH 47/75/168: Edmund Brown; MH 47/91/21: Henry England – both 15 May 1916.

⁶¹ MH 47/142/4/1: LGB Circular R.74 – Certified Occupations, 4 April 1916, p. 5.

⁶² MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.94 – List of Certified Occupations, 7 July 1916, p. 15.

⁶³ MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.105 – List of Certified Occupations, 20 November 1916, p. 19.

Retail workers who were removed from the list of certified occupations, whatever their managerial responsibilities, could not expect to remain exempt from military service. As the war dragged on, even those who claimed to be undertaking work of national importance in addition to their shop work could not sustain the argument that they were indispensable to the home front in an industry that was employing increasing numbers of women. Alongside his duties as a Waitrose manager, Henry England was a 'worker in a military canteen' and remaining in this position was a condition of his exemption in June 1916.⁶⁴ Approved firms of contractors were engaged to supply and operate military canteens, with prices and profits strictly regulated.⁶⁵ It is likely that Waitrose was one of the Committee's approved contractors and that England worked in a local military canteen as a representative of the firm.

On 1 January 1917 the Army Canteen Committee became a not-for-profit organisation and took increasing control of the provision of supplies, establishing a central organisation for the running of the canteens.⁶⁶ The numerous contractors

⁶⁴ MH 47/91/21: Henry England, 28 June 1916. The Army Canteen Committee was established in January 1915 to oversee supplies of food to troops training at home. The Expeditionary Force Canteens (attached to the Army Service Corps) was created in the early months of the war to serve the soldiers at the front.

⁶⁵ John Fortescue, *Canteens in the British Army* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015 [1928]), p. 48.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50. On the inclusion of the Royal Navy in June 1917, the Army Canteen Committee was renamed the Navy and Army Canteen Board. Amalgamating with the Expeditionary Force Canteens in December 1920, it became the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes – NAAFI.

were consolidated into the new system and the workers reorganised.⁶⁷ The Middlesex Appeal Tribunal's military representative (Captain Bax) challenged England's exemption on 30 January 1917, arguing 'that this man of 29 should now join the Army instead of remaining as a worker in a military canteen'.⁶⁸ England's certificate of exemption was withdrawn six days later.⁶⁹

Retail grocers' managers had been taken off the list of certified occupations by November 1916. In firms that had more than one shop, the overall manager was expected to take on duties that had been previously delegated to a branch manager. In the absence of detailed government guidance, decisions were made on a case by case basis. Recruiting personnel were guided by 'a small group of gentlemen with considerable local knowledge' who advised on 'questions concerning local industry, &c'.⁷⁰ They wielded considerable influence. Thomas Davies worked for J. Bakers Stores, 193-195, High Street, Acton, as a provision buyer and manager. His employer argued that Davies was 'the only man left in this department and we consider him indispensable to carry on our business'.⁷¹ Acton's military representative (John Kent) observed that 'this application has been investigated by members of the Advisory Committee who have come to the conclusion that the buying can be done by the General Manager'.⁷²

⁶⁷ See MH 47/68/7: Samuel Nicoll, 6 August 1917. Nicoll applied to work for the Navy and Army Canteen Board but was told that 'it is regretted that owing to the Canteen vacancies being filled by women, at present I have nothing I can offer you'.

⁶⁸ MH 47/91/21: Henry England, 30 January 1917.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 5 February 1917.

⁷⁰ MH 47/142/1: 'Registration and Recruiting', p. 17.

⁷¹ MH 47/86/107: Thomas Davies, 17 October 1916.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1 November 1916.

Retail butchers' proprietors, managers and slaughtermen were included in the first list, in February 1916, but excluded in all the subsequent ones.⁷³ Although appeals based on the argument that a son was essential to the business were sometimes successful (often at the expense of other employees) ultimately men with butchery skills were needed to supply food for the army. As a result claims based on the food needs of the home front or on family pressures were unsuccessful. Edward Richardson applied for the exemption of his son Clarence. Following the failure of the older man's health Clarence had taken charge of the family business, established for forty-seven years and upon which both men relied to support their dependents. Five of their employees had joined the armed forces and Clarence was the only man for whom an application was made. The appeal was dismissed and Edward died shortly afterwards.⁷⁴ Clarence attempted to get his case reheard but, by this time, he was attached to the Expeditionary Force Canteen Mess as a butcher.⁷⁵

Being excluded from the list of certified occupations – and having applications dismissed by both the Acton tribunal and the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal – did not necessarily mean that a butcher would be called up immediately. Nevertheless, in a context where suspicions of 'profiteering' were attracting increasingly negative attention, any continued presence on the home front was not tolerated if a retailer was found to be less than honest in his dealings with his customers.⁷⁶ William

⁷³ MH 47/142/4/1: LGB Circular R.40 – Certified Occupations, February 1916, p. 6; LGB Circular R.74 – Certified Occupations, 4 April 1916, p. 5.

⁷⁴ MH 47/81/84: Montague Richardson, 12 September 1916.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 9 October 1916.

⁷⁶ See Jean-Louis Robert, 'The Image of the Profiteer', in Winter and Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War*, especially pp. 120-3 for profiteers and consumers. Also

Lockyer was a butcher's buyer and manager, working for H. J. Bowbeer and Sons, in their shop on Acton High Street. His appeal had originally been dismissed on 30 August 1916 and he had subsequently been rejected from military service on medical grounds.⁷⁷ Re-graded as 'C1' – presumably under the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act of 1917 – he re-applied for exemption. Bowbeer claimed that Lockyer was serving 'between 3000 and 4000 customers weekly with approximately 2500lbs of meat which he himself cuts up for sale' and 'the customers are principally munition workers and others in engineering trades'.⁷⁸ He also worked at the Ealing Common branch where he helped to supply 'quantities of about 1200lbs weekly to Army Service Corps Camp, Park Royal, and 400lbs to Royal Flying Corps, Acton'.⁷⁹ However, on 28 March 1917 Lockyer was twice fined the maximum penalty of £5 for loading his scales against the purchaser by 1½ ounces and Kent declared 'that to give the public less than they pay dearly for is not in the national interest'.⁸⁰ Lockyer's application and subsequent appeal were summarily dismissed and he was called up.⁸¹

Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 136-42 and 197-9; Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda*, p. 137.

⁷⁷ MH 47/97/45: William Lockyer, 30 August 1916.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 26 June 1917.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 15 June 1917. Lockyer would have been convicted and fined under the Weights and Measures Act, 1878. The Weights and Measures, Orders as to Powers of Inspectors (1917, No. 538) was passed on 11 June 1917. See *Manuals of Emergency Legislation: Food Supply Manual – Revised to July, 31st, 1918* (London: HMSO, 1918), pp. 638-40.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 21 June and 12 July 1917.

While retail butchers were removed from the list of certified occupations in July 1916, bread bakers remained listed as essential workers throughout the war. However, changes to the upper age limit could result in a man losing his exemption certificate. Abel Field was a baker, attested and placed in Group 7 as an unmarried man born in 1889.⁸² Field's call-up from within this Group was cancelled by the local recruiting officer on 27 January 1916 as he was in a 'reserved trade'.⁸³ He remained exempt in the first 'Official List of Certified Occupations', published on 10 February 1916, which included 'bakers (bread)'.⁸⁴ On 7 July 1916 an age limit was imposed on unmarried bakers, excluding all those under the age of thirty.⁸⁵ Field's employer made the first application for the exemption of his baker on the same day.⁸⁶ Both application and

⁸² MH 47/142/1: 'Group and Class Systems, Notes on Administration, Issued by the Director-General of Recruiting', February 1916, p. 103.

⁸³ MH 47/80/69: Abel Field, n.d., circa 8 July 1916.

⁸⁴ MH 47/142/1: 'Group and Class Systems' – List of Certified Occupations, February 1916, p. 100.

⁸⁵ MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.94 – List of Certified Occupations, 7 July 1916, p. 14. An age limit was also imposed on married bakers in the November 1916 list, withdrawing exemption from all under the age of twenty-five. See MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.105 – List of Certified Occupations, 20 November 1916, p. 18. These age limits were raised to thirty-three for single men and twenty-seven for married men in February 1917. See MH 47/142/2: LGB Circular R.117 – List of Certified Occupations, 1 February 1917, p. 18. The age limits were raised to thirty-one for married bakers in June 1917. See MH 47/142/2: LGB Circular R.137 – Principal Changes in List of Certified Occupations, 23 June 1917, p. 11. These age limits remained the same until September 1918 when the exemption stipulation was changed to all bakers graded 1 and born in or before 1882 and, for those graded 2, the year was 1888: MH 47/142/3: LGB Circular R.136 (Revised) List of Certified Occupations, 26 September 1918, p. 23.

⁸⁶ MH 47/80/69: Abel Field, n.d. (but stamped as received by the tribunal on 8 July 1916).

subsequent appeal were dismissed.⁸⁷ On the other hand, William Webb (also single) was born in 1886. His employer claimed that Webb was the only bread baker left of four. He was asked to produce a birth certificate, confirming that he was over the age of thirty.⁸⁸ Once this was produced he was granted exemption on condition that he continued to work as a bread baker – and he did not serve in the armed forces.⁸⁹

Industrial-sized bakeries were able to keep some of their labourers and carters of military age if these men were of a low medical category. H. W. Nevill Company Limited was one of London's foremost bread producers and had a factory on Acton Lane.⁹⁰ They applied for the exemption of three of their workers: Alfred Farrant and Reuben Hooker were carters and Ernest Sheehan was a 'bakehouse worker'.⁹¹ Unlike Farrant, both Hooker and Sheehan had been medically rejected several times and their employer successfully claimed that they were filling the places of men who had been called up.⁹²

⁸⁷ Ibid., 13 July and 5 September 1916. Also MH 47/47/6: William Smith. Although Smith's father claimed that Smith was baking '22 sacks of bread a week' he was a single man, born in 1900, and his case was dismissed on 21 March 1918.

⁸⁸ MH 47/104/15: William Webb, 13 September 1916.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 19 October 1916.

⁹⁰ Diane Bolton, Patricia Croot and M. Hicks, 'Acton: Economic History', in T. F. T. Baker and C. R. Elrington (eds.), *A History of the County of Middlesex, Volume 7* (London: Victoria County History, 1982), pp. 23-30. Also 'Whitaker's Red Book of Commerce or Who's Who in Business, 1914', no pagination. Available from www.gracesguide.co.uk [Accessed 17 May 2020].

⁹¹ MH 47/76/94: Alfred Farrant, 13 June 1916. Farrant's appeal was dismissed.

⁹² MH 47/62/8: Reuben Hooker, 31 January 1918; MH 47/40/56: Ernest Sheehan, 22 June 1917. Neither man served in the armed forces. Also McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 139-40, for evidence that bread baking was not considered to be suitable work for women.

Small businesses were less likely to retain the service of their carters than large establishments, especially if the man was unmarried. Like the laundrywomen considered in chapter one, some female food retail proprietors sought to argue that they needed the masculine strength and presumed authority of their deliverymen. However, unlike the laundrywomen, these women were not successful in keeping their men. This was perhaps because their businesses were not considered by the Acton tribunal to be as locally – or nationally – important as those within the laundry trade. It may also have been the case that the laundry industry offered more opportunities for individual businesses to cooperate with one another, thus ensuring the retention on the home front of at least a handful of deliverymen.⁹³

Walter Dobell was a widower, working as a baker's roundsman for one Mrs Bennett who claimed that Dobell was indispensable for the 'safe conduct of my business'.⁹⁴ Her only son was serving in the armed forces 'and if I had his assistance it would not be necessary for me to make this appeal'.⁹⁵ Dobell was called up in March 1917.⁹⁶ William Young and John Thomas were both young unmarried men helping their widowed mothers run family dairy businesses. Young distributed milk on three rounds with the help of two boys and he explained that his mother had been in bed for three weeks after hurting her back while moving a milk churn.⁹⁷ Thomas stated

⁹³ See MH 47/93/87: Richard Hutchins. He was carting for his family business, the local munitions trade and Acton's laundry industry. The intervention of the National Federation of Laundry Associations is the likely reason for his continued exemption until mid-1917, despite his medical grading of 'A'.

⁹⁴ MH 47/35/13: Walter Dobell, 7 June 1916.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6 March 1917.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22 March 1917.

⁹⁷ MH 47/80/5: William Young, 1 July 1916.

that the work was impossible for a woman 'as there is a great deal of heavy lifting to be done'.⁹⁸ Neither the masculine association of strength and authority, nor the claims of widows for special consideration, seem to have swayed the tribunals. The Local Government Board advised tribunals in June 1916 that 'there seems to have been an impression in some quarters that the only sons of widows would be exempted as a matter of course. There was no such intention; this procedure would have been obviously unfair to other classes'.⁹⁹ Young was called up in July 1916; Thomas in March 1917.¹⁰⁰

Female proprietors were not the only business owners to stress the hard and dangerous nature of the work, requiring male strength and expertise. The list of certified occupations included carmen employed in the milk trade who were classed as a 'Collector from Railway Stations'.¹⁰¹ Archibald Gibson was a dairy station man. He worked for one J. W. Barker who stated that Gibson's task required special training as the churns had to be rolled 'across two lines of Railway Metals out into the street'.¹⁰² Barker argued that the work was dangerous and needed two experienced men, especially on dark mornings and nights – the churns weighing two and a quarter hundredweight (about eighteen stone or 114 kilograms). The two men handled between fourteen and sixteen churns a day and Barker had 'important contracts with Hospitals, Nursing Homes, Doctors and Nurseries in addition to about

⁹⁸ MH 47/92/40: John Thomas, 2 June 1916.

⁹⁹ MH 47/142/4/2: LGB Circular R.84, 1 June 1916, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 6 March 1917; MH 47/80/5: William Young, 26 July 1916.

¹⁰¹ MH 47/142/1: 'Group and Class Systems', List of Certified Occupations, February 1916, p. 100.

¹⁰² MH 47/76/4: Archibald Gibson, 23 May 1916.

1000 private customers'.¹⁰³ The Acton tribunal wrote to Gibson in May 1916 explaining that they 'were not convinced that your work of collecting milk at the railway station was your principal and usual occupation'.¹⁰⁴ Barker admitted that Gibson also did a milk round and that, 'as a roundsman he could be done without but, as a station man he is absolutely indispensable to the carrying on of my business'.¹⁰⁵ Milk roundsmen were not included in the list of certified occupations and Barker's appeal for Gibson was dismissed.¹⁰⁶

Men who worked as employees in the food and fuel retail trade were, on the whole, unlikely to remain exempt from military service. The next section considers men who were the sole proprietors of their own business.

One-Man Businesses

Forty-four of the eighty men considered in this chapter claimed to be running a one-man business dealing with food and fuel. Thirty-eight of the men were married.¹⁰⁷ Thirty-five of these thirty-eight claimed that they were supporting their wives and/or that these women were incapable of managing the business in their absence.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 19 May 1916.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 23 May 1916.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 12 June 1916. Also MH 47/98/22: Horace Goding; MH 47/80/7: Walter Potter.

¹⁰⁷ MH 47/9/18: Frederick Lunkenheimer; MH 47/92/40: John Thomas; MH 47/86/97: Arnold Wiggins; MH 47/119/42: Claude Wiggins – all were single. MH 47/93/14: Henry Prince was widowed.

¹⁰⁸ The only men who were married but made no mention of their wives were MH 47/53/22: Alfred Cooper; MH 47/31/46: Albert Cuff; MH 47/72/76: Alfred Nelhams.

None of these thirty-five claims were successful. Figure 4.2 below shows the different food and fuel trades within which these sole proprietors worked.

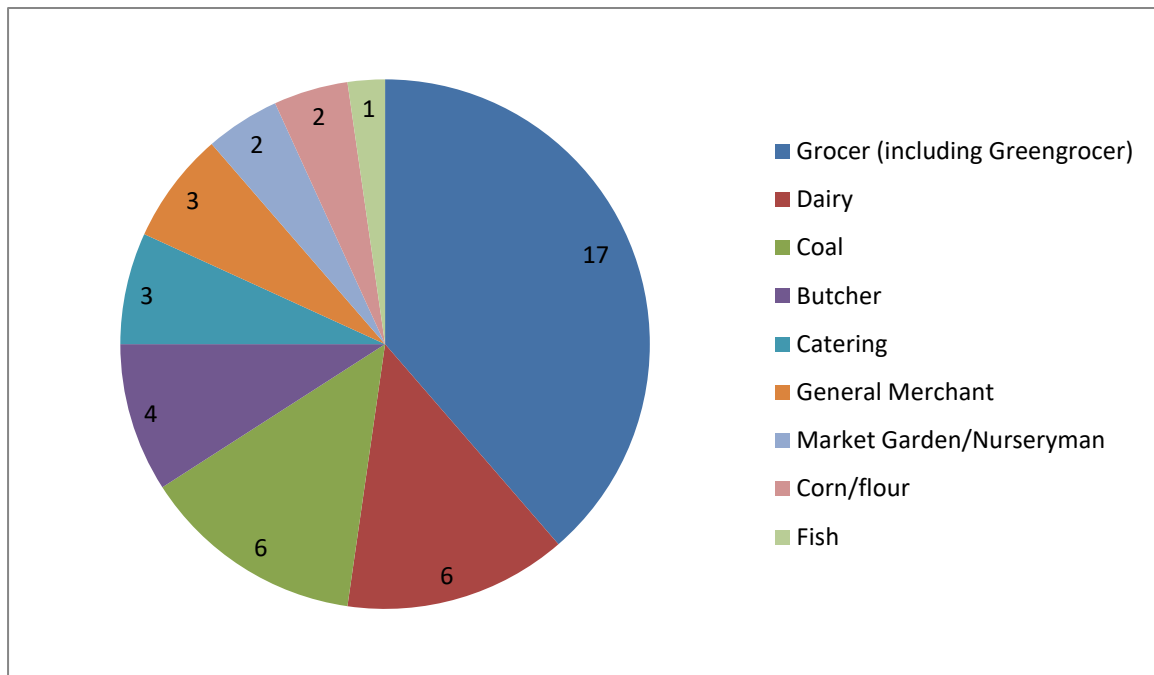


Figure 4.5 – Trades of Acton's Self-Employed Food and Fuel Retailers. Source – MH 47 Archive.

Only eight of these forty-four men remained exempt through certificates granted by the military service tribunals. One of these exemptions was granted by the Acton tribunal and did not reach the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal: Francis Glass (Acton's assistant military representative) lodged an appeal against grocer Albert Cuff's continued exemption but it was withdrawn for undisclosed reasons in February 1917.¹⁰⁹ Aside from these eight exemptions, another man was released from military

Many of these claims stated that the wife was 'delicate'. See McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 170, for the use of this term in many applications for exemption.

¹⁰⁹ MH 47/31/46: Albert Cuff, 21 February 1917. Although there are no details as to why Cuff's appeal was withdrawn, he was granted the Freedom of the City of London in 1927 and it can be assumed that he was a man of some status in the community. See London Metropolitan Archive: Freedom Admission Papers, 1681-1930, Albert

service when his health broke down during army training.¹¹⁰ A further five men were never actually called up for military service despite having their appeals dismissed by the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal.¹¹¹ Thus thirty of the forty-four self-employed men in this section left their one-man businesses to serve in the armed forces (sixty-eight per cent).

