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Paper:

Matthews, G. (2017). 'For Freedom and Justice': The Responses of Chapels in The Swansea Area to the First World War. *The Welsh History Review / Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru*, 28(4)
<http://dx.doi.org/10.16922/whr.28.4.4>

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‘FOR FREEDOM AND JUSTICE’: THE RESPONSES OF CHAPELS IN THE SWANSEA
AREA TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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Abstract: This article explores the responses of Nonconformist chapels in the Swansea area to the First World War, using the rate of recruitment from congregations and the memorialization of the war. Locating the episode in the political-religious rivalry between the Nonconformist denominations and the Established Church, it is clear that one of the motivations for supporting the war effort was the need to be seen to be doing their fair share for King and country at a time when Church disestablishment for Wales was on the statute book. In the discourse in Swansea’s newspapers as well as in the chapels themselves, the chapels’ Rolls of Honour were visible badges of loyalty.

The Great War was a severe challenge to the cherished beliefs and practices of Welsh Nonconformity. It is problematic to generalize about the reaction of Welsh Nonconformists to the war because there was such a wide spectrum of responses, from those who were enthusiastic in their support of Britain’s war effort to those who refused to budge from their pacifist convictions.¹ However, by focussing in upon one district with a vibrant Nonconformist culture, it is possible to gauge the impact of the war and its effects upon local chapelgoers’ thoughts and practices. This article explores the responses to the war amongst the chapels of the Swansea area, using evidence from newspaper reports, denominational publications and chapel communications to gain insights into how the congregations reacted to the challenging circumstances of wartime. One theme given particular attention in this

¹ Robert Pope, ‘Christ and Caesar? Welsh Nonconformists and the state, 1914–1918’, in Matthew Cragoe and Chris Williams (eds.), *Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cardiff, 2007), pp. 165–83; Robert Pope, “‘Duw ar drai ar orwel pell’: capeli Cymru a’r Rhyfel Mawr’, *Y Traethodydd*, 711 (October 2014), 213–30.

study is the rate of recruitment from the chapels of Swansea, as this can be taken as a firm indication of the congregation's commitment to Britain's war effort.² Also, the ways in which the war contribution was memorialized will be considered, as evidence of how the chapels understood the war at its conclusion.³

One over-riding consideration when examining the reactions of Welsh chapelgoers in the early months of the war is the need to locate events in the particular political-religious rivalry and struggle that had been playing out in Wales for several decades, as the Nonconformist denominations sought to be accepted as the leading influence in Welsh society. Thus, when faced with the choice of backing the war effort and being seen as loyal, or questioning it and risking being seen as traitorous, most of the leading lights of Welsh Nonconformity accepted the discourse of the 'just war'. At a local as well as the national level, there was a desire to be seen to be loyal. Furthermore, in a district such as Swansea with a plethora of places of worship, an element of rivalry meant that, in general, the chapel communities not only conformed to the expectation that they support the war but wished the size of their contribution to be publicly known and recognized.

² For the issue of recruitment in Wales in general, see Chris Williams, 'Taffs in the trenches: Welsh national identity and military service 1914-1918' and Neil Evans, 'Loyalties: state, nation, community and military recruiting in Wales, 1840-1918' in Matthew Cragoe and Chris Williams (eds.), *Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cardiff, 2007), pp. 126-64; pp. 38-62, and Gervase Phillips, 'Dai Bach y Sowldiwr': Welsh soldiers in the British Army', *Llafur*, 6, 2 (1993), 94-105; for an in-depth study of recruitment in north Wales, see: Clive Hughes, *'I'r Fyddin Fechgyn Gwalia!': Recriwtio i'r Fyddin yng Ngogledd-Orllewin Cymru, 1914-1916* (Llanrwst, 2014).

³ For the commemoration of the First World War in Wales in general, see: Angela Gaffney, *Aftermath: Remembering the Great War in Wales* (Cardiff, 1998).

The discourse in Swansea's local newspapers, as in most of the rest of the United Kingdom, was strongly supportive of Britain's war effort. As Catriona Pennell has shown, as the international situation deteriorated there was no general wave of jingoistic patriotism welcoming the chance to fight, but rather a feeling of trepidation and uncertainty, as individuals considered the options available and their associated risks.⁴ For the Swansea district, the evidence suggests that there was a variety of responses to the onset of war, which could depend on the individual's age, sex and personal circumstances, and on local economic conditions. However, the notions of duty and responsibility were universally strong, and the prevailing discourse led young men, in particular, to regard the act of volunteering as a test of their manhood.

The local Swansea newspapers certainly played their part in fostering the idea that this was a just war, not sought by Britain but pressed on the kingdom by the malevolent intent of Germany and her allies. This was the editorial line not only of the Conservative-leaning *South Wales Daily Post* but also of the Liberal *Cambrian Daily Leader*.⁵ It was also the viewpoint of the socialist *Llais Llafur* (printed in Ystalyfera but circulated in the northern part of the Swansea district). Furthermore, the denominational press which was, naturally, influential among the area's chapel communities accepted the argument that Britain's cause in the war was just.⁶

⁴ Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2012), especially chapters 1 and 2.

⁵ For the political persuasions of these newspapers, see Aled Gruffydd Jones, *Press, Politics and Society: a History of Journalism in Wales* (Cardiff, 1993), p. 211. Both daily newspapers had a weekly sister paper which printed a digest of the contents: the *South Wales Weekly Post* and the *Herald of Wales*.

⁶ Robert Pope, 'Capeli Cymru a'r Rhyfel Mawr', p. 217; Gethin Matthews, 'The responses of Welsh Baptist churches to the First World War – from "The Great War to maintain the sacred ideals of Christian Civilization"

When referring to Britain's cause, what one can call 'the language of 1914' dominated: the ideals of 'honour', 'duty' and 'sacrifice' were to the fore.⁷ Considering the prevailing 'high diction', Paul Fussell declares that 'the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable', so words such as 'glory' and 'honour' were used in abundance and were understood clearly by the audience.⁸ What is clear from the evidence is that Swansea's chapel leaders accepted and promulgated these notions. Even at the war's close, as the chapels commemorated their involvement and sacrifice, the language abounded with references to freedom, justice and sacrifice.

Across Wales, Nonconformist denominations were in a position of strength in 1914, despite the erosion of their influence which had been gathering pace alongside socio-economic changes in the country. The statistics are open to discussion but one estimate gives the figure of 950,000 of the Welsh population of 2.45 million as being attached to a chapel (39 per cent of the total), giving credence to the conclusion that 'on the eve of the First World War Nonconformity was the most single significant institution which Wales possessed.'⁹ Prior to August 1914, the attitude of the Nonconformist denominations was overwhelmingly anti-militaristic. Densil Morgan makes the fine distinction that they tended to be pacifistic rather than pacifist, while Paul O'Leary suggests that there was a significant 'defencist' tradition,

to "If war is right, nothing can be wrong" in Larry Kreitzer (ed.), *Step Into Your Place: The First World War and Baptist Life and Thought* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 83-109, pp. 93-6.

⁷ See Gethin Matthews, 'Rhwygau', in idem (ed.), *Creithiau: Dylanwad y Rhyfel Mawr ar Gymdeithas a Diwylliant yng Nghymru* (Cardiff, 2016), pp. 1-20 (11-13).

⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London, 1975), pp. 21-2.

⁹ D. Densil Morgan, *The Span of the Cross: Christian Religion and Society in Wales, 1914-2000* (Cardiff, 1999), p. 23 and p. 281, n.24.

which allowed for the resort to force in the face of an external threat.¹⁰ However after the outbreak of war there was, as Robert Pope states, an ‘almost total abandonment’ of any pacifist principles as the denominations embraced the war effort.¹¹

The Swansea district had a very strong tradition of Protestant Nonconformity, which had become entrenched in the nineteenth century.¹² It was in Swansea that one of two major national demonstrations was held in 1912 in support of Church disestablishment.¹³ There were over 140 chapels operating in the Swansea area in 1914, with new causes regularly opening their doors.¹⁴ For Swansea chapel-goers, the tradition was a source of pride: in the

¹⁰ Densil Morgan, *Span of the Cross*, p. 285, n.52; Paul O’Leary, ‘Arming the citizens: the Volunteer Force in nineteenth-century Wales’, in Cragoe and Williams (eds), *Wales at War*, pp. 63-81 (63-4).

¹¹ Robert Pope, ‘Welsh Nonconformists and the state’, p. 171.