In May 1916, as nationwide debates were taking place over the passing of the Military Service Act, 1916 (Session 2), an Acton newspaper reported ‘that if the tradesmen of Acton and Chiswick are brought within the provisions of the Compulsion Act, two thirds of those who manage their own businesses will in all probability have to close down’.¹¹² In an open letter to the same newspaper on the same day, Herbert Nield – Conservative MP for Ealing and Chairman of the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal – remarked that military conscription worked ‘in favour of large stores or combined businesses to the great prejudice of the small tradesman, who is threatened with extinction’.¹¹³ Nield’s letter expressed his ‘warmest sympathy’ for ‘the small shopkeeper’.¹¹⁴ Despite this professed support, however, only seven of Acton’s forty-four sole proprietors of retail food and fuel businesses received

Edmund Cuff, 3 February 1927. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 28 May 2020]. Cuff was not required to reapply for exemption and remained exempt from military service. For further detail about cases that demonstrate a lack of transparency – and presumably access to influential contacts – see chapter five.

¹¹⁰ MH 47/30/36: William Edwards.

¹¹¹ MH 47/89/57: William Bacchus; MH 47/23/57: Frank Cutting; MH 47/39/47: Benjamin Hawkes; MH 47/97/82: Charles Hooper; MH 47/92/9: Frederick Hurrell.

¹¹² *Gazette*, 19 May 1916.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

exemption from the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal.¹¹⁵ None of these exemptions were granted on the ground that the man was a 'small shopkeeper' or that his business was of either local or national importance.

In all but one case, the seven shopkeepers who remained exempt at appeal level provided evidence of ill health or disability.¹¹⁶ In November 1916 Nield argued that it was not in the nation's interests to be 'saddled with useless soldiers'.¹¹⁷ The Middlesex Appeal Tribunal refused further exemption for dairyman and provision merchant William Edwards in May 1917.¹¹⁸ However, Nield personally intervened with the War Office when Mrs Edwards wrote to inform him that her husband's health had broken down during army training.¹¹⁹ Edwards was released from military service on 2 October 1917.¹²⁰ The five men who were granted exemption from the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal included a greengrocer named Thomas Ginger, who suffered from severe asthma. His breathing difficulties were such that 'on an average during the whole year I am unable to lie down in bed for three nights out of seven'.¹²¹

The other four self-employed retail food suppliers who were granted exemptions by the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal all claimed health issues in their appeals. All four

¹¹⁵ As mentioned above the military representative's appeal against Albert Cuff's continued exemption was withdrawn at local level and never reached the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal. See MH 47/31/46: Albert Cuff, 21 February 1917.

¹¹⁶ The exception was MH 47/68/7: Samuel Nicoll, 13 March 1917. Nicoll was a conscientious objector who was ordered by the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal to find work of national importance (see chapter five).

¹¹⁷ *Gazette*, 17 November 1916.

¹¹⁸ MH 47/30/36: William Edwards, 5 May 1917.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 August 1917.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2 October 1917.

¹²¹ MH 47/43/26: Thomas Ginger, 1 September 1917.

enhanced their argument for remaining exempt by demonstrating a willingness to undertake munitions work, implicitly endorsing the perception that this was of greater importance to a wartime economy than the retail of food and/or fuel. Alfred Goding's wife had symptoms of pulmonary tuberculosis. Presumably in order to remain at home to care for her, Goding gave up his dairy business and became a munitions worker in 1917.¹²² Alfred Cooper had 'no right eye' and he was 'quite prepared to go on munitions work and release single men without responsibilities within five miles so that I can direct my own business under management of whatever kind I could get'.¹²³ Sidney Turvey was also partially sighted. He obtained part-time munitions work and presumably managed to keep his butcher shop open.¹²⁴ James Yolland's wife suffered from 'Haemorrhage of the Lungs' and 'a double rupture which precludes her from doing any heavy lifting. In addition she has the care of 4 young children'.¹²⁵ Yolland found part-time work in a munitions factory and ran his business 'with no other male assistance except boy 14 assisting to deliver goods after school'.¹²⁶

Cooper, Goding, Turvey and Yolland all bolstered their appeals by taking up munitions work. In Goding's case, he had found work with C. A. Vandervell before his six-month exemption, granted by the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal, expired.¹²⁷ Other men stated that they were willing to undertake munitions work in addition to their retail employment but did not actually do so. This reluctance or inability to fulfil

¹²² MH 47/60/44: Alfred Goding, 24 December 1917.

¹²³ MH 47/53/22: Alfred Cooper, 26 August 1916 and 11 September 1916.

¹²⁴ MH 47/55/9: Sidney Turvey, 6 February 1917.

¹²⁵ MH 47/60/27: James Yolland, 14 December 1916.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5 June 1917.

¹²⁷ MH47/60/44: Alfred Goding, 24 December 1917.

such a commitment was probably a deciding factor in their failure to secure continued exemption from military service. In May 1916 Alfred Milton declared to the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal that he was 'willing to go on Munition work so that I can attend to my business in the evening and not close down'.¹²⁸ He was granted exemption at this time, conditional upon him continuing to run his grocery and provision business.¹²⁹ There is no evidence that he took up munitions work and, when the military representative (Captain Bax) challenged his certificate in January 1917, Milton was unable to secure any further exemption.¹³⁰ Retail grocers had been removed from the list of certified occupations in November 1916 and, without munitions work, Milton had no further argument for remaining on the home front.

Claims to be feeding munitions workers do not seem to have been more successful than claims to be provisioning civilians generally. Arnold Wiggins explained that 'my shop is within a Munitions area, and I am supplying Messrs. Du Cros alone with about £100 worth of meat at just over cost price for their workers. At Erconwald Street also I supply numerous munition workers with meat'.¹³¹ Charles Prince was a greengrocer who was supported in his application by the canteen superintendent at the 'Inspection Buildings, Park Royal', who stated that Prince was 'doing important work for this Canteen as Buyer of vegetables and fruit. He also acts as Carter in

¹²⁸ MH 47/91/20: Alfred Milton, 15 May 1916.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 June 1916.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 January 1917 and 8 February 1917. Also MH 47/100/4: William Portch, 23 and 29 November 1917.

¹³¹ MH 47/86/97: Arnold Wiggins, 6 June 1916.

fetching our allotment of sugar from the Docks and in other useful capacities.¹³²
Neither Prince nor Wiggins remained exempt from military service.¹³³

Men who ran their own canteens, independent of a specific factory, were unlikely to remain exempt either, even if a large number of their customers were munitions workers. If a man worked with his wife, she was expected to manage without him. Thomas Thomas' canteen catered 'for upwards of 450 Munition workers employed at Napiers, Du Cros, Vandervells and Dents and ... [for] at least 500 other customers (such as Carmen etc.)'.¹³⁴ He explained that his wife did some of the cooking but did not understand the buying or the management side of the business. In spite of these arguments, Thomas was called up in February 1917.¹³⁵

To some extent, fish and chip shop proprietors' claims were met more sympathetically. Such establishments had begun to appear in working-class districts prior to the First World War, providing valuable nutrition at an affordable price.¹³⁶ Appellants stressed the importance of these establishments to poorer consumers.¹³⁷ George Saville was the overall manager of twelve fish and chip shops and he explained that 'the average price which our customers pay for a meal is 2 ½ d and having regard to the present high price of meat and other foods and also fuel, the

¹³² MH 47/93/25: Charles Prince, n.d.

¹³³ Ibid., 7 November 1916; MH 47/93/25: Charles Prince, 4 April 1917.

¹³⁴ MH 47/31/44: Thomas Thomas, 11 January 1917.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 7 February 1917. Also MH 47/13/16: Herbert Symes, 29 August 1916.

¹³⁶ Ian Gazeley, *Poverty in Britain, 1900-1965* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 45; John Walton, 'Fish and Chips and the British Working Class, 1870-1930', in *Journal of Social History*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1989), pp. 254-8. Neither potatoes nor fish were rationed during the war.

¹³⁷ See McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 143 and 149, for similar arguments stressing the importance of fish and chip shops in Northamptonshire.

effect of closing Fried Fish Shops would be that in many cases, our customers will be left without food'.¹³⁸ The tribunals acknowledged that fish and chip shops were an important source of food.¹³⁹ However, exemptions granted to men working within the trade were short-term, probably because, as in the case of retailers generally, the tribunals believed that the work could be carried out by women. Walter Hoad ran a fish and chip shop with his wife and argued that 'fried fish being the main food for factory and Munitions workers around therefore it is considered necessary food to the public'.¹⁴⁰ Hoad argued that if his business closed it would 'cause great inconvenience to the late workers it being the only shop on the estate and the only thing that can be obtained in the way of food owing to the early closing act'.¹⁴¹ He was granted a three-month temporary exemption in September 1916.¹⁴² In December 1916 Kent opposed any further exemption as 'men passed for C1 are needed to release A men'.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ MH 47/12/60: George Saville, 19 June 1916. Also MH 47/103/19: Francis Patterson, 3 June 1918.

¹³⁹ *Gazette*, 8 September 1916. A report from an Acton tribunal hearing ran the headline 'Fried Fish as Staple Food!'

¹⁴⁰ MH 47/89/18: Walter Hoad, n.d., circa August 1916.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 28 November 1916. DORA Order 10b – Power to Order Early Closing – was enacted on 24 October 1916 and restricted 'either generally or in particular areas the hours in the evening during which any class of trade or business may be carried on'. See *Manuals of Emergency Legislation, Defence of the Realm Manual, 6th Edition, Revised to August 31st, 1918* (London: HMSO, 1918), p. 100.

¹⁴² MH 47/89/18: Walter Hoad, 6 September 1916.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* Hoad was called up on 26 January 1917. Also MH 47/103/19: Francis Patterson, 7 June 1918. Patterson's wife was 'bedridden' and the couple lived above the shop. He remained exempt for the duration of the war.

As with the employed retail workers, some self-employed shopkeepers were initially protected from military service by the list of certified occupations, only to lose this exemption as the war went on. Unlike employees, however, employers were not simply taken off the list and called up as the demand for military manpower increased. In some cases, local needs were also taken into consideration. In February 1916, the Local Government Board explained that ‘cases of smaller shops [were] to be dealt with individually by the Local Tribunals in view of the varying circumstances of the proprietor and the district’.¹⁴⁴ Recruiting officers, military representatives and tribunals alike were reminded that these ‘varying circumstances’ were to be taken into consideration when deciding whether a man should serve in the armed forces.¹⁴⁵

In order to ascertain the ‘varying circumstances’ of the district, an ‘Occupation Index’ was compiled by recruiting officers in August 1915 from data gathered during National Registration.¹⁴⁶ This index formed part of the ‘Military Register’ and was

¹⁴⁴ MH 47/142/4/1: LGB Circular R.40 – Certified Occupations, February 1916, p. 6. Grocers managers were removed from the list in November 1916. See MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.105 – List of Certified Occupations, 20 November 1916, p. 19. See also MH 47/68/7: Samuel Nicoll; MH 47/93/25: Charles Prince.

¹⁴⁵ See McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 137-143, for examples of several differences of approach to the ‘varying circumstances’ from some of Northamptonshire’s local tribunals. Also Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 90-1, for East Yorkshire local tribunal protests that their community knowledge and understanding was being undermined by the district’s appeal tribunal and ‘London’.

¹⁴⁶ MH 47/142/1: ‘Registration and Recruiting’, p. 6.

written on blue 'Army Form W.3153c'.¹⁴⁷ These so-called 'blue cards' were made out 'for each man who is still in civil life and living in the Area' and were arranged alphabetically in trade order (for example, all local butchers were indexed together).¹⁴⁸ In August 1916 recruiting officers, military representatives and tribunals were reminded by the Local Government Board that:

it is necessary for the Nation to maintain not only an Army but also an internal and export trade. Later it will be necessary to arrange to leave certain numbers of men of each of the different trades in civil life, even if they are otherwise eligible for service. Conversely, it will be possible at times to get men for the Army who might be protected by Tribunals on occupational grounds when, as a matter of fact, men of that occupation could locally be spared.¹⁴⁹

There is evidence that recruiting personnel heeded this Local Government Board advice. Five Acton men were never called up for military service by recruiting officers, despite having their appeals for exemption dismissed by the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal. These five cases, involving men in food or fuel businesses, suggest that there were times when the local recruiting authorities recognised the importance of keeping some men in their civilian occupations, even though the military service tribunals had presumably considered the appellants to be dispensable. Charles Hooper was a provision merchant who also carried mail 'from the Sorting Office to

¹⁴⁷ The military register itself was written on white index cards: Army Form W.3153a. Each man also had a red index card – Army Form W.3153b – which contained attestation information and/or his situation with regard to military service.

¹⁴⁸ MH 47/142/1: 'Registration and Recruiting', p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

the Great Western Railway and in connection with this he now has six horses and four vans'.¹⁵⁰ Hooper's re-application at appeal level was dismissed in July 1917.¹⁵¹ However, there is no evidence that he served in the armed forces and the 1918 Electoral Register demonstrates that he was still on the home front in April 1918.¹⁵² It can be assumed that Hooper remained exempt for the duration of the war, presumably in connection with his work as a carrier of mail.¹⁵³

Manpower pressures changed throughout the war and such fluctuations meant that a final decision by a tribunal was not always the end of the case. Four coal dealers were never called up for military service, despite losing their exemption certificates. The winter of 1916/17 was exceptionally cold and people living in London's working-class districts suffered particular hardship. Probably because of this, coal dealers who had been denied exemption from military service were retained on the home front. William Bacchus, Frank Cutting and Frederick Hurrell had their appeals dismissed between October 1916 and February 1917.¹⁵⁴ However, all three were registered as living at their home addresses in April 1918, which suggests that they

¹⁵⁰ MH 47/97/82: Charles Hooper, n.d., circa 3 January 1917.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 31 July 1917.

¹⁵² See London Metropolitan Archives, London, England, Electoral Registers [hereafter 1918 Electoral Register]. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 28 June 2020]. See Appendix Three. This register was compiled in April 1918, in connection with the Representation of the People Act, 1918. See Hugh Fraser, *The Representation of the People Act, 1918* (London: Sweet and Maxwell, 1918), p. 129.

¹⁵³ An efficient mail service was considered by the authorities to be essential to British morale. See Martha Hanna, 'War Letters: Communication Between Front and Home Front', in *1914-1918 Online – International Encyclopaedia of the First World War*. Available from www.1914-1918-online.net [Accessed 18 July 2020].

¹⁵⁴ MH 47/89/57: William Bacchus, 9 January 1917; MH 47/23/57: Frank Cutting, 25 October 1916; MH 47/92/9: Frederick Hurrell, 28 February 1917.

were never called up.¹⁵⁵ Bacchus lived in a 'poor neighbourhood' and claimed that he sold 'on an average 15 Tons of Coal a week in the Winter months'.¹⁵⁶

In the later months of 1917, the Local Government Board issued guidance to tribunals and recruiting personnel, cautioning them against calling up coal dealers during the winter of 1917/18. One of the main objectives of the Household Coal Distribution Order of 10 August 1917 was to secure deliveries of coal in small quantities to London's working-class consumers.¹⁵⁷ In December 1917 the Metropolitan Coal Distribution Branch of the Board of Trade alerted the Minister of National Service to 'the serious condition of the coal trade in London and the neighbouring areas', resulting in the Minister giving 'instructions not to call up, during

¹⁵⁵ See 1918 Electoral Register and Appendix Three. Men who were serving in the armed forces had the letter 'a' prefixed to their name, indicating that they were 'absent'. This prefix is not attached to the names of these three men.

¹⁵⁶ MH 47/89/57: William Bacchus, 1 June 1916 and 8 August [sic – September] 1916. Working-class customers bought coal in small quantities. See for example MH 47/83/57: William Dewberry, 13 June 1916. Dewberry claimed that he supplied his customers with loads of '14lbs and upwards'. For an indication of the number of working-class people who could be served per tonnage see MH 47/101/60: James Wayne, 5 July 1917. Wayne was a Hounslow coal merchant's carman, who was supplying '300 customers (mostly poor people who can only obtain their coal in small quantities, weekly) disposing of between 25 and 30 tons ... weekly'.

¹⁵⁷ Customers who consumed two hundredweight (cwt) or less (224 pounds or 1.02 kilograms) a week were given priority access to London's coal stocks. Retail coal traders were required either to register as coal merchants (for amounts over 2cwt) or to take out licenses as coal dealers (for amounts under 2cwt). The trade became a closed one and customers registered with a coal merchant/dealer in order to be supplied. See Redmayne, *Coal-Mining Industry*, pp. 116-9; Triebel, 'Coal and the Metropolis', pp. 359-60; *Defence of the Realm Manual, 7th Edition*, pp. 308-9.

the winter months, certain men employed in the trade'.¹⁵⁸ Benjamin Hawkes lost his appeal tribunal exemption in June 1917.¹⁵⁹ He was a coal dealer with '3 Horses and Vans I deal in half cuts and 1 cuts', serving working-class customers.¹⁶⁰ His exemption was successfully challenged by Glass in June 1917 but, like Bacchus, Cutting and Hurrell, Hawkes was never called up for military service.¹⁶¹

The Local Government Board explained to the tribunals that 'in some districts of London a very material proportion ... [of coal dealers] serve a useful function, especially in supplying coal to working class customers from trolleys'.¹⁶² The tribunals were advised that although 'it is impossible to give general protection to men of this description, as many of them may not be engaged in the coal trade for the whole of their time', the appellants 'might reasonably receive exemption until the end of February or the middle of March [1918]'.¹⁶³ Frederick Hurrell not only delivered coal, he also did laundry deliveries and some munitions work.¹⁶⁴ Although his appeal was dismissed on 28 February 1917, it is plausible that the main reason he never served in the armed forces was that he delivered coal to working-class people.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁸ MH 47/142/5/2: LGB Circular R.166 – London Coal Trade, 5 December 1917.

¹⁵⁹ MH 47/39/47: Benjamin Hawkes, 20 June 1917.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6 June 1916. A full coal sack weighed 112 pounds or 1cwt (eight stone or 50.1 kilograms). It is assumed that a 'cut' means a 'cwt'.

¹⁶¹ MH 47/39/47: Benjamin Hawkes, 20 June 1916. See 1918 Electoral Register.

¹⁶² MH 47/142/5/2: LGB Circular R.166 – London Coal Trade, 5 December 1917.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ MH 47/92/9: Frederick Hurrell, 20 March 1916 and 23 June 1916.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 28 February 1917.

Coal dealers, men who took up munitions work and men who were unfit for any kind of active military service were the only appellants among the forty-four self-employed retail proprietors who remained exempt from military service.¹⁶⁶ Men whose main – or only – argument for exemption was that they were running a one-man business did not remain exempt, irrespective of the commodity that they dealt in. This was despite the fact that tribunals were advised by the Local Government Board in June 1916 that ‘with a view to securing uniformity of decision and practice’, exemption clause D would in future specify that due consideration should be given to cases in which the man was ‘the sole proprietor of a business upon which the support of his family exclusively or mainly depends’.¹⁶⁷ Significantly, however, tribunals were asked by the Local Government Board to determine whether ‘if the man is called to the Colours the hardship to him or his dependents – after due regard is paid to the allowances and other assistance which may be available – is so serious that exemption, conditional or temporary, will alone meet the justice of the case’.¹⁶⁸ Given the availability of financial support such as the separation allowance, men who earned only a modest income from their businesses were thus generally deemed by the tribunals to be no worse off financially if they served in the armed forces.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ With the exception of MH 47/31/46: Albert Cuff previously mentioned.