¹² F. G. Cowley, ‘Religion and education’, in Glanmor Williams (ed.), *Swansea: An Illustrated History* (Swansea, 1990) pp. 144-76 (154-6). See also E. C. Williams, ‘The Nonconformist movement in industrial Swansea, 1780-1914’ (unpublished MPhil thesis, Swansea University, 1993)

¹³ Neil Evans, “‘A nation in a nutshell’: the Swansea disestablishment demonstration of 1912 and the political culture of Edwardian Wales’, in R. R. Davies and Geraint H. Jenkins (eds.), *From Medieval to Modern Wales: Historical Essays in Honour of Kenneth O. Morgan and Ralph A. Griffiths* (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 214-29.

¹⁴ The figures given in the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Church of England and Other Religious Bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire*, vol. 6, *Nonconformist County Statistics* (1911) [hereafter *RCCEORB*] are: 115 Nonconformist places of worship in the borough of Swansea (including twenty-five Baptist; twenty-eight Calvinistic Methodist; thirty-two Congregationalist; eight Wesleyan Methodist); twelve in Llansamlet (four Baptist; five Calvinistic Methodist; three Congregationalist); six in Penderry and Clase Rural (one Baptist; one Calvinistic Methodist; four Congregationalist) and eight in Cockett and Sketty (three Baptist; four Congregationalist; one Wesleyan); thus, a total of 141 in the area being studied.

Welsh Nonconformist press many authors would boast of the strength and vitality of Swansea's chapel culture.¹⁵

For the purposes of this article I have adopted a loose definition of 'the Swansea area', rather than focussing just on the parts that were within the borough of Swansea in 1914. The adjoining parishes such as Llansamlet, Penderry, Cockett and Sketty were tied economically to the town and shared the same culture, with reports of events and activities in these places included in the 'local news' columns of the newspapers. According to the census figures of 1911, the population of the county borough of Swansea was just over 100,000, of whom almost 29,000 were recorded as speaking Welsh (28%).¹⁶ The proportion of Welsh-speakers in the neighbouring parishes was substantially higher: for the Swansea Rural District, 73% were recorded as speaking Welsh.¹⁷ Some communities within three or four miles of central Swansea had been overwhelmingly Welsh in speech until the turn of the twentieth century, though here as in the rest of Wales there were anglicizing pressures.¹⁸

The 1911 census reveals a very diverse range of categories of male employment for Swansea County Borough. The largest single category was 'Iron, steel and tinsplate', with a return of 5,573, though there were more in total working in transport (Railways: 2,029; Docks: 2,095; Other transport: 4,397). Other categories with over two thousand men employed were 'Engineering, vehicles etc.' (3,585); 'Building and construction' (3,293); 'Commercial and financial' (2,647); 'Food and drink' (2,532);

¹⁵ See, for example, John Williams, *Eglwysi Annibynnol Abertawe a'r Cylch, 1860-1915* (Merthyr Tydfil, 1915).

¹⁶ Data for individuals over three years old; the percentage figure excludes those who did not answer the language question. *Census of England and Wales, 1911, Vol. 12, Language spoken in Wales and Monmouthshire* (London: 1913), Tables 1 and 2 (p. 31; p. 45).

¹⁷ The Swansea Rural District included the neighbouring parishes that are part of this study, but also some areas further afield such as Gorseinon, Loughor and Pontarddulais. The population (three years and over) was 39,973. *Census of England and Wales, 1911, Vol. 12, Tables 1 and 2* (p. 33; p. 45).

¹⁸ Robert Bevan, 'The Welsh Language in Fforestfach (Glamorgan), 1891-1901', *Studia Celtica*, XLVI (2012), 165-190.