¹⁶⁷ MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.85 – Regulations for Tribunals under the Military Service Acts, 1916, 1 June 1916, p. 6. See Appendix One for exemption clause D. See also McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 136-7.

¹⁶⁸ MH 47/142/4/2: LGB Circular R.84, 1 June 1916, p. 5. Army allowances and financial support through the Civil Liabilities Committee are discussed in detail in chapter two.

¹⁶⁹ MH 47/89/57: William Bacchus, 11 September 1916.

At the same time, as in the cases of the taxi-cab owner-drivers considered in chapter two, men who were perceived as providing their families with a living above that of mere subsistence were generally not successful in remaining exempt from military service either.¹⁷⁰ James McDermott argues that, by early 1917, public opinion 'was not receptive to any assumption that men who already enjoyed a higher-than-median standard of living should expect preferential treatment'.¹⁷¹ In February 1917 Henry Edwards claimed that 'the Army Allowance will not cover expenses for my 3 children, which are away at Boarding school, owing to their health failing if they live at home'.¹⁷² His appeal was dismissed with the stipulation that he was not to be called up for three weeks.¹⁷³

Five months before Edwards' case was heard by the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal the Central Tribunal had published guidance to other tribunals regarding sole proprietors of businesses, admitting that 'these cases present great difficulty and each case

¹⁷⁰ MH 47/91/20: Alfred Milton, 15 May 1916; MH 47/80/70: Arthur Puddle, 18 May 1916.

¹⁷¹ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 133.

¹⁷² MH 47/92/10: Henry Edwards, 13 February 1917.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 28 February 1917. Provision was also made by the Local Government Board in the June 1916 circular for tribunals to delay a decision regarding self-employed men: MH 47/142/4/2: LGB Circular R.84, 1 June 1916, p. 5. Only four of the forty-four shop-keepers considered in this section had their application and appeal summarily dismissed: MH 47/74/66: Walter Bacchus and MH 47/74/47: William Libberton did not attend their own appeals. MH 47/14/56: James Lee and MH 47/77/59: Thomas Buffrey had applications and appeals summarily dismissed by both tribunals. It is apparent that both the Acton tribunal and the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal took full advantage of the opportunity to delay a decision in cases that were difficult to resolve.

must be decided on the individual circumstances'.¹⁷⁴ Despite such sympathy, the Central Tribunal had decreed that sole proprietors should not be granted exemption on the ground that a one-man enterprise would have to close down in the appellant's absence. This guidance was published in the same Local Government Board circular that announced the Central Tribunal ruling that taxi-cab owner-drivers could not expect to remain exempt from military service simply because they were buying their vehicle on a hire-purchase agreement.¹⁷⁵ In order to remain exempt from military service a sole proprietor of any business was required to demonstrate to the tribunals additional evidence of serious hardship. A reduction of income was not sufficient justification for exemption as a 'very large number of persons who are not proprietors of businesses have had to suffer considerable reduction of income'.¹⁷⁶

If it was proved by the appellant that a one-man business would have to be closed, the Central Tribunal advised that consideration should also be taken of the likelihood of the business being revived after the war. These considerations included 'the amount of capital involved, the age and domestic position of the applicant, and the period during which the business has been established'.¹⁷⁷ Alfred Milton and Frank Taylor had both been in business for less than five years and although they claimed to have invested their capital and life savings they were called up.¹⁷⁸ James Yolland

¹⁷⁴ MH 47/142/4/3: LGB Circular R.100 – Notes of Further Cases, Decided by the Central Tribunal, Circulated for the Information of the Tribunals, Case No. 61 – 'Sole Proprietors of Businesses', 20 September 1916, p. 2.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., Case No. 60 – 'Taxi-Cab Owner-Drivers', p. 1.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., Case No. 61 – 'Sole Proprietors of Businesses', p. 2.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ MH 47/91/20: Alfred Milton, 8 February 1917; MH 47/14/58: Frank Taylor, 24 July 1916.

claimed that his 'capital is sunk in the business, which I hold on a long repairing lease'.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, he remained exempt only by taking up munitions work when his temporary exemption expired in June 1917.¹⁸⁰

The Central Tribunal directive of September 1916 had also urged 'the desirability of more local effort to secure co-operation between traders'.¹⁸¹ Brothers who worked in the same trade but not on the same premises were considered by the tribunals in much the same way as the branch managers of a retail chain, thus assuming a level of family co-operation that appellants sometimes sought to dispute.¹⁸² Alfred and Lionel Mudge were corn merchants who ran three separate enterprises. Lionel claimed that 'there is no formal partnership between us, but we do in fact share equally the profits of all three establishments. The management however is entirely separate and it is impossible for either of us to lend assistance to the other'.¹⁸³ The tribunal was not convinced that these were truly 'one-man' businesses. The brothers

¹⁷⁹ MH 47/60/27: James Yolland, n.d., circa 22 January 1917.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 5 June 1917.

¹⁸¹ MH 47/142/4/3: LGB Circular R.100, 20 September 1916, p. 2. Also McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 139-40.

¹⁸² Some brothers were involved in open family disputes and refused to co-operate with each other. See MH 47/86/97: Arnold Wiggins and MH 47/119/42: Claude Wiggins. The two brothers had appeared before the Acton tribunal with their mother on 16 November 1916. See MH 47/119/42: Claude Wiggins, 1 January 1917. The acrimonious 'lengthy hearing' was mentioned in the local newspaper. See *Gazette*, 29 December 1916. Arnold was called up on 20 November 1916 and Claude on 12 February 1917. For further evidence of disputes between rival traders see McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 143-4.

¹⁸³ MH 47/13/19: Lionel Mudge, 27 June 1916.

appeared together before the Acton tribunal on 22 June 1916: Alfred (who ran two of the three shops) was granted conditional exemption and Lionel was called up.¹⁸⁴

In mid-1917, the Local Government Board consulted with local authorities on the ways in which co-operation schemes for one-man businesses could be managed, with a view to implementing a nationwide system.¹⁸⁵ Legislation passed in 1917 and 1918 reminded tribunals of the need to secure co-operation between traders.¹⁸⁶ However, such incentives and advice were too late for many of the men in this chapter, most of whom had been refused further exemption by early 1917. Despite the importance to civilian consumers of the commodities they sold and the sympathy extended to 'one-man' businesses, most independent shopkeepers were swallowed up by the nation's need for munitions and military manpower.

Conclusion

The Ministry of Food did not exert the same level of central control over the nation's food supplies as the Ministry of Munitions did over the country's production of war

¹⁸⁴ MH 47/35/6: Alfred Mudge; MH 47/13/19: Lionel Mudge – both 22 June 1916.

¹⁸⁵ RG 28 – Subseries within RG 28 – Military Service Tribunals: RG 28/21: Co-Operation Schemes for One-Man Businesses. Also McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 144-52, for nationwide (mostly failed) attempts to formulate co-operation schemes amongst local traders and Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals*, p.110, for discrepancies of outcome in cases of local businesses across several local tribunals in East Yorkshire.

¹⁸⁶ See MH 47/142/5/1: LGB Circular R.124 – Paragraph 5, Sole Proprietors of Small Businesses, 1 March 1917, p. 2; MH 47/142/5/2: LGB Circular R.167 – One-Man Businesses, Cases of Hardship, Co-operation, 17 December 1917; MH 47/142/6: LGB Circular R. 217 – Co-Operation in Transport, 11 July 1918; MH 47/142/6: LGB Circular R.237 – Maintenance of the Businesses of Men with the Forces, 10 October 1918.

materiel. This was arguably because Britain did not suffer life-threatening domestic food shortages during the war. Indeed, only fourteen of the eighty appeals for exemption in this chapter claimed that the man was providing an essential retail food service. Although there were significant problems with coal supplies, particularly in working-class areas of London during the harsh winter of 1916/17, central government left local authorities to resolve many of their communities' food and fuel problems. Much of the burden of organising the manpower related to such supplies was left to the military service tribunals. On the whole, the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal did not view food and fuel retail workers to be indispensable to civilian manpower needs and only twenty-two of the eighty Acton men considered in this chapter received exemptions that lasted for the duration of the war.

Despite the difficulties faced by the country with regard to food supplies, men who were employed in retail food businesses were unlikely to remain exempt from military service. The extent to which these men were really indispensable, either to the nation or to the business, came under renewed scrutiny as the list of certified occupations was revised. Proprietors of retail outlets were expected to make sacrifices with regard to releasing their male staff for military service. Shop owners who were eager to demonstrate a patriotic compliance to such demands generally only claimed exemption for their managers. Increasingly large numbers of women were employed in retail work from the end of 1915, including businesses that had operated exclusively with men before the war. Arguments that women did not have the skills and, in some cases, strength required to undertake retail work were not successful, the tribunals putting forward a counterview of women as able and competent, challenging the association of shop-work with masculinity. Male shop assistants were not considered by the authorities to be irreplaceable civilian workers

and, with no support from their employers, they were left with few options but to join the armed forces.

The managers of some retail outlets were retained on the home front if their position was included in the list of certified occupations. Grocery managers, for example, were deemed by the authorities to be essential civilian workers at the beginning of the conscription process. However, the situation on the fighting fronts meant that the definition of a certified occupation was altered as a reflection of changing military manpower imperatives. Age limits were introduced and/or occupations were removed from the list. Many men who had perhaps assumed that they would remain exempt in their civilian occupations were called up to replace military casualties. Proprietors and managers who were above military age were increasingly expected to take on the responsibilities of any branch manager who was eligible for military service.

At the same time, men who were in positions of responsibility and authority over the workforce of large retail food enterprises were retained in their civilian occupations. The Maypole Dairy, for example, supplied food to working-class customers and was considered by the authorities to be of sufficient importance to the retail food infrastructure to warrant the exemption of one of its senior managers. However, this decision was made by the local recruiting officer rather than the military service tribunals. Recruiting personnel were an integral part of the conscription process and some manpower decisions bypassed the tribunals altogether. In addition, a number of men were never actually called up by recruiting officers, despite losing their tribunal appeals: civilian manpower issues, such as the distribution of coal, could on occasion override military manpower pressures.

Evidence suggests that there was considerable support and sympathy for one-man businesses from the authorities and other interested parties. Indeed, the second Military Service Act included the stipulation that special consideration should be shown by the tribunals towards such men. However, as the military imperatives of the war continued to escalate, appellants were increasingly unlikely to remain exempt on the argument that they should stay at home and protect their own interests. Proprietors of one-man businesses were sometimes successful in remaining on the home front if they demonstrated a willingness to undertake munitions work, thus indicating its greater perceived importance than food and fuel distribution. Some of these men were able to keep their shops open with the help of family and friends, overseeing the enterprise in their spare time. However, most self-employed independent shopkeepers were only given temporary exemptions by the tribunals in order to make arrangements for the management or closure of their businesses – and they were then called up for military service.

As in the cases of taxi-cab owner-drivers, financial assistance was provided by the government to alleviate short-term domestic hardship. As calls for 'equality of sacrifice' became entrenched in wartime culture, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that men whose main argument was that military service would impact their families' standard of living, were not granted exemption from military service. Tribunals were advised to take into consideration the likelihood of the one-man business being revived after the war, including the establishment's age and the amount of capital invested. However, as the military manpower needs became increasingly urgent, the nation's small shopkeepers were called up for service in the armed forces. There was a recognition that traders such as coal merchants provided a key home front resource and that their call up would lead to hardship, both to themselves and the

local community. In mid-1917 central government thus began to investigate schemes by which small businesses could be co-ordinated in order to protect local infrastructures and safeguard the livelihoods of independent shopkeepers. However, this attempt came too late for many of the men considered in this chapter, most of whom had already been called up as military needs escalated in the months following the Battle of the Somme.

Chapter Five – White-Collar Workers and Conscientious Objectors

Introduction

This chapter examines the conscription appeals of fifty-five men. These appellants worked in offices as clerks, accountants, registrars, managers and civil servants; some were employed on the Stock Exchange or as insurance agents. This chapter also discusses the appeals of Acton's conscientious objectors, the majority of whom were employed in non-manual trades: white-collar work. Of the fifty-five men, only nine remained exempt from military service (nineteen per cent).

In 1976 Gregory Anderson noted that white-collar workers (specifically Victorian clerks) had received more academic attention from sociologists than they had from historians.¹ Peter Bailey argued in 1999 that the lack of historical study of white-collar workers was because they were 'a fundamentally unheroic group'.² In fact, financial and commercial clerks constituted a significant proportion of the recruits who voluntarily enlisted at the beginning of the First World War.³ Before the

¹ Gregory Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), p. 3. For a useful literature review of clerical work see Michael Heller, 'London Clerical Workers 1880-1914: The Search for Stability' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2003), pp. 6-15. Sociological studies include, for example: Michel Crozier, *The World of the Office Worker* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971); David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958); Charles Wright Mills, *White-Collar: The American Middle-Classes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

² Peter Bailey, 'White Collars, Grey Lives? The Lower-Middle-Class Revisited', in *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1999), p. 276. Also Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), *The Lower Middle Class in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).

³ Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003 [1985]), pp. 25 and 36; Jonathan Wild, 'A Merciful and Heaven-Sent

introduction of military conscription roughly twice as many self-employed professionals and white-collar workers enlisted compared to manual workers – and a significant number of men working in banking and commerce continued to join the colours in 1916.⁴ Jay Winter argues that ‘in no other occupational group did such a large proportion of men go off to war’.⁵

Twenty per cent of the overall British working population in 1911 were non-manual workers and 887,000 of those non-manual workers were clerks.⁶ Clerical workers were comparatively young: Anderson estimated that, in 1911, seventy-two per cent of male clerks aged between fifteen and sixty-five were under the age of thirty-five.⁷ The white-collar workers under consideration in this chapter include the largest percentage of unmarried men in any of the occupational groups in this thesis: sixty per cent were single, although not all were especially young. Many of them had their appeals dismissed as a direct result of their marital status. At the same time, the chapter will show that married white-collar workers were equally hard-pressed to justify their continued presence on the home front.

In December 1915 the Clerical and Commercial Employments Committee, established by the National Register (Lansdowne) Committee, reported that ‘unless some measures are immediately taken to deal with the question of the retention of

Release? The Clerk and the First World War in British Literary Culture’, in *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2007), p. 75.

⁴ Winter, *British People*, p. 33.

⁵ Ibid., p. 37. Also Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War – British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 81 and 116.

⁶ Arthur J. McIvor, *A History of Work in Britain, 1880-1950* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 33 and 40.

⁷ Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*, p. 52.

the indispensable expert clerical staff – which cannot be replaced – there must result grave danger to the maintenance of the machinery of finance and commerce, which in the national interests should not be jeopardised’.⁸ However, resulting legislation regarding office work was rather vague; it was offered more as recommendations than hard-and-fast rules. It was accepted that some clerks were indispensable – especially those in industrial establishments – due to their ‘technical knowledge, their intimate acquaintance with their employer’s business or the managerial and directing character of their work’ but ‘it is impossible to separate these men by classification from other clerks who can be replaced, as the distinction depends upon the circumstances of the individual case rather than upon the description of the occupation’.⁹ This advice, placed at the back of the ‘List of Certified Occupations’

⁸ The National Archives, Kew [hereafter TNA]: RG – Records of the General Register Office, Government Social Survey Department, and Office of Population Censuses and Surveys: RG 28 – General Register Office, National Registration, Correspondence and Papers [hereafter RG 28]: RG 28/9 – Subseries within RG 28 – National Register (Lansdowne) Committee, 1915-1916 [hereafter RG 28/9]: Second Report of the Clerical and Commercial Employments Committee, n.d. circa 15 December 1915, p. 1. For Lord Lansdowne and the National Register of 1915 see Samuel Hurwitz, *State Intervention in Great Britain – A Study of Economic Control and Social Response, 1914-1919* (London: Routledge, 2013 [1949]), pp. 102-3.

⁹ TNA: MH – Records Created or Inherited by the Ministry of Health and Successors, Local Government Boards and Related Bodies: MH 47 – Central Military Service Tribunal and Middlesex Appeal Tribunal, Minutes and Papers: MH 47/142 – Blank Forms, Circulars, Pamphlets Issued by the Local Government Board and Other Government Departments, With Printed Acts, Proclamations, Booklets, etc. [hereafter MH 47/142]: MH 47/142/1: Group and Class Systems, Notes on Administration, Appendix No. 6, Official List of Certified Occupations, 10 February 1916, p. 102. Also MH 47/142/4/1: Local Government Board [hereafter LGB] Circular R.70, paragraph 7, 23 March 1916, p. 2.

from February 1916, remained unchanged throughout the war, even when it was extended to include clerks in non-industrial establishments in April 1916.¹⁰ The military service tribunals were thus left to judge each case on its own merits and it is these judgements that are the focus of this chapter.

The first section begins by discussing twenty-one appeals by white-collar workers who claimed that their masculine expertise and skills were essential to the important work they were engaged in and/or that they were suffering serious financial, business or domestic problems at the time of the appeal. This section considers the issue of the replacement of male clerical workers by females, and the claims made in applications and appeals that the work was of a technical nature and women were not able to comprehend the complexities involved. It also analyses the claims put forward on the basis of domestic responsibilities, particularly those made by the sole remaining sons of widowed mothers, and assesses the extent to which these met with a favourable response.

The second section examines eleven appeals by men who claimed to be undertaking work of national importance. All these appeals also made reference to the health of the appellant and/or his dependents and this section assesses the part played by physical fitness in appeals – and the outcomes with regard to exemption from military service. It considers the interplay between health and work, paying especial attention to the 1916 government recommendation that ‘the directing head of every considerable business of real importance should be given exemption from

¹⁰ MH 47/142/4/1: LGB Circular R.40, List of Certified Occupations, February 1916, p. 6. For the extension see MH 47/142/4/1: LGB Circular R.74, List of Certified Occupations, 4 April 1916, p. 6.

military service'.¹¹ It considers whether such guidance was applied even-handedly or whether some of the influential white-collar workers in this chapter were given preferential treatment – over men with less influence in the local community – with regard to their appeals.

The chapter's final section focuses on appeals made on the basis of a conscientious objection to war. As David Littlewood explains, conscientious objectors represent a tiny fraction of exemption claims brought before any British military service tribunal.¹² Study of the MH 47 archive has revealed twenty-three conscientious objectors from Acton who took their cases to the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal. As at least twelve of these men were white-collar workers or men with a higher degree of education, this group are discussed together in the third section of this chapter. This section explores the many and varied claims put forward by Acton's conscientious objectors with regard to their anti-war stance and considers the part played by peer group, social position and level of education in claiming a moral, religious or political objection to war. This section points to the initial novelty of the concept of conscientious objection to military service and concludes by looking both at the ways in which language and actions of dissent were developed as the war progressed and how the authorities responded to them.

¹¹ See for example MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.105, List of Certified Occupations, 20 November 1916, p. 21.

¹² David Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards in the Great War – Determining the Fate of Britain's and New Zealand's Conscripts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 65-6.

Claims of Domestic/Financial Hardship

This section discusses the appeals for exemption of twenty-one white collar workers. Eleven of these appeals included the claim that the man was doing work of national importance.¹³ However, the main thrust of the argument put forward by these men centred on the masculine skills they brought to their work and/or their domestic responsibilities as family breadwinners.

Figure 5.1 shows the diversity of the types of clerical work in which these men were engaged: including finance, munitions, transport and housing. None of these claims were successful.

¹³ Sometimes the essential work being claimed was not actually the appellant's paid occupation. For two examples see TNA: MH – Records Created or Inherited by the Ministry of Health and Successors, Local Government Boards and Related Bodies: MH 47 – Central Military Service Tribunal and Middlesex Appeal Tribunal - Minutes and Papers [hereafter MH 47]: MH 47/74/28: Arthur Browning, and his brother MH 47/74/29: Thomas Browning. Both men claimed ground A in their argument that they were officers of the London Diocesan Church Lads Brigade. Arthur was conscripted on 16 May 1916. Thomas was the unit's Cadet Major and his rank may have ensured his continued exemption. He did not lose his exemption certificate until May 1917 and his name is included in the 1918 Electoral Register as being resident in Acton in April 1918. See London Metropolitan Archives, London, England, Electoral Registers [hereafter 1918 Electoral Register]. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 22 June 2020]. This register is discussed in chapter four. See also Appendix Three for other men whose names appear on this register.

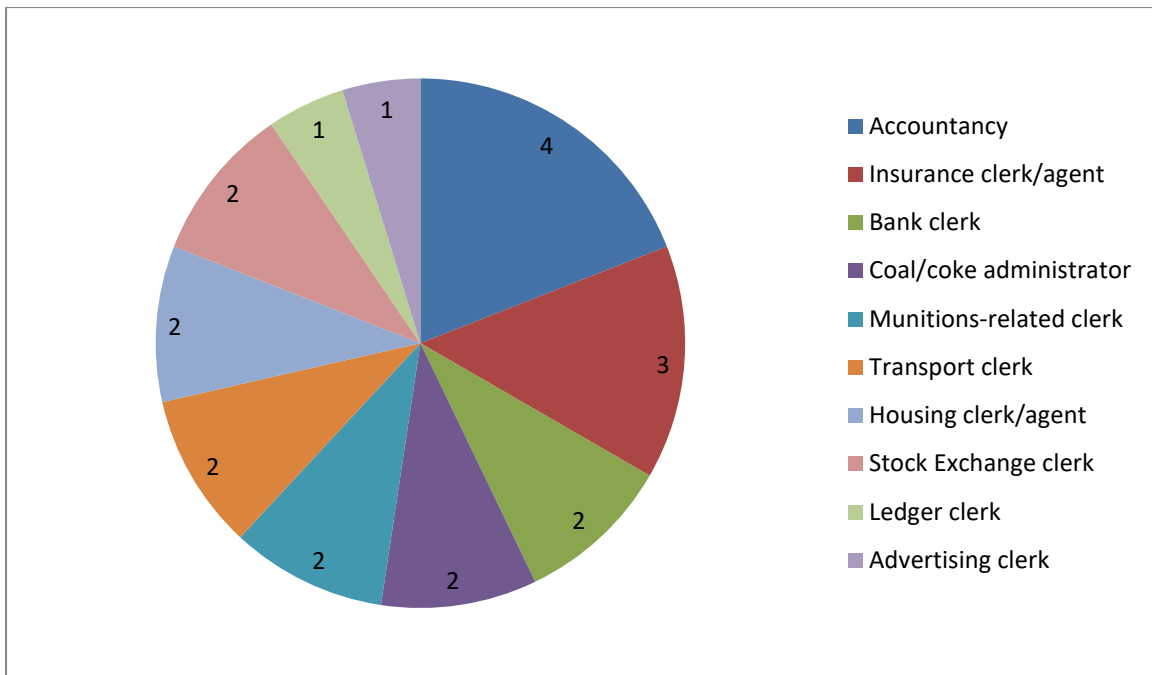


Figure 5.6 – Diversity of Clerical Work. Source – MH 47 Archive.

Appeals from employers who argued that their clerks were irreplaceable due to their knowledge and experience were unsuccessful if the firm employed a large number of men. This was the case even if the work being done by the company was connected to the munitions trade. Alfred Palmer and Harold Starkey were clerks for an Acton coal and coke contractor: Walter Moore and Sons. Moore claimed that the company supplied coal to gas companies who were, in turn, 'engaged in the production of toluol for high explosives'.¹⁴ They explained that they had lost about twenty-five per cent of their men but John Kent – the Acton military representative – observed that the company 'have had several sons of members of the firm and several other members of their staff exempted from Military Service by making application to

¹⁴ MH 47/12/39: Alfred Palmer, 17 February 1916.

different Tribunals'.¹⁵ Both Palmer and Starkey had their appeals dismissed in the first half of 1916.¹⁶

Moore argued that the woman they had hired to be trained as Palmer's replacement had left 'as she did not like the work' and 'time was thus lost'.¹⁷ The company were presumably following a 1916 government directive ordering that 'no man who is eligible for military service should be retained in any employment if his place can be temporarily filled by a woman'.¹⁸ The government explained that an employer's reluctance to engage female clerks was not to be accepted by the military service tribunals.

The early twentieth century had seen a new influx of women into white-collar work: at the outbreak of war eighteen per cent of commercial and clerical workers were female.¹⁹ However, women were for the most part confined to lower grade, routine

¹⁵ Ibid., 6 June 1916.

¹⁶ Ibid., 19 June 1916; MH 47/8/73: Harold Starkey's appeal was dismissed on 22 March 1916. Also MH 47/29/47: Henry Moore, 6 February 1917. Moore was one of the sons of the firm and his appeal was dismissed.

¹⁷ MH 47/12/39: Alfred Palmer, 12 June 1916

¹⁸ MH 47/142/1: *Women's War Work in Maintaining the Industries and Export Trade of the United Kingdom – Information Officially Compiled for the use of Recruiting Officers, Military Representatives and Tribunals* (London: HMSO, 1916), p. 6. See also RG 28/15 – Subseries within RG 28 – Maintenance of the National Register [hereafter RG 28/15]: 'Memorandum: Employment of Women Clerks', 4 October 1916.

¹⁹ Mclvor, *History of Work in Britain*, p. 189. For the employment of women in clerical and commercial roles see Jerry White, *Zeppelin Nights - London in the First World War* (London: Bodley Head, 2014), p. 110; Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War 1* (London: Tauris, 2000 [1998]), p. 34; Arthur Marwick, *Women at War, 1914-1918* (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 48 and 74. It was

posts and there continued to be a considerable resistance to what was perceived as the entrance of unskilled cheap female labour in clerical work.²⁰ Exemption applications thus sought to play on existing notions of female incompetence and supposed inability to deal with complex clerical tasks. Charles Chouler was the sole clerk employed by an Acton scrap metal merchant. His employer explained that 'the business requires considerable technical knowledge of metals and it would be impossible for my Manager's post to be filled by a woman'.²¹ Ernest Nichols worked for West London Estates, Limited. His employer pleaded that 'the company are the owners of 103 homes and there are 215 tenants. The properties are situated in working class districts and require great tact in management'.²² They added that 'a woman could not perform the work'.²³ Although it is not known whether either firm ever employed a female clerk, their emphasis on women's supposed shortcomings did not sway the tribunals and neither were successful in the argument that their men were irreplaceable.²⁴

arguably only in clerical work that working-class women retained their First World War employment to a significant extent after the war. See McIvor, *History of Work in Britain*, pp. 186-7.

²⁰ See Janet McCalman, 'The Impact of the First World War on Female Employment in England', in *Labour History*, vol. 21 (1971), p. 40. Also Penny Summerfield, 'Women and War in the Twentieth Century', in June Purvis (ed.), *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1995]), p. 319-22.

²¹ MH 47/75/82: Charles Chouler, 4 April 1916.

²² MH 47/14/60: Ernest Nichols, 4 June 1916.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See also MH 47/86/60: Joseph Mason, 22 February 1916. Mason's employer claimed that a 'female substitute will be useless owing to long experience necessary'. He remained exempt until December 1916.

Legislation concerning office workers was modified as the civilian manpower crisis worsened and in November 1916 the 'Recommendations' section of the List of Certified Occupations was altered to include 'Professional Accountants' for the first time: 'many of these are engaged in work of great national importance in connection with taxation and the like, and should therefore receive special consideration from Local Tribunals'.²⁵ The balancing of civilian and military manpower needs, however, was left to the discretion of the military service tribunals and the appeals of three Acton accountants were turned down. John Coad was the book-keeper for a Dutch diamond broker, a firm that, amongst other things, imported rough diamonds for use in munitions. Coad was granted exemption in October 1916, conditional upon him joining the Volunteer Training Corps.²⁶ This exemption was successfully challenged by Kent in March 1917, who argued that the army was in great need of clerical workers.²⁷ Sydney Basker was the registrar of a company managing three New Zealand gold mines: an industry which, he claimed, 'the Government has described

²⁵ MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.105, List of Certified Occupations, 20 November 1916, p. 21.

²⁶ MH 47/36/74: John Coad, 12 October 1916.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2 March 1917. Coad served in the Army Pay Corps from 21 July 1917. See TNA: WO – Records created or inherited by the War Office, Armed Forces, Judge Advocate General, and related bodies: Soldiers' Documents from Pension Claims, First World War: John Coad. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 9 January 2018]. See Appendix Three.

as second only in importance to that of producing Munitions'.²⁸ Basker was a single man of twenty-eight and his appeal was dismissed on 27 March 1916.²⁹

The importance of clerks to Britain's financial infrastructure was reflected in legislation that was passed in the final months of the war. The Military Service (Withdrawal of Exemptions) Order (No. 1), 1918 came into effect on 9 April 1918 as a direct result of the Spring Offensive, launched by the German army on the Western Front on 21 March of that year. This Order led to the withdrawal of many exemptions. Part IV, however, made provision for the continued exemption of clerks who had been born in or before 1883, who were below medical grade '1' and who were engaged in industrial, banking, insurance, export and other specified commercial occupations.³⁰ Frank Pidduck was an insurance clerk, graded 'C1' and born in 1882, who narrowly missed his chance to remain exempt under these new laws.³¹ Pidduck worked 'on the Chief Office Staff' for Pearl Assurance Company Limited, who had successfully retained his services, through repeated applications to the High Holborn tribunal, until early 1918. He was then obliged to apply for exemption on personal grounds through the Acton tribunal.³² His unsuccessful

²⁸ MH 47/9/21: Sydney Basker, 14 February 1916.

²⁹ See also MH 47/24/26: Robert Newman, 30 October 1916. Newman was a self-employed accountant with a wife and three children but, despite his family responsibilities, he lost his appeal.

³⁰ MH 47/142/6/1: M[inistry of] N[ational] S[ervice] Form R.49, Order Under the Military Service Act, 1918, Section 2, p. 6.

³¹ From 17 November 1917 men who had previously been graded 'C1' would have been re-graded as '2' or '3' and therefore below grade '1'. See Alison Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies – The Replacement of British Infantry Casualties on the Western Front, 1916-1918* (Warwick: Helion, 2018), pp. 307-310.

³² MH 47/102/101: Frank Pidduck, 18 April 1918.

appeal included the complaint that 'if my claim had been entertained ... after the issue of the Withdrawal of Exemptions Order Number 1 of 1918 ... my case on the business grounds would have received different consideration'.³³

Ten white-collar workers based their appeals mainly on personal financial and domestic problems, emphasising their civilian masculine duty as provider and protector of dependants.³⁴ None of them remained exempt from military service and their position as the main breadwinner was considered by the authorities to be of secondary importance to the service they could contribute to the fighting forces.³⁵

Eight of these ten men were single. On 5 January 1916, during the House of Commons debate on the first Military Service Act, Prime Minister H. H. Asquith recognised that some unmarried men who would be affected by the new legislation had pressing domestic responsibilities: 'there is the case of the man, though a single man, who is really the support and stay of, it may be, father, mother, sisters, who are dependent upon him'.³⁶ Referring particularly to women who had husbands and sons already serving in the armed forces, Asquith added that 'where there is a single unmarried son left behind, it would, of course, be a monstrous thing if the State were to call for military service from a man in that position'.³⁷

³³ Ibid., 18 May 1918.

³⁴ See Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards*, pp. 66-7, for arguments based on the concept of the male provider.

³⁵ See Peter Dewey, 'Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force during the First World War', in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 27, no. 1 (1984), pp. 220-1.

³⁶ *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, vol. 77, column no. 949-1074, 5 January 1916. Available from <https://parliament.uk/historic-hansard/index.html> [Accessed 28 May 2018].

³⁷ Ibid.

James McDermott argues that the 'localist sentiment' of the Northampton tribunal ensured favourable outcomes in applications made by or on behalf of the sole remaining sons of large families that were deemed to have already made significant sacrifices to the war effort, judged on the basis of the number of men serving in the armed forces from within the domestic unit.³⁸ When the Northamptonshire Appeal Tribunal dismissed these cases, this generated 'resentment and a sense that they were not in tune with local feeling'.³⁹ The Acton tribunal and Middlesex Appeal Tribunal, on the other hand, appear to have been largely in agreement with regard to applying the letter of the law and the demand for single men to join the armed forces over-rode any argument that the eight unmarried Acton appellants could put forward about their masculine responsibilities towards their families: their initial applications and subsequent appeals were all dismissed.

A tone of indignation can be detected in the language used by two of these single men, presumably indicative of a feeling that their family responsibilities were being ignored despite official pronouncements. A stockbroker's clerk, Sydney Fairlie, claimed to have 'serious financial liabilities' that he would not be able to meet if he were called up.⁴⁰ He asked for 'a period of 5 to 6 months [which] will almost certainly free me from what would prove hopeless financial embarrassment', adding that he was the sole support of two unmarried sisters.⁴¹ His application was refused and he complained in his appeal that the Acton tribunal had not 'fully appreciated the difficulties of my position' and that, under the Military Service Act, 'those with

³⁸ James McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals, 1916-1918 – 'A Very Much Abused Body of Men'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 164-6.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 167.

⁴⁰ MH 47/12/73: Sydney Fairlie, 5 June 1916.

⁴¹ *Ibid*.

“exceptional financial obligations” are entitled to exemption’.⁴² The appeal was dismissed.⁴³ Joseph Peyton also worked on the London Stock Exchange. His employers successfully appealed for his exemption but this expired on 4 August 1916. Peyton had moved to Acton, presumably to be with his mother, and claimed to have ‘a mortgage of around £300 on the House which I am purchasing by monthly instalments’.⁴⁴ He applied to the Acton tribunal on the ground that he was the sole support of his widowed mother, who would not be able to meet the mortgage payments and ‘therefore it would mean the selling up of everything and for her to go to the workhouse’.⁴⁵ The Acton tribunal argued that Peyton had three brothers who could contribute to their mother’s support and the appeal was dismissed.⁴⁶

Peyton was one of eight single white-collar workers who claimed in their appeals that they were the sole remaining son of a widowed mother. James Longhurst was a twenty-one-year-old railway clerk and his widowed mother made a small living from laundry work. Young and unmarried white-collar workers like him were often hard-pressed to convince a tribunal that they were fulfilling an essential role as the male head of the family, even if they were the main breadwinner. In working-class families this was because the army pay and allowance were comparable with the modest wage that these young men were earning.⁴⁷ Longhurst argued that he supported both his mother and his three younger brothers and ‘I have done my best for them

⁴² Ibid., n.d., circa 20 June 1916.

⁴³ Ibid., 3 July 1916.

⁴⁴ MH 47/83/8: Joseph Peyton, n.d., circa 18 August 1916.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 19 October 1916.

⁴⁷ For details of army pay and separation allowance for soldiers’ dependants (including widowed mothers) see chapter two.

and my help will be greatly missed ... I do not consider it fair to be classed as a single man with no home ties'.⁴⁸ His employer stated that he could be released for military service and the Acton tribunal ruled that his family would be no worse off financially on an army allowance.⁴⁹

Employers' willingness to allow young and single white-collar workers from affluent backgrounds a portion of their salary while they were absent also counted against their exemption application. Henry Watson and Charles Oates were both bank clerks who had been promised such financial assistance and in both cases this was a significant factor in the dismissal of their appeals. Watson's father had recently died, his two brothers were serving in the armed forces and he argued that his widowed mother 'may break down under the strain if I also should leave her'.⁵⁰ Oates' appeal was dismissed because it was found that he was not the only sibling supporting his widowed mother: 'Applicant has 2 sisters earning 25/- and 50/- respectively. Man earning £165 per annum and expects something from his employers should he be called up'.⁵¹

In February 1916 new guidelines were issued by the Local Government Board, advising tribunals that 'the fact that there are daughters may be a material factor in the case. They may contribute to the maintenance of the mother or, if the mother is suffering from infirmity, there may be less hardship in depriving the mother of the

⁴⁸ MH 47/73/144: James Longhurst, 11 February 1916.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 12 February 1916.

⁵⁰ MH 47/72/142: Henry Watson, 21 February 1916.

⁵¹ MH 47/72/73: Charles Oates, 6 March 1916.

personal support of her son'.⁵² Two young and unmarried white-collar workers were both put back ten Derby groups on 4 February 1916, partly to allow their female siblings some time to find suitably well-paid work. In both cases the army pay and allowance were deemed by the tribunal to be comparable to the young man's income. In addition, rather than as the helpless dependants portrayed in applications, the tribunals viewed both mothers as able to earn a living themselves. Frederick Robbins argued that his sister's earnings were not sufficient to support the household.⁵³ Kent explained that Robbins' sister 'was now earning 16/- a week ... and his mother is in fairly good health'.⁵⁴ Sidney Lindon claimed to be supporting his widowed mother and his sister 'who as a milliner is not regularly employed', while his 'mother has no other means of support'.⁵⁵ Kent observed that Lindon's mother was only forty-eight and 'I understand that milliners who have remained in the trade can now earn good money'.⁵⁶

Another consideration addressed by the Local Government Board in February 1916 was that of the age and health of the widowed mother, who could 'suffer from some grave infirmity and even though her financial position might not be rendered materially worse, if the son is the only child left at home and the comfort of the mother depends to an exceptional degree on him, it might constitute "serious

⁵² MH 47/142/2: LGB Circular R.55, 11 and 23 February 1916. This Circular detailed the Central Tribunal ruling 'with regard to applications for exemption in the cases of sons of widows'. See Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards*, p. 108 for evidence that an 'active sister' at home could result in the dismissal of an application for exemption from military service.

⁵³ MH 47/72/77: Frederick Robbins, 8 March 1916.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 11 March 1916.

⁵⁵ MH 47/72/78: Sidney Lindon, 23 February 1916.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11 March 1916.

hardship” to deprive her of him.⁵⁷ These guidelines applied to Leslie Battrum, a forty-year-old unmarried white-collar worker, but he did not remain exempt beyond March 1917. His seventy-year-old mother sent a sworn declaration to the Acton tribunal, pleading that she was ‘alone in the world’.⁵⁸ Georgina Battrum explained that she had been widowed in 1893, invalided in an accident in 1902 and had entirely depended upon her only child, Leslie, from that day forward. The Acton tribunal granted absolute exemption and this certificate was not challenged until early 1917 when Kent declared that ‘all men are now urgently needed for the army’.⁵⁹

Claiming exemption as the sole son of a widowed mother was not confined to single men. Married men with this filial responsibility seem to have been more successful than unmarried men in delaying their conscription, probably because they had greater family commitments. Ernest Edwards’ wife was pregnant and he asked for time for his spouse to deliver her baby and recover her strength. He had recently become a National Health insurance agent and he twice persuaded the Acton tribunal that, given enough time to recuperate, his wife would be able to collect the insurance premiums on his behalf and assume responsibility for the family’s financial welfare while he was away.⁶⁰ Edwards’ claim to be the sole child of a widowed and ‘delicate’ mother formed a significant part of the appeal that enabled him to remain exempt until late October 1916.⁶¹

⁵⁷ MH 47/142/4/1: LGB Circular R.55.

⁵⁸ MH 47/35/7: Leslie Battrum, 8 March 1916.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 February 1917. Also MH 47/86/60: Joseph Mason claimed to be supporting his widowed mother but was called up in December 1916.

⁶⁰ MH 47/82/136: Ernest Edwards, 17 March 1916 and 8 June 1916.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 5 October 1916.

According to Adrian Gregory, one of the reasons middle-class men were reluctant to sign up for military service was the 'loss of caste' that their families would suffer in their absence – or as a result of their being wounded or killed in action.⁶² Unlike Ernest Edwards, mentioned above, men who provided their wives with a comfortably affluent middle-class home life, based around the ideal of the male breadwinner, found it difficult to proffer any solution to their domestic difficulties other than that they be allowed to remain in their civilian occupations. The Acton tribunal did not consider this to be a sufficiently convincing argument from Albert March who, like Edwards, had a pregnant wife. March was an advertising and estimating clerk for a Knightsbridge draper and silk merchant. He asked for enough time to provide his wife with the 'necessaries of life as she is accustomed to ... [and to] pay the many expenses entailed on these occasions'.⁶³ The Acton tribunal refused his application and he appealed through a solicitor, who further stated that March's wife suffered from varicose veins and was unable at the time to walk.⁶⁴ The Middlesex Appeal Tribunal granted exemption until the end of September, by which time it was claimed that Mrs March would have given birth.⁶⁵

Overall, the tribunals' task of balancing the scales of available manpower was a difficult one but, as this section has shown, in the cases of lower middle-class white-collar workers, it was relatively straightforward to assign them to the armed forces: in wartime, notions of male clerical expertise or of masculine domestic responsibilities seem to have lost some of their power. The next section turns to more successful

⁶² Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 92-5.

⁶³ MH 47/15/10: Albert March, 24 September 1916.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 3 July 1916.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 25 July 1916.

exemption applications and explores the factors that may have had an impact on the outcome, including wealth, local connections and power.

Health, Status and Power

This section examines eleven appeals that were connected in some way to health. All nine of the fifty-five white-collar workers who remained exempt from military service appear in this section. James McDermott's Northamptonshire study reveals that some tribunals behaved with a degree of deference to certain prominent appellants, indicating a willingness to make accommodations based on social or economic status.⁶⁶ This section assesses evidence of such practices in either applications or appeals in Acton, paying special attention to the complex role of health in influencing the outcome for appellants. Figure 5.2 shows the type of clerical work in which these men were engaged. The status of these white-collar workers varied considerably and this section examines the extent to which power and influence had an impact on the outcome of applications and appeals.

⁶⁶ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 5-6 and 176. Also Jon Lawrence, 'Labour and the Politics of Class', in David Feldman and Jon Lawrence (eds.), *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 237, for the argument that although 'class feeling was woven deep into the fabric of pre-1914 British society and culture' this class-bound structure 'began to crumble under the strains of war-time mass mobilisation'.

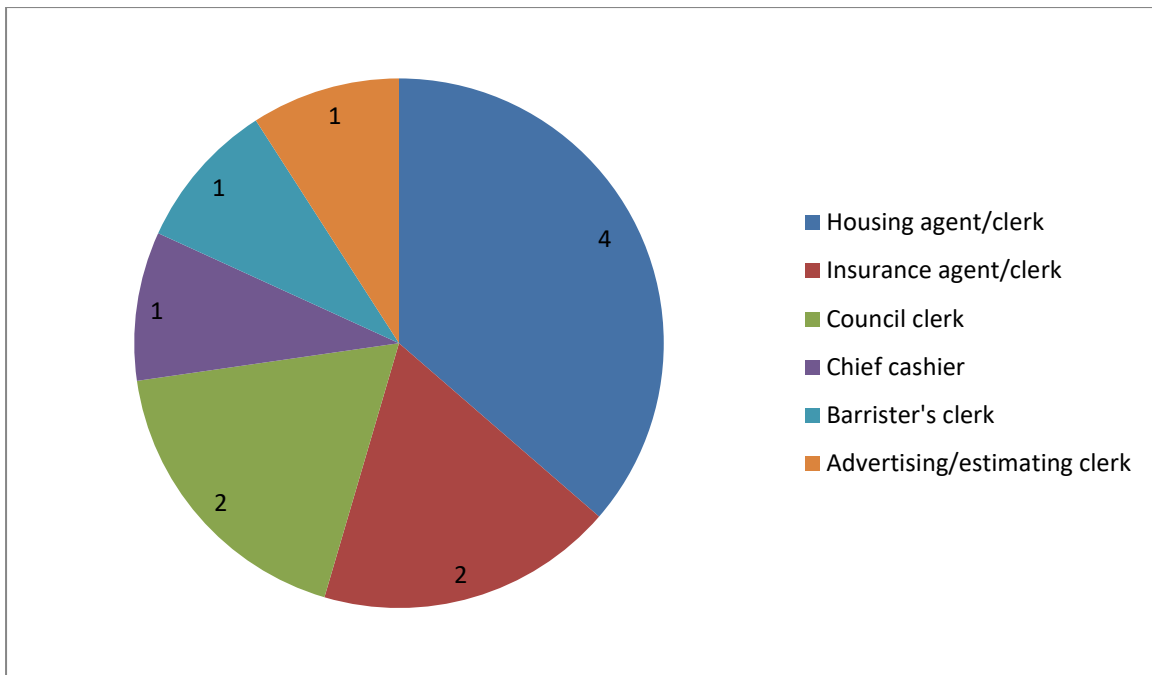


Figure 5.2 – Nature of Clerical Work. Source – MH 47 Archive.

Attested men could not apply for exemption on the grounds of ill-health.⁶⁷ This legislation was altered in June 1916 to allow such men to be examined by the Recruiting Medical Board and, if found to be passed for home, garrison or sedentary service and not likely to be called up for some considerable time, be permitted to defer or withdraw their applications or appeals 'without prejudice' to any future application.⁶⁸ Local Government Board Circular R.89 set out these new rules and was cited in some cases where an argument was put forward that the man made considerable fiscal and financial contributions to the country.

There is evidence that prominent local businessmen who did remain exempt from military service were probably assisted by influential contacts. William Davenport

⁶⁷ MH 47/142/1: Group and Class Systems, Notes on Administration, Appendix 4, Instructions to Tribunals as to Voluntarily Attested Men, February 1916, pp. 69-84.

⁶⁸ MH 47/142/4/2: LGB Circular R.89 – Instructions Relating to Voluntarily Attested Men, 7 June 1916.

was an estate agent who argued that if he were called up the country would gain a soldier but would lose the taxes that he paid and would be obliged to support his wife and children. His firm was involved in various deals to purchase land and abandoned premises for munitions purposes and he asked for his appeal to be heard in private as 'there are certain things I do not wish the public in general to have common knowledge of'.⁶⁹ When refused exemption by the Acton tribunal, Davenport 'took an opportunity of attending at the Hounslow Barracks, where I was thoroughly examined by the medical authorities there, and rejected by them'.⁷⁰ The appeal was 'withdrawn (rejected by M[edical] B[oard])' and the case notes end there.⁷¹ Seymour Price, an incorporated insurance broker, also asked that the 'containing information of a confidential nature should not be read to the public'.⁷² Price went into considerable detail about 'personal liabilities in respect of my house and life assurance premiums' and did not mention his health apart from to note wryly that if he were to be compensated 'under the Government Scheme, coupled with the Separation Allowance, I should be a somewhat expensive soldier for such inferior service as Garrison Duty at home'.⁷³ Price's appeal was 'withdrawn under R89' and his file terminates with no further information.⁷⁴ It can be assumed that neither Price nor

⁶⁹ MH 47/78/87: William Davenport, 3 June 1916.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 7 July 1916.

⁷¹ Ibid., 11 July 1916.

⁷² MH 47/78/5: Seymour Price, 24 May 1916.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 28 June 1916.

Davenport served in the armed forces as it seems unlikely that either would have neglected to make a further appeal for exemption had it been required.⁷⁵

In broad terms, the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act, of 5 April 1917, allowed for the re-examination of most men who had previously been rejected on health grounds.⁷⁶ There is no evidence that either Davenport or Price had their medical grading reviewed at this time and their exemptions remained unchallenged for the duration of the war. However, two of Acton's young and single white-collar workers were re-examined under this new legislation and both complained that their subsequent re-grading did not reflect their actual physical condition. Walter Muir was an advertising and estimating clerk who had been rejected 'under the Derby Scheme' in December 1915 and 'under the Pink Form Scheme' in September 1916.⁷⁷ He observed that 'the two previous examinations were very stiff ones ... It seems rather strange that I should be twice rejected on account of my heart and the final examination was told it was all right'.⁷⁸ Wallace Harris was a conveyancing clerk who had been rejected on medical grounds (he too suffered from heart disease) on three previous occasions but 'after a very cursory examination by one doctor only, who merely listened to my heart with his ear and did not even use a stethoscope ... I

⁷⁵ No military service records were found for either of these men. See Appendix Three.

⁷⁶ MH 47/142/2: Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act, 1917, 5 April 1917.

⁷⁷ MH 47/41/74: Walter Muir, n.d., circa 16 July 1917. The 'pink form' was issued to medically rejected men, advising that they might yet be re-examined before a cut-off date of 1 September 1916. After that time a further rejection would be considered to be final. See *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, vol. 92, column no. 636-715, 20 March 1917. Available from <https://parliament.uk/historic-hansard/index.html> [Accessed 18 July 2017].

⁷⁸ MH 47/41/74: Walter Muir, n.d., circa 16 July 1917.

was then for the first time classed as C3'.⁷⁹ Harris' employer argued that 'I should be permitted to retain the services of at least one efficient clerk' but his appeal was unsuccessful.⁸⁰ The Middlesex Appeal Tribunal did not consider either Muir or Wallace to be indispensable to their employer and, presumably also on account of their youth and unmarried status, dismissed their appeals.

Not all young and unmarried white-collar workers who had been rejected on medical grounds had their grading reconsidered under the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act. Neither were they conscripted into the armed forces. Indeed, the likelihood of either event happening appears to have been linked to the relative importance of the firm that employed the man. Exemption cases that came from within Acton's network of influential businessmen indicate a degree of bias in favour of the appellant. Six of the ten men who sat on the Acton tribunal also held positions as local councillors on the Acton Urban District Council (AUDC) and there is compelling evidence that local council concerns may have influenced the ruling of the local tribunal in at least some cases.⁸¹ John Jones worked for the Acton building firm of Athawes, Son and Company, as the manager responsible for the collection of rents and repairs to properties on local housing estates. Like Muir and Wallace, Jones suffered from heart disease and had been rejected on medical grounds when he tried to attest under the Derby Scheme. The Acton tribunal granted Jones absolute exemption on 17 February 1916.⁸² The appeal lodged six days later by the assistant military representative (Francis Glass) was withdrawn for unspecified

⁷⁹ MH 47/40/57: Wallace Harris, 23 June 1917.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ See Appendix Two: The Acton Urban District Council and the Acton Local Tribunal.

⁸² MH 47/73/15: John Jones, 17 February 1916.

reasons on 10 May 1916.⁸³ Jones' health was too poor for military service and he was arguably indispensable to this local firm. His employer, William Athawes, was the firm's managing director and a well-connected local businessman. He probably exerted some considerable pressure on the tribunals to retain his clerk.

The government recommendation, printed verbatim into the back of each new List of Certified Occupations from February 1916 to September 1918, was that 'the directing head of every considerable business of real importance should be given exemption from military service'.⁸⁴ Exemptions based on this rather ambiguous advice sometimes needed to be backed up by further evidence and proof of a physical inability to serve in the armed forces could be used as a secondary or qualifying argument. William Athawes (above-mentioned) was called up for military service one month after securing the exemption of his clerk, John Jones. In his own case he argued that he was 'personally responsible to clients for the collection of rents and insurance premiums amounting to nearly £22,000 annually and for the payment of over £4000 annually in rates and taxes'.⁸⁵ The Acton tribunal granted temporary exemption for three months on condition that he did not reapply.⁸⁶ Athawes was sufficiently well-connected to engage the services of an illustrious barrister – Sir Patrick Hastings – to represent him at the appeal hearing.⁸⁷ The Middlesex Appeal Tribunal stipulated that exemption could be granted on account of his exceptional financial and business obligations and on condition that he joined the

⁸³ Ibid., 23 February 1916 and 10 May 1916.

⁸⁴ See for example MH 47/142/1: LGB Circular R.105, List of Certified Occupations, 20 November 1916, p. 21. Also McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 133-7.

⁸⁵ MH 47/60/19: William Athawes, 12 June 1916.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 29 June 1916.

⁸⁷ H. Montgomery Hyde, *Sir Patrick Hastings* (London: Heinemann, 1960), pp. 39-53.

Special Constabulary.⁸⁸ The National Service Representative (Captain Carter) appealed in 1918 against any continued exemption but the objection was withdrawn.⁸⁹

In the cases of both Jones and Athawes, the appeals of the military representatives were withdrawn, indicating that a decision was reached outside the courtroom.⁹⁰ There were complaints in 1916 that some appeals were being lodged by the military representative merely for the sake of appearances. Exemptions granted to white-collar workers who worked for the AUDC were particularly controversial because 'the question thereupon arose as to the jurisdiction of the Tribunal in these cases ... that had been agreed to by the military representative (Councillor John Kent), who is also the Chairman of the Council'.⁹¹ One exemption certificate granted to an AUDC clerk was challenged by Kent and this may have been as a result of public pressure. Joseph Illingworth was an audit clerk. The AUDC Treasurer (Sam Lord) had successfully applied for his conditional exemption by arguing that six of his ten clerks had already joined the colours and 'it would be impossible to replace him'.⁹² Lord ultimately lost Illingworth to the army and was heard to remark that 'I really think the

⁸⁸ MH 47/60/19: William Athawes, 25 July 1916.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 8 June 1918.

⁹⁰ 'National Service Representatives' replaced military service representatives in 1917.

⁹¹ *Express*, 26 May 1916. Also *Gazette*, 19 May 1916. Keith Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 46-7. See Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards*, p. 114, for comment on Yorkshire tribunals and their dealings with local council personnel.

⁹² MH 47/86/83: Joseph Illingworth, 23 May 1916.

Military Representative appealed because, being Chairman of the Council as well, he did not want it to be thought he was keeping a general service man back'.⁹³

Despite such pressure, Kent did not object to the exemption of another of Lord's clerks in early 1917.⁹⁴ In this case, the man's health was the subject of some debate and this provided a further argument in favour of his retention in civilian employment. Francis Bailey was granted conditional exemption as a local government employee in January 1917.⁹⁵ Lord was later obliged to re-apply for this exemption and he argued that his department was seriously depleted of staff but was nevertheless expected to take on additional duties, including those involved in 'the passing of the Representation of the People Bill now before Parliament'.⁹⁶ Lord was granted a further exemption for Bailey by the Acton tribunal and the local military representative (Gibbs) lodged an appeal. According to Gibbs, Bailey had been 'passed for B1... [was] willing to join and has had experience in the Volunteers'.⁹⁷ According to Lord, Bailey had been passed '3B – Garrison service at Home'.⁹⁸ Bailey's medical condition was clearly the subject of some contention and ultimately Gibbs' appeal was withdrawn before the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal hearing, indicating that the health clause was used to secure Bailey's exemption.⁹⁹

⁹³ *Express*, 1 December 1916.

⁹⁴ MH 47/99/76: Francis Bailey, 8 January 1917.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11 January 1917.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18 September 1917.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 October 1917.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18 September 1917.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29 October 1917. '3B' was 'garrison service at home', according to the early 1916 medical grading: 'B1' was 'garrison service abroad', according to the medical grading introduced in May 1916.

There were disputes between the military service representatives and the tribunal members at appeal level also. Jay Winter argues that, thanks to the efficient organisation of a relatively self-governing home front medical community, organised through the Central Medical War Committee, there was no crisis in the provision of civilian medical care.¹⁰⁰ However, some military service exemptions were granted because of a lack of civilian medical provision. The Middlesex Appeal Tribunal went to a great deal of trouble to assist a senior bank clerk in his appeal for exemption. Walter Curtze was the chief cashier of a Regent Street bank and cared for his wife, who suffered from disseminated sclerosis and was partially paralysed. The appeal tribunal had a significant disagreement with their military representative (Captain Carter) about Curtze's continued exemption.¹⁰¹ They granted leave for Carter to apply to the Central Tribunal and asked for guidance in ascertaining 'what in this connection constitutes domestic hardship'.¹⁰²

Carter argued that Curtze had been granted enough time to make arrangements for his wife but, in a country at war, it would seem that there were few medical facilities left in place for civilian invalids. In 1914 Acton had a cottage hospital with thirty beds but it had handed over one of its two wards and its committee room to the care of

¹⁰⁰ Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003 [1985]), pp. 103-212. Also W. MacPherson, *Medical Services General History: Volume 1* (London: HMSO, 1921), pp. 138-159.

¹⁰¹ Captain Carter had been invalided out of the Middlesex Regiment following the Dardanelles Campaign and was described by his contemporaries 'as of the "bull-dog breed", tactless and "zealous"'. See Peter Harris, "Structures, Experiences and Discourses": The Middlesex Military Service Tribunals and their Appellants, 1916-1918' (Unpublished PhD thesis, De Montfort University, 2018), p. 131.

¹⁰² MH 47/63/30: Walter Curtze, 30 May 1917.

military patients in 1915.¹⁰³ In addition, ten other military hospitals had been established in the immediate vicinity (Willesden, Ealing, Shepherd's Bush and Hammersmith) during the war.¹⁰⁴ This would have had a serious impact on available civilian medical care in Acton and the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal were:

so impressed with the hopeless tragedy that was revealed in this case, that although not within its judicial functions, went to the trouble to try and find a suitable institute [for Mrs Curtze] but without success. The Tribunal regard this case as constituting a condition of domestic hardship, as acute as it is possible for it to exist, and they are of opinion that unless the Military Service Act ... is to be regarded as a dead letter, this case is one in which the Tribunal could not do otherwise than grant exemption.¹⁰⁵

Carter suggested that Curtze should – at the very least – take up work in a munitions factory but the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal highlighted Curtze's financial predicament: 'A further point to be observed is that the nursing of the man's wife involves considerable expenditure, that if he were taken away from his present work he would in all probability be unable to earn sufficient money to provide his invalid wife with the necessary requirements'.¹⁰⁶ The Central Tribunal ruled in favour of the appeal tribunal and, although Curtze was required to reapply for his exemption certificate on

¹⁰³ Bolton, et al, *History of the County of Middlesex – Volume 7*, pp. 32-35. There was also an isolation hospital with sixty-three beds. Also 'The Wartime Memories Project – The Great War 1914-1918 – Hospitals'. Available from <https://www.wartimemoriesproject.com/greatwar/hospitals> [Accessed 18 March 2019]

¹⁰⁴ 'The Wartime Memories Project – Hospitals'.

¹⁰⁵ MH 47/63/30: Walter Curtze, 30 May 1917.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 12 July 1917.

a regular basis, he remained exempt – to care for his wife – for the duration of the war.¹⁰⁷ Curtze's case was thus heard by the two higher tribunals. In contrast, George Frankling was granted repeated exemptions by the Acton tribunal (without needing to appeal until April 1918) to care for his wife.¹⁰⁸ Frankling had been a barrister's clerk at Lincoln's Inn for nineteen years and presumably had informal access to legal advice from his colleagues. It is plausible that these connections facilitated a successful outcome in his case, without the extra loops through which Curtze was required to jump.

Antony Sterne did not have Frankling's influential connections. He too argued that his partially disabled wife needed him to remain at home to provide for her needs. Sterne was an insurance clerk for the Prudential Assurance Company and claimed exemption on the grounds of both his own and his wife's ill-health. He emphasised that 'I am no "shirker", as I have offered my services to the government in a variety of ways ... since I have known I was only fit for home service'.¹⁰⁹ He asked for a temporary exemption in order to accumulate some money for his wife's medical expenses and this was granted.¹¹⁰ When this certificate expired he re-applied, arguing that 'my wife, who is only 27, suffers from rheumatism and becomes at times depressed and melancholy owing to the severe pain and fear of becoming

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 21 July 1917, 13 November 1917; 23 March 1918; 15 March 1918.

¹⁰⁸ MH 47/70/52: George Frankling, 29 June 1916; 20 August 1916; 22 March 1917; 21 June 1917; 4 October 1917; 18 January 1918. He did not need to appeal to the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal until 20 April 1918 and was then granted further exemptions on 9 May 1918 and 8 November 1918.

¹⁰⁹ MH 47/81/83: Antony Sterne, 30 April 1916.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 11 May 1916.

permanently crippled like her mother'.¹¹¹ In contrast to Frankling's case, the Acton tribunal refused this application, although Sterne was granted a further (and final) six-week exemption from the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal.¹¹²

Analysis of the appeals in this section suggests that there was clear discrimination in favour of men who made significant fiscal, commercial and financial contributions to the local community. The health clause of the Military Service Act was utilised to facilitate exemptions for prominent businessmen and professionals who were found to be fit only for sedentary or garrison duties. At the same time, men who made a modest living – and an insignificant contribution to the fiscal and commercial health of the country – were routinely conscripted into the armed forces despite their poor health and lack of physical fitness.

Conscientious objectors

Conscientious objection to the undertaking of military service was the most notorious of all the exemption clauses and the military service tribunals were often at a loss as to how to proceed when faced with such claims.¹¹³ Recent scholarship has shown that there were 'hotspots' of religious, political and/or moral resistance to military service throughout the country.¹¹⁴ The 'CO Index' (comparing men of military age in the 1911 Census with the 'Pearce Register' of known conscientious objectors from

¹¹¹ Ibid., 7 August 1916.

¹¹² Ibid., 12 September 1916.

¹¹³ See Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards*, pp. 22 and 129-147; McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 36-63.

¹¹⁴ Cyril Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience* (London: Boutle, 2014), pp. 22-3.

the same area) is a useful tool for shining a spotlight onto regions where there was a concentration of organised and recorded support for ‘men of conscience’.¹¹⁵

Tottenham, Willesden and Hornsey were ‘hotspots’ of conscientious objectors in Middlesex, while Acton was an area of some smaller significance.¹¹⁶ According to the *Gazette*, there was an ‘Anti-Conscription Fellowship ... [whose] members ran into thousands of people, who were determined to resist conscription at all costs, and some of those who had been heard by that Tribunal [Acton], and would yet be heard, were prepared to die rather than bear arms’.¹¹⁷ At the same time, there is evidence that Acton had a number of conscientious objectors who were prepared to acquiesce to military service if they were not actually required to kill anyone. A local newspaper report in July 1916 stated that the Acton tribunal had dealt with twenty conscientious objectors on the evening of 6 July 1916, ‘many of whom were given non-combatant’s certificates, subject to engaging on work of national importance’.¹¹⁸ One of their number was named: [George Wilfred] Holford Knight, a local barrister who did not appeal against such non-combatant duties, presumably content with the local tribunal’s decision.

The *Gazette* reported on the cases of eleven conscientious objectors who appeared before the Acton tribunal in early 1916.¹¹⁹ Only one of these eleven unnamed men

¹¹⁵ Cyril Pearce and Helen Durham, ‘Patterns of Dissent in Britain during the First World War’, in *War and Society*, vol. 240, no. 2 (2015) p. 143.

¹¹⁶ Haringey First World War Peace Forum, Conscientious Objection in Hornsey, Tottenham and Wood Green – ‘Conscientious Objection in Middlesex’. Available from www.hfwwpf.wordpress.com [Accessed 28 March 2018].

¹¹⁷ *Gazette*, 3 March 1916.

¹¹⁸ *Express*, 7 July 1916.

¹¹⁹ *Gazette*, 3 March and 10 March 1916.

can be positively identified in the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal documents and most of the others, like Knight, probably accepted the non-combatant terms that were offered at local level.¹²⁰ The *Gazette* also provides evidence that other men had attested to 'help to prevent conscription' and were then not allowed to apply on the ground of a conscientious objection to the war.¹²¹ Further, the newspaper reveals that 'a number of appellants who were in certified occupations, preferred to appeal on conscientious grounds, but their certificates ruled out any consideration of the conscientious objections'.¹²² Reginald Spencer applied for exemption on both ground A: work of national importance and ground F: a conscientious objection to military service. He was a skilled 'Motor-Bodymaker' for the London General Omnibus Company and held a 'War Service Badge and Certificate' but 'I feel that my Principle should not have been ignored and I very much dislike having to shield behind a Certificate ... I am not making war materials'.¹²³ Spencer took his case to the appeal tribunal – and lost – but presumably many conscientious objectors simply returned to their certified occupations.

Twenty-three Acton conscientious objectors took their cases to the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal. Twelve of these twenty-three men emphatically claimed clause 'F' as their sole ground for exemption and the others utilised the conscience clause with a mix of grounds A, D, E and G.¹²⁴ Fourteen objected on religious grounds, six for political

¹²⁰ MH 47/8/106: Arthur Quiningborough.

¹²¹ *Gazette*, 3 March 1916. Some conscientious objectors complained that recruiting officers had advised that they would not be able to appeal unless they attested. See McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 23 and 45.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 10 March 1916.

¹²³ MH 47/66/33: Reginald Spencer, 14 March 1916.

¹²⁴ See Appendix 1: Exemption Clauses.

and moral reasons and three because they were of German parentage. Figure 5.3 shows the eventual outcome of the appeal decision.

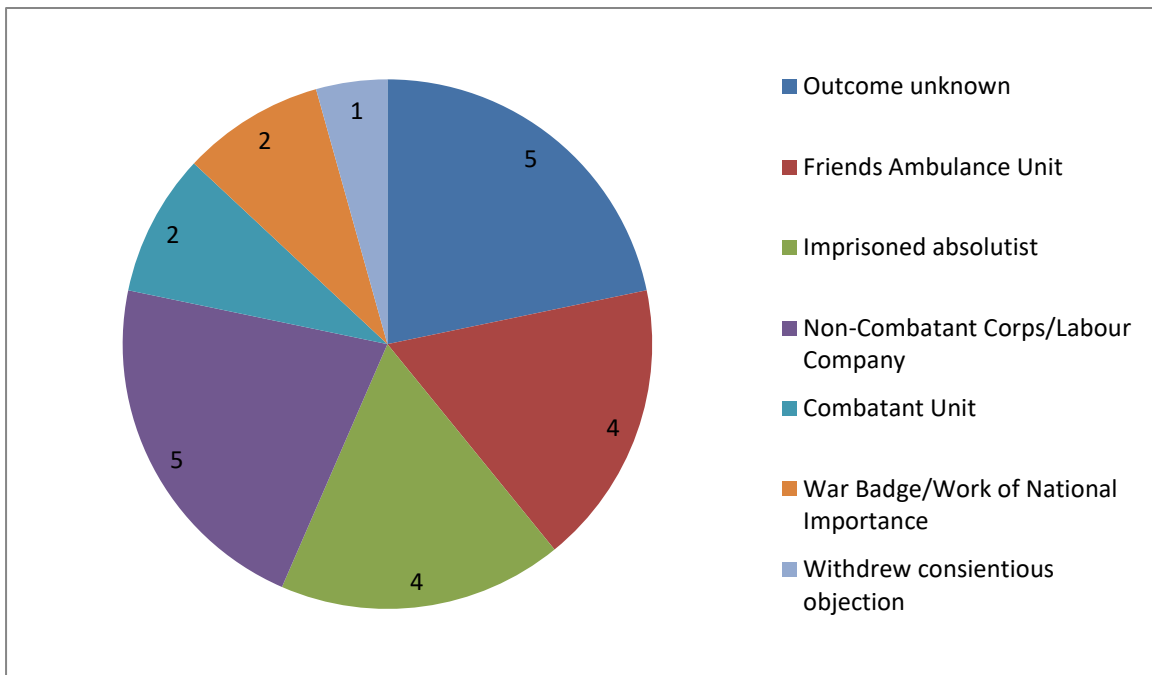


Figure 5.7 – Appeal Outcomes of Acton's Conscientious Objectors. Sources – MH 47 Archive; Pearce Register of Conscientious Objectors; Library of the Society of Friends; British Army WW1 Service Records, 1914-1918.

Eleven of Acton's conscientious objectors were white-collar workers and/or men with a level of higher education. Figure 5.4 shows in broad terms the occupational categories to which the men in this section belonged.

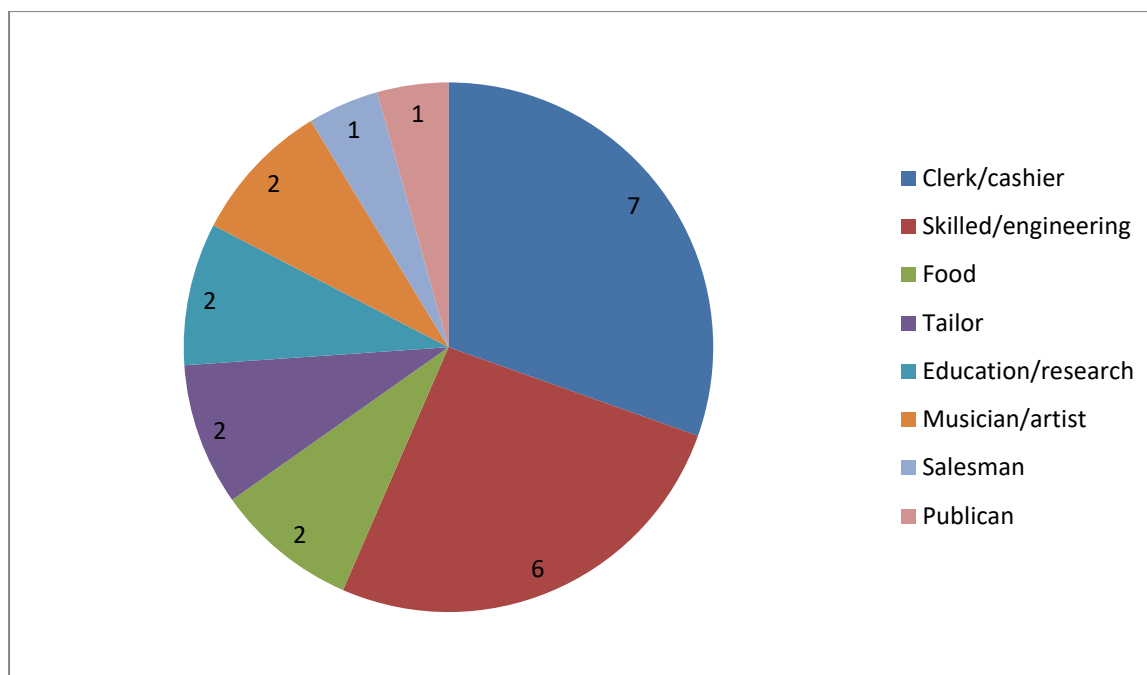


Figure 5.4 – Occupations of Acton's Conscientious Objectors. Source – MH 47 Archive.

In order to examine this apparent 'hotspot' amongst white-collar workers and men of higher education, all of Acton's conscientious objectors are considered together in this section.¹²⁵ None of the appeals lodged by either the laundrymen or the taxi-drivers claimed a conscientious objection to the war. It seems that not only were there 'hotspots' of conscientious objection in specific regions and certain occupations there were also what might be known as 'coldspots' as well.

Speculation aside, it is not possible to ascertain precise reasons for such 'coldspots'. However, claiming a conscientious objection to the war was not a straightforward – or easy – choice.¹²⁶ W. and G. du Cros, for example, presented itself as a staunchly

¹²⁵ Haringey First World War Peace Forum – 'Occupations of COs'. 'Just over 1,000 men [in Middlesex], mostly office workers, cited conscience amongst the grounds for exemption'.

¹²⁶ For the reviling of conscientious objectors see for example Lois Bibbings, *Telling Tales About Men: Conceptions of Conscientious Objectors to Military Service During*

patriotic company: not only sending men and materiel directly to the Western Front, but also turning over its entire workforce and factory facilities to the manufacture of munitions of war. James Bryant worked for the du Cros taxi company as a cashier. He was a Catholic and claimed absolute exemption from the war on the ground of a 'deep religious conviction'.¹²⁷ His case suggests the hostility that he probably received from the du Cros workforce. He claimed that he was a victim of persecution: 'I have not chosen the easier path – for I might have joined the Army a long time ago as a non-combatant, and received a deal of honour and glory; instead, I have received – other things'.¹²⁸

For their part, local tribunals were inadequately prepared to deal with claims for exemption from military service on grounds of a conscientious objection.¹²⁹ In addition, ambiguities in the wording of the legislation led to opposing interpretations of the Military Service Act.¹³⁰ There is evidence that members of the Acton tribunal were divided on aspects of the conscience clause. Councillor Arney (Labour) argued 'that the speeches in Parliament had clearly indicated that when a man satisfied the

the First World War (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009). See MH 47/9/33: Alfred Savigear, n.d., circa 15 March 1916. Savigear withdrew his application on grounds of a conscientious objection when he was rejected for medical reasons.

¹²⁷ MH 47/9/32: James Bryant, 20 February 1916.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16 March 1916.

¹²⁹ John Rae, *Conscience and Politics – The British Government and the Conscientious Objector to Military Service, 1916-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 48-51; David Boulton, *Objection Overruled – Conscription and Conscience in the First World War* (Cumbria: Dales Historical Monographs, 2014 [1967]), pp. 123-140.

¹³⁰ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 36-40; Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards*, pp. 129-36.

tribunal that he had a conscientious objection to military service it was intended he should be granted total exemption'.¹³¹ The Chairman, Councillor Pratt (Conservative), disagreed and was of the opinion that the tribunal had yet to see a genuine conscientious objector. In his opinion, the men he had questioned were all engaged in work that was in some way connected to the war effort and 'a man, to be conscientious, ought to give up his situation and go and work among the poor in the slums for sixpence a day'.¹³² Despite such arguments, it was – on the whole – standard procedure for the Acton tribunal to grant non-combatant service to men who they thought demonstrated a genuine conscientious objection to military service. According to James McDermott, 'many' local tribunals in Northamptonshire adopted a similar line.¹³³ On the other hand, David Littlewood argues that Yorkshire local tribunals reveal significant discrepancies of outcome with regard to granting non-combatant service due to 'ambiguous, and even contradictory, instructions'.¹³⁴

Non-combatant service was not clearly defined in the early months of conscription and there is evidence of exasperation from the tribunal members when faced with some difficult decisions. George Chitty was a bank clerk who had been granted this class of exemption from both the local and the appeal tribunals but he made no suggestion as to what work he was willing to do. When Chitty asked for permission to take his case up to the Central Tribunal, Herbert Nield argued:

The applicant like so many others has made no attempt to help in any work of national importance and still has no suggestion of a definite

¹³¹ *Gazette*, 3 March 1916.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 10 March 1916.

¹³³ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 41.

¹³⁴ Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards*, p. 145.

character to make – ‘work’ with him depends upon what may or may not violate his conscience – there is no data upon which we can go, and therefore it appears to me that the proper order has been made – relieving him from combatant service only.¹³⁵

Exemptions granted by a local tribunal for non-combatant service might be withdrawn if the man appealed against the decision. Percy Enock was a furniture salesman and ‘an Internationalist, absolutely opposed to all war, manufacture of munitions of war, or aiding and abetting anyone concerned directly or indirectly in prolonging or engaging in war’.¹³⁶ Enock eventually served as a combatant in the army, possibly as a result of losing his previous non-combatant exemption at appeal level.¹³⁷

Cases such as this probably explain why other men declared that they were willing to accept their non-combatant exemption, appealing only in order to clarify a point or to ask for a little more time. Edward Easter was a shorthand typist and clerk who was ‘not appealing against the decision of the local Tribunal, but have accepted their decision of non-combatant service’.¹³⁸ Easter asked for a ‘month’s postponement from service because I wish to get married ... before joining up’.¹³⁹ James Davidson,

¹³⁵ MH 47/8/99: George Chitty, 27 March 1916.

¹³⁶ MH 47/8/101: Percy Enock, 6 March 1916.

¹³⁷ TNA: WO – Records created or inherited by the War Office, Armed Forces, Judge Advocate General, and related bodies: WO 363 - Soldiers’ Documents, First World War ‘Burnt Documents’ [hereafter FWW Service Records]: Percy Lionel Enock. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 28 June 2018]. Also MH 47/9/34: Leonard Pote, 28 March 1916. See Appendix Three.

¹³⁸ MH 47/8/98: Edward Easter, 17 March 1916.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13 March 1916.

a solicitor's son, challenged the condition imposed on his non-combatant exemption. Davidson was a member of the Acton Plymouth Brethren and he stated that, although he could not take human life, he did not object to non-combatant service.¹⁴⁰ He was obliged to appeal when a 'condition was added requiring me to obtain employment in the Minesweeping Service of His Majesty's Navy'.¹⁴¹ Both Easter and Davidson served with the Non-Combatant Corps for the duration of the war.¹⁴²

A seemingly-straightforward solution with regard to Acton's Quakers was to post them to the Friends Ambulance Unit [hereafter FAU]. The Bakers were one of Acton's prominent Quaker families, in business as manufacturers of bread- and biscuit-making machinery and, controversially, connected to both a food contract with the War Office and the making of munitions.¹⁴³ Two of three Baker brothers

¹⁴⁰ MH 47/68/20: James Davidson, 19 May 1917.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 29 May 1917.

¹⁴² The Non-Combatant Corps was established by Army Order 112 on 10 March 1916 'for those who had no objection to service as such but did not wish to be trained in or use arms': Chris Baker, 'The Non-Combatant Corps', *The Long Long Trail, Researching Soldiers of the British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918*. Available from www.longlongtrail.co.uk [Accessed 23 January 2018]. Also MH 47/142/4/1: Army Council Instruction No. 551 of 1916 – Non-Combatant Corps, Procedure for Disposal of Conscientious Objectors, 11 March 1916. See Appendix Three.

¹⁴³ 'Joseph Baker and Sons', *Directory of Manufacturers in Engineering and Allied Trades, 1918*, p. 44. Available from www.gracesguide.co.uk [Accessed 21 January 2019]. This firm made 9.2 inch gun milling, rifling and lapping gear, 6 inch shells, 3 inch Stokes' bombs, cordite mixers, shell lathes, gun sights and mine sinker parts – as well as machinery for military bakeries and margarine manufacture. In 1918 they were employing 600 men and 170 women.

emphatically denied any direct link to the war contracts, both were granted non-combatant exemptions and sent to the FAU.¹⁴⁴

The ambulance section of the FAU was an unpaid posting and this was presumably not an insurmountable problem for Quakers with financial means and/or no family commitments.¹⁴⁵ Percy Boxell, however, was a clerk with a wife to support. He stated that 'the Ambulance Corps is quite voluntary work with no remuneration whatever, and to join this would mean providing my own equipment and training fees which is quite impossible for me to do as I am now giving up my present employment'.¹⁴⁶ Boxell was accepted into the general service (paid) section of the FAU, who sent him to a market garden near Canterbury.¹⁴⁷ He worked there until August 1918 when the farmer was obliged to dispense with his services following a 'failure of the fruit

¹⁴⁴ MH 47/8/104: Charles Baker; MH 47/66/27: Paul Baker. Charles served as a cook with the FAU from 16 May 1916 to 23 April 1918. See 'Friends Ambulance Unit (1914-1919)', *Library of the Society of Friends*. Available from www.quaker.org.uk [Accessed 3 March 2019]. Charles' name is listed on the 1918 Electoral Register as being resident in Acton in April 1918. See London Metropolitan Archives, London, England, Electoral Registers. Available from www.ancestry.co.uk [Accessed 22 June 2020]. This register is discussed in chapter four. See also Appendix Three. Baker Senior wrote to the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal on 1 May 1916 to inform them that Paul had joined the FAU but there are no records for him in the *Library of the Society of Friends*.

¹⁴⁵ For example MH 47/66/26: Albert Green. Green served with the FAU from 1 October 1918 to 7 March 1919. See 'Friends Ambulance Unit (1914-1919)', *Library of the Society of Friends*. Available from www.quaker.org.uk [Accessed 5 February 2019].

¹⁴⁶ MH 47/67/25: Percy Boxell, 14 July 1916.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 13 July 1916. See Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, p. 97.

crop'.¹⁴⁸ The FAU then arranged for him to take up a position 'as an Attendant at the National Society for Epileptics Colony at Chalfont St. Peters, Bucks.' and this was approved by the appeal tribunal.¹⁴⁹

The Committee on Work of National Importance was appointed by the Board of Trade in March 1916, 'as a body to whom the Tribunals may ... refer for advice as to what services of national importance an applicant for exemption on grounds of conscientious objection may properly be required to undertake'.¹⁵⁰ The Preliminary List of Occupations (otherwise known as Work of National Importance) was published on 14 April 1916.¹⁵¹ Some conscientious objectors moved around within these occupations and were willing to adapt to changing circumstances. Samuel Nicoll was a Christadelphian who was initially granted exemption on the ground that, as a grocer, he was included in the list of certified occupations.¹⁵² When his occupation was removed from the list Kent endorsed Nicoll's continued exemption on the condition that he joined the Volunteer Training Corps as 'although he is a

¹⁴⁸ MH 47/67/25: Percy Boxell, 28 August 1918.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 9 September 1918.

¹⁵⁰ RG 28/23 – Subseries within RG 28 – Military Service Tribunals: RG 28/23: Letter from Local Government Board to Local Tribunals, 24 June 1916. This advisory committee was also known as the 'Pelham Committee' – after its first chairman, H. W. Pelham. See John Graham, *Conscription and Conscience – A History, 1916-1919* (London: Allen, 1922), pp. 98-102.

¹⁵¹ MH 47/142/4/1: Committee on Work of National Importance – Preliminary List of Occupations Which the Committee Recommend to the Tribunals as Being of National Importance, 14 April 1916. This list was divided in sub-headings: Agriculture; Forestry; Shipping; Transport; Education; Public Utility Services; Red Cross and General Welfare Work.

¹⁵² MH 47/68/7: Samuel Nicoll, 6 July 1916. See MH 47/142/4/1: LGB Circular R.40 – Certified Occupations, February 1916, p. 6.

conscientious objector I presume he would have no objection to assist in the preparations which are being made in case of invasion'.¹⁵³ Nicoll's response was immediate, demanding absolute exemption 'in keeping with exemptions granted to all other Bona-fide Christadelphians'.¹⁵⁴ He was ordered to find full-time work of national importance and he spent the rest of the war in first a market garden, then an army canteen and, ultimately, a munitions factory.¹⁵⁵

Conscientious objectors were placed in an uncomfortable position if they had pre-war employment in a factory that then turned to the making of munitions. Like the Baker brothers, some might be able to argue that they had remained completely unconnected to any military work. Quakers could opt for a posting to the FAU but non-combatant service was not a straightforward choice for other men. George Dagley was a carpenter for H. C. Cleaver Ltd., a firm which had taken up war work in 1916. Dagley had been a Baptist preacher in Canada but had returned to England to support his widowed mother. At the time of his call-up in February 1916, he was in Harrogate on company business.¹⁵⁶ Cleaver were still able to fulfil civilian contracts at this time and Dagley's job in Yorkshire may have been of a non-military nature. He was granted non-combatant service but appealed against it and lost his case.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ MH 47/68/7: Samuel Nicoll, 15 January 1917.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., n.d., circa 24 January 1917.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 28 February, 6 July 1917 and 25 September 1917. Christadelphians considered munitions manufacture to be morally acceptable: see McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 48.

¹⁵⁶ MH 47/10/25: George Dagley, 3 March 1916.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 5 April 1916. Also MH 47/10/27: William Goodwin – a socialist conscientious objector working for David Napier and Son. Goodwin lost his non-combatant

It was recognised by the authorities that 'British-born or naturalised subjects of enemy parentage, must be dealt with ... carefully. A man who has a German or Austrian name, for instance, will be called up, but should, as a general rule, be posted to a Labour unit or Infantry Works company'.¹⁵⁸ Frederick Lunkenheimer and George Kniss both claimed a conscientious objection to military service. Lunkenheimer's 'Father left Germany as he objected to military service. He always brought us up that all warfare was wrong'.¹⁵⁹ The family were bakers and 'last May we had our business premises wrecked by the public owing to the bitter feeling against us as being Germans'.¹⁶⁰ Kniss was a tailor whose father was 'interned in Scotland, which accounts for my conscientious objection as it is hard to have to fight against one's own people'.¹⁶¹ Lunkenheimer's case was dismissed by both tribunals. Kniss admitted that his grounds for application were 'mainly domestic' but he was granted non-combatant service, which he refused.¹⁶² Lunkenheimer served in the 1st, and Kniss in the 3rd, Infantry Labour Companies of the Middlesex Regiment.¹⁶³

exemption when he appealed on 5 April 1916. There is no further information about either Dagley or Goodwin.

¹⁵⁸ MH47/142/4/1: ACI No. 467 of 1916 – 'Position of British-Born Subjects of Alien Parentage, and Men of Indifferent Character, Under the Military Service Act, 1916', 1 March 1916.

¹⁵⁹ MH 47/9/18: Frederick Lunkenheimer, 24 February 1916.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ MH 47/15/63: George Kniss, 13 June 1916. See MH 47/142/4/1: Army Council Instruction No. 582 of 1916, 15 March 1916 – 'It will not usually be desirable to accept for enlistment the sons of enemy aliens even though they are British subjects whose parents or other immediate relatives are interned'.

¹⁶² MH 47/15/63: George Kniss., 15 June 1916.

¹⁶³ TNA: WO – Records created or inherited by the War Office, Armed Forces, Judge Advocate General, and related bodies: WO 328 – War Office and Air Ministry,

Lunkenheimer and Kniss were posted to labour units because they were of German origin – not because they were conscientious objectors. Both John Raymond's and John Greenwood's claims on ground F were also dismissed. Raymond's family had emigrated to Britain from Germany when he was six weeks old and his father had become a naturalised British subject 'because he considered this country least likely to adopt compulsory military service to which he was strictly opposed on humane principles'.¹⁶⁴ Raymond himself objected to military service 'because, being of German birth, he knows too well the evils of warfare in regard to human life'.¹⁶⁵ His claim was dismissed by both tribunals and there is no further information about him. Greenwood's widowed mother was half-German and she had apparently declared that 'she would rather I were dead than in the army'.¹⁶⁶ He argued that 'Europe has become a shambles. In the name of Christ and Humanity I take this opportunity of protesting against the Emperors, capitalists, secret diplomatists and the like who have directly or indirectly caused this war'.¹⁶⁷ Greenwood served as Private 1085 in the Eastern Non Combatant Corps from 8 May 1916. He was sentenced to fifty-six days imprisonment on 10 July 1916 for 'disobeying a command given by his Superior

Service Medal and Award Rolls, First World War: John Frederick [sic] Lunkenheimer and George Albert William Kniss. See Appendix Three.

¹⁶⁴ MH 47/12/44: John Raymond, circa 13 June 1916.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1 June 1916.

¹⁶⁶ MH 47/8/100: John Greenwood, 17 February 1916.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Officer'.¹⁶⁸ He was transferred to Army Reserve Class W on 19 August 1916 and demobilised on 31 March 1920.¹⁶⁹

Greenwood's arrest for 'disobeying a command' suggests that he may have been an absolutist conscientious objector. Four other Acton men took this stance but, despite having a determination to resist all military authority, not all of Acton's absolutists were able to clearly articulate their conscientious objection in their application or in front of a tribunal. In early 1916 the language of dissent on grounds of conscience was new and it would take time for the arguments to develop through the tribunal experiences of other protesters.¹⁷⁰ Harold Boddy was a storekeeper for David Napier and Son. His original application stated simply 'conscientious objection' but he was to elaborate on his appeal document to include the information that he was supporting a widowed mother and three younger siblings.¹⁷¹ In his (unanswered) appeal to the Central Tribunal he pleaded that 'through ignorance of the Act I did not state this case on my form to the local Tribunal and the appeal tribunal would not hear me.'¹⁷² Boddy was plainly not an eloquent man but he had (or developed) a radical conscientious objection to the war and was imprisoned as a result.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ FWW Service Records, John Danforth Herman Greenwood.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. Army Order 203 of 1916 introduced Army Reserve Class W under Section 12 of the Military Service Act, 1916 (Session 2): 'for all those soldiers whose services are deemed to be more valuable to the country in civil rather than military employment'. See Baker, 'British Army Reserves and Reservists', *Long Long Trail*.

¹⁷⁰ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 39-40.

¹⁷¹ MH 47/10/26: Harold Boddy, 24 February 1916 and 20 March 1916.

¹⁷² Ibid., 7 April 1916.

¹⁷³ 'Pearce Register of Conscientious Objectors, A Database of Conscientious Objectors in the First World War', *Everyday Lives in War*, University of Hertfordshire:

Two young Acton absolutist conscientious objectors made simple but strongly idealistic statements. Nineteen-year-old Arthur Quiningborough was a telegraph clerk, supported in his Acton tribunal hearing by Councillor Carter (who served on the AUDC and was also the president of the local Anti-Conscription Fellowship) who said he was present 'to speak on behalf of the lad'.¹⁷⁴ Quiningborough had not applied on religious grounds but he had 'strong conscientious objections to take any part whatsoever in Military Service' and stated that 'I have made up my mind to abide by my own convictions'.¹⁷⁵ William Haines was a twenty-five-year-old research student who appealed by declaring a long-standing Christian conscientious conviction that he could not take part in any military operations: 'this is purely an individual position and I cannot accept the jurisdiction of this tribunal ... In short I ask for total exemption, and quietly state that if it cannot be granted I would rather accept the alternative of punishment than service'.¹⁷⁶ Both Quiningborough and Haines served prison sentences as absolutist conscientious objectors.¹⁷⁷

An eloquent refusal of military service came from Eli Wilson, an artist who also taught art at Goldsmith's College. He claimed absolute exemption as a conscientious objector 'because I believe war and military service to be wrong'.¹⁷⁸ He was not affiliated to a religious body, believed that the term 'non-combatant service' was a

Harold Eden Boddy. Available from <https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk> [Accessed 3 June 2016].

¹⁷⁴ *Gazette*, 3 March 1916.

¹⁷⁵ MH 47/8/106: Arthur Quiningborough, 24 February 1916.

¹⁷⁶ MH 47/9/29: William Haines, 28 February 1916.

¹⁷⁷ *Pearce Register of Conscientious Objectors*: Arthur Cyril Quiningborough and William Burgess Haines.

¹⁷⁸ MH47/15/64: Eli Wilson, 23 June 1916.

'euphemism, and does not exist in fact', stated that he had always engaged in philanthropic activities – 'why wait for the war?' – and was not prepared to 'bargain for the right to follow my conscience'.¹⁷⁹ The Acton tribunal granted exemption conditional upon Wilson 'obtaining agricultural or farm work within one month'.¹⁸⁰ He appealed, stating that 'it seems obviously absurd ... to ask a man of 39 to leave a profession requiring 10 to 15 years of study after his general education, to take up work which a boy of 14 would probably do equally well'.¹⁸¹ He argued that, as his conscientious objection to the war had been established, 'insistence on the conditions of exemption would be in the nature of persecution'.¹⁸² Wilson served a prison sentence as an absolutist conscientious objector from 1917 to 1919.¹⁸³

Acton had a significant number of conscientious objectors but only a few of them took their arguments to the county tribunal. Those who did put forward a range of arguments – some eloquently stated and some far less so – and some were more determined than others to take a hard-line stand for what they believed to be a moral justification in resisting the war. Most were flexible in their personal interpretation and were open to compromises. These men had to find a way to express their views that was new to both themselves and to the tribunals by which they were being judged.

Conclusion

Of all the occupational groups under consideration in this thesis, the white-collar workers were the appellants who were the least successful in gaining or retaining

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., n.d., circa 23 June 1916.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 6 July 1916.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., n.d., circa 19 July 1916.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ *Pearce Register of Conscientious Objectors: Eli Marsden Wilson.*

exemption from military service. Legislation regarding the indispensability of male white-collar workers was vague because their duties covered a wide range of jobs and responsibilities. Without occupations that were indisputably of national importance, most of these white-collar workers were dispensable as civilians. Men of seniority in a firm were likely to keep their positions longer than colleagues of a junior rank (and age) but, as the war escalated, many of Acton's remaining white-collar workers were conscripted. Married men were able to gain a little more time to put their affairs in order than single men but marital status was not the primary factor in the negative outcome of the appeals lodged by white-collar workers. Most of the men in this chapter were unsuccessful in receiving or retaining exemption from military service because they could not prove that they were of any significant manpower value to the country in their white-collar occupations. These men were isolated both from each other and from any official or unofficial public support, to a far greater extent than any other occupational group studied in this thesis.

The exception to this trend were those with power and influence. Men of a lowly station and modest means were particularly vulnerable in the face of conscription. Some of them were in a poor physical condition but were considered to be of national utility in clerical or sedentary positions within the armed forces. At the same time, influential and wealthy businessmen were able to rely on legislative loopholes and local connections to secure continued and, sometimes unchallenged, exemption from military service for the duration of the war. Their contribution to the fiscal, commercial and financial welfare of the local community was considered by the authorities to be of more importance to the country than any service they could provide to the armed forces.

The work of the Central Medical War Committee ensured that Britain's citizens did not suffer any significantly life-threatening lack of civilian medical care. At the same time, this committee was also tasked with providing an unprecedented number of medically-trained personnel for the treatment of servicemen both at home and on the fighting fronts. This was a delicate balancing act in terms of the country's manpower and some of Acton's appellants were granted exemption from military service in order to stay at home and care for relatives who could not be helped in any other way. These exemptions were at the discretion of military service tribunals and apparently favoured men in positions of some social standing.

Conscientious objection was a controversial stand to take, particularly in a community that was geared to such a large extent to supporting the industrial war effort. It is not surprising that the majority of Acton's conscientious objectors were men of a somewhat elevated station, both in terms of their occupation and their level of education. Whatever their social position, those of Acton's conscientious objectors who took their cases to the appeal tribunal (with the exception of the Quakers) appear to have been relatively isolated from any effective support.

The Acton tribunal granted non-combatant service to those men who successfully demonstrated to the tribunal members that they had a genuine conscientious objection to military service. It can be assumed that many appellants accepted this concession and did not apply to the appeal tribunal. Others appealed in order to clarify a point or ask for a little more time, but those who did ran the risk of losing their non-combatant exemption altogether. All of Acton's conscientious objectors who remained exempt from combatant military service were expected to undertake some form of acceptable work as an alternative. The few who refused to co-operate

in the war effort in any way received short shrift and were imprisoned as absolutist conscientious objectors until the end of the war.

Conclusion

Shortly after the passing of the second Military Service Act on 25 May 1916 the Local Government Board published a circular to the nation's local and appeal military service tribunals that included an acknowledgement of the pressure under which they were operating and outlined what was expected of them:

The nation is endeavouring to secure a much finer adjustment between the rival claims of military requirements on the one hand and industrial and financial needs, of personal hardship and conscientious conviction on the other hand, than has ever been attempted before at any time or in any country.¹

This unique episode in Britain's history provides a rich seam of valuable information about the society that fought the First World War. In taking a small cross-section of the country, this thesis complements and builds upon the recent, but growing, academic argument that 'the comparative history of local communities in the Great War could beneficially supplement the history of nation-states at war'.²

¹ The National Archives, Kew: MH – Records Created or Inherited by the Ministry of Health and Successors, Local Government Boards and Related Bodies: MH 47 – Central Military Service Tribunal and Middlesex Appeal Tribunal, Minutes and Papers: MH 47/142 – Blank Forms, Circulars, Pamphlets Issued by the Local Government Board and Other Government Departments, With Printed Acts, Proclamations, Booklets, etc.: MH 47/142/4/2 – Local Government Board Circular R.84, 1 June 1916, p. 8.

² Pierre Purseigle, 'Beyond and Below the Nations: Towards a Comparative Analysis of Local Communities at War', in Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle (eds.), *Uncovered Fields – Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 121.

The 291 Acton appellants considered in this thesis articulated their appeals against military conscription in a wide variety of ways. The expression of their arguments reveal multiple and highly subjective individual responses to the severe demands placed upon them as a result of the exceptional circumstances brought about by the First World War. Some appellants were eloquent and persuasive in their arguments, including many documents of proof and approbation in their case files, while other appeals were poorly expressed, with little or no supporting evidence. These documents indicate that some people were closely monitoring the national and international situations as they affected their own position, while others showed a more or less wilful disregard of wartime events.

Although the appellants articulated their claims in multifarious ways, and tribunals responded in an equally varied manner, this thesis has identified a number of themes running through the cases. Whether or not the appeals were eventually successful, many appellants stressed social, financial and business status in their claims for exemption, making much of their positions in local trade and commerce, and their roles as family breadwinners. Throughout many cases run arguments of class distinction, both implied and explicit, with tones of superiority in claims of prominent businessmen demanding preferential treatment, and hints of perceived inferiority in complaints of unfair tribunal judgements amongst appellants from lower classes or social status.

Many cases – put forward by both male and female appellants – stressed the importance of retaining men who were deemed to be essential to the home front because of perceived masculine skills such as strength, authority, business acumen and technical skills. The society that fought the First World War saw complex debates taking place about what women were thought to be capable of doing and

these perceptions altered as the war escalated and the manpower crisis worsened.³ This alteration can be seen as a clear thread running through these documents, demonstrating the many ways in which women were increasingly utilised in employment positions on the home front between 1916 and 1918.

In some of the occupations considered in this thesis, such as retail and some clerical work, the women within a family unit were expected to step into the man's shoes and take the reins of the business in his absence. Indeed, appellants could sometimes be given limited but arguably sufficient time for the womenfolk to adapt to their new role. Having said that, there were some occupations and skills that women were seemingly never required to take on, such as driving taxi-cabs or operating complex technical power laundry equipment. Indeed, in the laundry trade, it was often the women themselves who claimed that they were incapable of such activities.

The themes and arguments put forward by these 291 appellants were received in a wide variety of ways by the tribunals, and the other individuals and organisations responsible for manpower and conscription. Balancing the complex and ever-changing demands for the nation's civilian and military manpower was an unenviable task. As James McDermott and David Littlewood have both suggested, this was conducted at a local level with little central government guidance in most cases.⁴ As this thesis has shown, the exception to this was the Ministry of Munitions, which

³ Gail Braybon, 'Winners or Losers: Women's Role in the War Story', in Gail Braybon (ed.), *Evidence, History and the Great War*, p. 91.

⁴ James McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals, 1916-1918 – 'A Very Much Abused Body of Men'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 4 and 22; David Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards in the Great War – Determining the Fate of Britain's and New Zealand's Conscripts* (London: Routledge, 2018 [2019]), pp. 25-6.

bombarded the tribunals with ever-changing regulations and sometimes caused significant delays in processing and resolving local manpower issues.

It is clear that the needs of Acton's social, industrial and financial infrastructure were a guiding principle when determining some outcomes, and this was particularly the case with regard to the large number of exemptions debated, granted and renegotiated at local tribunal level for men who worked within Acton's laundry trade. This local industry experienced severe labour shortages, both male and female, whilst at the same time it attempted to cater for an increased demand in wartime services. Many businesses were failing by the early months of the war and the local authorities had legitimate concerns about the short- and long-term future security of Acton's financial infrastructure.

Some men were in a better position to remain exempt than others and this was particularly the case with Acton's prominent businessmen. There is compelling evidence that, as in Northamptonshire, men with power, wealth and status simply pulled strings and used influential contacts to remain exempt from military service, or to procure a successful outcome for an employee.⁵ This thesis has found that these exemptions were linked to the health clause of the Military Service Act and used to facilitate exemptions for well-connected men who were found to be fit only for sedentary or garrison duties. At the same time, men without influential connections were routinely conscripted into the armed forces, despite demonstrating their poor health.

As the war's demands became ever more insistent and the need for military manpower increased, the tribunals and their military representatives were required to

⁵ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 176.

constantly reassess their local and county decisions and make amendments in accordance with new manpower imperatives and frequently altered central legislation. The maintenance of the country's financial security and economic infrastructure was essential but fluctuating fortunes on the battlefields could result in a man being called up from within what had previously been seen, by appellants and the authorities alike, as a relatively protected civilian position. Nowhere is this more apparent than with the men whose occupations were subject to altered status in line with the frequently changing Lists of Certified Occupations. Increasingly urgent military manpower needs meant that men fit for any type of service in the armed forces were taken out of occupations whose civilian personnel could be reorganised. Alterations to the lists – both in terms of a man's age and marital status, and as a result of the employment of increasing numbers of women – left many of Acton's food retail workers, for example, with no remaining argument against conscription.

Many appellants attempted to renegotiate their civilian status and place on the home front. Men who worked in the manufacture of weapons of war had a significantly better chance of remaining exempt from military service than those who worked in most other occupations. It is clear that many appellants recognised this and deliberately signed up for work in the munitions trade in order to remain on the home front and ensure the survival of a family business or support vulnerable relatives. Munitions work, however, did not guarantee exemption. Its impact on appeals changed a great deal during the war and was directly connected to the fluctuating circumstances on the battlefields and the ever-changing manpower situation.

A man's domestic position could have some bearing on his case and many appellants claimed to be supporting relatives who were in poor health. Ailing wives, parents and children were frequently cited as reasons for a man to remain exempt

from military service and there are a few examples of Acton appellants who were permitted to remain on the home front throughout the war to support desperately dependent relatives, such as those who were terminally ill. However, these were the exception rather than the rule and in most cases other members of the family were expected to help out in the man's absence. Arguments that young men were needed at home to support aging and ailing fathers (or other male relatives) were usually dismissed by the tribunals. On the whole, older and/or unfit men were expected to put their masculine shoulder to the wheel and do their bit for the war effort by managing without strong and able-bodied men of military age.

McDermott considers whether tribunals that displayed compassion towards appellants did so because they were taking care to not set themselves against public opinion.⁶ There is evidence that the Acton tribunal and the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal were sympathetic to the plight of families in a man's absence: for example, it was not unusual for time-limited exemptions to be granted, allowing women to recover their strength following a pregnancy or illness. It could be argued that this was more a practical solution than a sensitivity to public mood. McDermott concludes that the tribunals in Northamptonshire 'demonstrated no extreme of generosity or callousness in their dealings' and this appears to be a fair appraisal of the two tribunals considered in this thesis.⁷ In Acton, many men argued that their wives were incapable of managing without them – claiming that their womenfolk either lacked business acumen, were too busy with numerous children and household duties, lacked physical strength and/or were too ill to take on the task of providing for the family in his absence. The tribunals usually dismissed such arguments, often citing

⁶ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 171-2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 175 and 227.

the availability of financial assistance. It was understood that some families would suffer economic and familial distress but such suffering, while regrettable, was seen as an inevitable sacrifice – expected of the nation as a whole.

Contemporary notions of masculine protection and feminine dependence were most often deployed in cases that involved widowed mothers but, despite the Prime Minister's assertion in early 1916 that these women would have preferential treatment with regard to the exemption of their sole remaining son, this guarantee was then significantly qualified in the interests of overall fairness. On the whole, the manpower crisis dramatically altered pre-war notions concerning masculine domestic responsibilities, and tribunals increasingly expected women to cope without their men.

Very few appellants who were graded 'A' remained exempt from military service and those who did were seen to be of value on the home front for their skills and experience. Many men claimed that they were unfit for any form of military service. Indeed, despite the contemporary association between manliness, strength and fitness, some actively emphasised their physical weakness in their claims for exemption. Medical grading was a highly contentious issue throughout the war, with many men unsuccessfully arguing that their grading did not reflect their actual physical condition.⁸ Alison Hine points out that, as the war progressed and the armed forces fine-tuned the amalgamation of new recruits into the services, men were no longer exempted on the ground that they were physically incapable of front-

⁸ Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003 [1985]), pp. 50-64.

line infantry duties.⁹ Men with demonstrable health issues were increasingly utilised behind the lines in supporting roles. Many of Acton's taxi-cab drivers were conscripted into the Army Service Corps as motor drivers, and the army's clerical and canteen positions were filled by the district's white-collar workers and food retail employees.

The networks and connections within the small district of Acton ensured mutual support in some cases, with shared values and expectations. The local laundry industry, for example, had sufficiently effective networks of mutual support to allow for a certain level of collaboration and survival. It also had a recognisably strong and authoritative central trade association which offered an important mediation service to laundry employees, local proprietors, recruiting personnel and military service tribunals alike. While some occupations benefitted from strong trade associations and mutual help, others did not. The many retail food businesses, for example, were disparate and lacked cohesion, their entrepreneurial individualism resulting in an absence of the supportive structures that may have played a role in some of the successful laundry workers' appeals. Indeed, there is evidence amongst Acton's independent retailers of the 'sullen obstructionism' to negotiations about who should go to war and who should remain in their occupations, described by McDermott in his Northamptonshire study.¹⁰

⁹ Alison Hine, *Refilling Haig's Armies – The Replacement of British Infantry Casualties on the Western Front, 1916-1918* (Warwick: Helion, 2018), pp. 149-80.

¹⁰ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 142-3.

David Monger explains that local institutions and expertise were crucial to any national endeavour throughout the war.¹¹ Much of the burden of balancing local and national priorities rested with the military service tribunals – and Acton was no exception. Manpower shortages and a lack of resources nationwide caused significant and highly publicised problems in the maintenance of essential local services such as road and building repairs, and transport and supply networks – not to mention public health issues such as food supply, rubbish collection and sewerage. Civilian manpower problems could, at times, override any military manpower pressures: the coal crisis during the severe winter of 1916/17 led to a number of Acton's coal distributors being kept back from service in the armed forces by the local military authorities, despite having their exemptions cancelled by the local and county military service tribunals.

The 291 cases considered in this thesis contain many examples both of support and of disapproval for appeals and their outcomes. John Horne describes 'models of wartime behaviour', in terms of what was considered to be acceptable – and unacceptable – demonstrations of duty, solidarity and sacrifice.¹² These themes of social morality and mobilisation can be seen in Acton. Some appellants stressed their patriotic credentials by looking for opportunities, through voluntary activities, to aid the war effort and justify their position as civilians.¹³ A significant number of

¹¹ David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain – The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014 [2012]), pp. 62-82.

¹² John Horne, 'Social Identity in War: France, 1914-1918', in T. G. Fraser and Keith Jeffery (eds.), *Men, Women and War* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1999 [1993]), p. 120.

¹³ Laura Ugolini, *Civvies – Middle-Class Men on the English Home Front, 1914-18* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 157-89.

Acton's appellants made the case that they had been engaged in philanthropic and patriotic endeavours since the beginning of the war, and these voluntary activities did temporarily strengthen their argument to remain exempt after the introduction of conscription.

Towards the end of 1916, however, as the war of attrition hardened attitudes and the authorities took increasing control of civilian activities, volunteering changed from being an optional undertaking that strengthened appeals, to becoming a compulsory precondition for exemption. In addition, such 'voluntary' work did not guarantee a successful outcome: the military manpower crisis of 1917, resulting both from the rapid expansion of the armed forces and the huge numbers of battlefield casualties, heightened the British army's urgent need for men and lowered the likelihood of *all* appellants remaining exempt from military service, regardless of any voluntary endeavours on the home front.

Equality of sacrifice is a theme that runs throughout the cases studied in this thesis: a notion that had become embedded in the nation's wartime culture by 1916 and was demanded by a society that was suffering bereavement and significant personal hardships.¹⁴ Pierre Purseigle describes an 'ethic of mobilisation' – a matrix of thought and behaviour that shaped the identity and involvement of local communities.¹⁵ Acton's employers were among those who were expected to demonstrate their adherence to such ideals by releasing their men for military service, employing more women, taking on certain tasks themselves and collaborating with their rivals. Indeed, a willingness to co-operate with others, at their own expense, was a key factor in the success of many appeals. Businesses were expected to demonstrate

¹⁴ Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards*, pp. 108-10.

¹⁵ Purseigle, 'Beyond and Below the Nations', p. 111.

their patriotism and commitment to the war effort by providing considerable financial support to employees who were away fighting for their country. The tribunals acted as arbiters, putting pressure on employers to take the necessary steps to facilitate the enlistment of their workforce: for example W. and G. du Cros, in a widely publicised case in mid-1916, was required to make immediate concessions with regard to the wartime storage of employees' taxi-cabs.

Men whose main argument against military conscription was that they should remain at home to protect their own interests were increasingly likely to receive short shrift.¹⁶ In late 1915, the proprietor of a one-man business might expect public endorsement as an entrepreneurial economic agent and the mainstay of his family: the argument that conscription would bring financial ruin and economic hardship was met with a good deal of sympathy. However, the introduction of financial aid – such as the Military Service Civil Liabilities fund – in mid-1916, designed to alleviate some of the shortfall in income from a soldier's pay and the accompanying separation allowance, limited the amount of sacrifice involved in joining the armed forces to a more acceptable level. In a community that was expected to forego luxuries and reduce their consumption of essentials, equality of sacrifice was key to public consensus and the closure of a business or lowered standard of living were less and less likely to ensure exemption.

The tribunals played an important role in upholding the concept of equality of sacrifice. Adrian Gregory describes the 'morally dubious' ways in which some people sought economic advantage from wartime circumstances.¹⁷ Many claims for

¹⁶ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 133

¹⁷ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War – British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 91-2 and 136-42.

exemption from entrepreneurs and speculators – whose motives were arguably driven by personal incentives and financial gain – were assiduously investigated by the Acton tribunal's military representative, John Kent. Those who took advantage of the misfortune of others by expanding their own enterprises and taking on a competitor's clientele were not tolerated. Likewise, appellants who moved into occupations such as Acton's laundry trade, in which they had not previously been employed but from which a profit could be made, were treated with suspicion. Men who were arguably attempting to bolster their chances of remaining exempt from military service by taking on employees, buying a house or getting married were subject to close scrutiny by Acton's military authorities.

Britain's patriotic narrative was diverse and complex, designed to resolve public grievances or to help set wartime discomforts in context.¹⁸ Tribunal hearings were conducted in public and cases that created a stir were reported in the local newspapers. This was especially the case with Acton's conscientious objectors. Acton was not a 'hotspot' of support for men of conscience. Indeed, there is evidence that the laundry industry and taxi-cab trade were significant 'coldspots' of disapproval for those who chose to object to the war on moral, religious or political grounds.

In early 1916 the Acton tribunal and the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal were as ill-equipped to deal with conscientious objectors as most other tribunals in the country.¹⁹ Nevertheless, some consensus was eventually reached and, once the language and philosophy of pacifism were sufficiently developed and agreed upon,

¹⁸ Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda*, p. 272.

¹⁹ McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 39; Littlewood, *Military Service Tribunals and Boards*, pp. 129-30.

men who satisfactorily demonstrated a conscientious objection to the war in front of the Acton tribunal were usually granted non-combatant duties as a matter of course. Whether they contested this ruling by requesting unconditional exemption was a matter for each individual to decide and, if they did, they faced the real danger of having their objections completely overruled by the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal.

According to Purseigle, military service tribunals were 'a site where agents of the State pursued military manpower in face of individual opposition and local economic interests. Representatives of civil society thus adjudicated conflicts which often reflected a wider debate over the extraction of the means of war making'.²⁰ Central government relied on local and county tribunals to implement manpower legislation that it was still in the process of creating. The appellants, the tribunals and numerous associated contemporaries navigated their way through the conscription process by making reference to established pre-war notions of proper male conduct, such as masculine domestic responsibilities, and developing wartime imperatives, such as a demonstrable equality of sacrifice among all citizens.

Military service tribunals were required to undertake a complex balancing act between the manpower needs of the military authorities, the munitions industry, the local population and the economic stability of the country. They undertook this task in the full glare of public scrutiny and a fundamental part of their job was to demonstrate that there was a commitment on the part of the authorities to a proportionate and fair distribution of the burdens of war amongst all members of British society. In 1922 this need for equality of sacrifice and patriotic duty was summed up succinctly in the Official History of the Ministry of Munitions: 'in a

²⁰ Pierre Purseigle, 'Introduction', in Pierre Purseigle (ed.), *Warfare and Belligerence – Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 31.

protracted struggle the goodwill of the people cannot be retained unless the action of the Government is approved as reasonable not merely in principle but in detail.²¹ McDermott concludes that 'compulsion was a social contract requiring the visible demonstration of fairness in its implementation'.²² Despite the occasional lack of transparency, most notably relating to the treatment of some influential individuals, this is an accurate summing up of Acton's experiences of the conscription process.

²¹ *History of the Ministry of Munitions, Volume VI, Part I* (London: HMSO, 1922), p.1.

²² McDermott, *Military Service Tribunals*, p. 229.

Appendix One

Grounds For Exemption

Local Government Board Circular R.41: Military Service Act, 1916 – Application as to Exemption. [For men called up under the Military Service Act.]

Application may be made:–

- a) On the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that the man should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work in which he is habitually engaged;
- b) On the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that the man should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work in which he wishes to be engaged;
- c) If he is being educated or trained for any work, on the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that, instead of being employed in military service, he should continue to be so educated or trained;
- d) On the ground that serious hardship would ensue if the man were called up for Army service, owing to his exceptional financial or business obligations or domestic position;
- e) On the ground of ill-health or infirmity;
- f) On the ground of a conscientious objection to the undertaking of combatant service;
- g) On the ground that the principal and usual occupation is one of those included in the list of occupations certified by Government Departments for exemption.

Local Government Board Circular R.52: Form for Voluntarily Attested Men – Application as to Exemption. [For men called up in their Groups under the Derby Scheme.]

Application may be made:–

- (a) On the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that the man should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work in which he is habitually engaged; or
- (b) On the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that the man should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work in which he wishes to be engaged; or
- (c) If he is being educated or trained for any work, on the ground that it is expedient in the national interests; or

(d) On the ground that serious hardship would ensue, if the man were called up for Army service, owing to his exceptional financial or business obligations or domestic position.

Application may also be made for exemption: –

(e) On the ground that the principal and usual occupation of the man is one of those included in the list of occupations certified by Government Departments for exemption. The official list of the certified occupations may be consulted at the offices of the Local Tribunal or of the recruiting officer.

Appendix Two

Acton Urban District Council

Chairman: (April 1914 until 18 April 1916) – Councillor G. Percy Pratt; (April 1916 – April 1917) – Councillor John Kent; (April 1917 – ?) – Councillor Frederick George Arney.

Vice-Chairman: (after 18 April 1916): Councillor Frederick George Arney.

Secretary: Mr William Hodson.

Treasurer and Chief Accountant: Mr Sam Lord.

Councillor S. M. Skinner.

Councillor R. J. Hewitt.

Councillor W. J. Boissonnade.

Councillor R. Poulton.

Councillor J. P. Hamilton.

Councillor F. Glass.

Councillor Rev. de Sausmarez.

Councillor S. R. Whiting.

Councillor W. Carter.

Councillor T. H. Howes.

Councillor Miss Smee.

Councillor Snelling.

Councillor Crane.

Councillor Gee.

Councillor Page.

Councillor Ince.

Councillor Rev. R. G. Davies.

Acton Local Tribunal

Chairman: Councillor G. Percy Pratt.

Military Representative: Councillor John Kent (until 23 January 1918).

Assistant Military Representative: Councillor Francis Glass.

Secretary: Mr William Hodson.

Councillor S. M. Skinner.

Councillor Frederick George Arney.

Councillor R. J. Hewitt.

Councillor W. J. Boissonnade.

Councillor R. Poulton.

Mr C. A. Buckmaster.

Mr Stevenson.

Mr J. T. Street.

Mr J. F. Shillaker.

Advisory Committee

Mr Eydmann.

Mr R. G. Essex.

Mr C. H. Pratt.

Mr W. A. Turpin.

Mr W. H. Williams.

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MH: Records created or inherited by the Ministry of Health and successors, Local Government Boards and related bodies.

RG: Records of the General Register Office, Government Social Survey Department and Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

WO: Records created or inherited by the War Office, Armed Forces, Judge Advocate General and related bodies.

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