‘General labourers’ (2,501) and ‘Copper and zinc’ (2,175). In terms of female employment, the largest categories were ‘Domestic service’ (3,897) and ‘Clothes etc.’ (2,523).¹⁹ As one would expect, different parts of Swansea had their own economic circumstances, which also meant that they had distinctive cultural patterns. The economy of the area adjacent to the docks was dominated by transport and the shipping trade and these parts were predominantly English-speaking. There was a growing belt of suburbia, principally to the west, with concentrations of middle-class households and white-collar workers. Along the lower Swansea Valley there were a range of metallurgical industries thriving, and moving further north there were a number of coal-mines. Within the boundaries of the county borough only 1,477 men were returned in 1911 as working in ‘Mines, quarries etc.’, but this number can be greatly increased if one counts the colliers working in the mines in adjacent parishes. Some of the communities here would have been as staunch a part of the Nonconformist Welsh-speaking culture as any in industrial Wales. One example of the centrality of chapel culture to a mining community here comes in the tradition of a prayer meeting at the start of each week in Mynydd Newydd colliery (between Fforestfach and Treboeth), held in two ‘chapels’ underground.²⁰

As their numerical strength was recognized, the Welsh Nonconformist denominations had been active in developing a political programme, seeking legislation to promote their aims and ideals. An early success was the passing of the Sunday Closing Act in 1881; further legislative initiatives were sought in fields such as education and land reform, but the principal campaign, waged over the course of decades, was that of disestablishment of the Church. This was sought consistently by the upper echelons of the Nonconformist hierarchy

¹⁹ Glanmor Williams (ed.), *Swansea: An Illustrated History*, pp. 349-50.

²⁰ Gwilym H. Thomas, ‘Cymanfaoedd Glowyr Mynydd Newydd’, *Cymru* 23 (July, 1902), 42-4.

even when the majority of the privileges enjoyed by the Established Church had been removed.²¹

By the summer of 1914, the goal of disestablishment seemed tantalizingly close. The power of the House of Lords to block legislation had been curtailed, so that the Upper House could no longer reject laws that had been passed by the Commons, but could only delay them. The Welsh Church Act was passed by the House of Commons in February 1913 and twice vetoed by the Lords, but by the time the storm clouds were gathering over Europe, it was ripe to be forced through despite their Lordships' objections.²² Thus, disestablishment was enacted on 18 September 1914, at the same time as the Irish Home Rule Bill, although both were immediately suspended for the duration of the war.

The parallels between the situations in Ireland and Wales are worth exploring. In both cases the legislation had been the subject of bitter argument for decades, and the resistance was to continue. In both cases, the leaders of the campaign against the legislation saw an opportunity to overturn it in the future by being seen to be so loyal to the British cause in the war that the government would be honour-bound to reward them. Thus while Sir Edward Carson (the Unionists' figurehead) was pivotal in the formation of the 36th (Ulster) Division, Bishop Alfred Edwards of St Asaph (*de facto* leader of the Welsh Anglicans) was loud in his proclamations of the contribution of Welsh Churchmen to the war effort. Other clergymen weighed in, casting aspersions on the loyalty of Welsh Nonconformists and claiming that the recruitment rate amongst Welsh Anglicans far outweighed that of Welsh chapel-goers. As a

²¹ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868-1922* (Cardiff, 1970), pp. 42-4, pp. 259-67; Neil Evans, 'A nation in a nutshell', pp. 215-8.

²² Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, pp. 269-71.

consequence of this manoeuvring, the proponents of the suspended legislation were obliged to demonstrate their loyalty to the utmost. Thus, John Redmond (leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party) made a speech in County Wicklow two days after the Home Rule Act was passed and suspended, urging the members of the Irish Volunteers to join the British Army, while the Rev John Williams, Brynsiencyn (*de facto* leader of the Welsh Nonconformists) and other prominent preachers embarked on their recruitment campaign in chapel congregations.²³

As well as the overwhelming support of Nonconformist ministers for the British war effort, special mention has to be made of Lloyd George, whose position at the heart of the Liberal-Nonconformist nexus was unassailable in 1914. Many of his war speeches are shot through with religious rhetoric and are finely-honed to appeal to Welsh Nonconformist sensibilities.²⁴ Other national leaders, such as O. M. Edwards, the influential editor of *Cymru*, used the language of the pulpit as they argued that Britain's cause was just.²⁵ However, as Gerwyn Williams has argued, when it came to the decision of whether or not to volunteer at an

²³ For more details of this comparison, see Gethin Matthews, “‘Un o ryfeloedd yr Arglwydd’: eglwysi Anghydfurfiol Cymru a’r Rhyfel Mawr, 1914–15”, in Matthews (ed.), *Creithiau*, pp. 34-62 (54-5). The literature on these individuals is extensive. For John Williams, see: Harri Parri, *Gwn Glân a Beibl Budr: John Williams, Brynsiencyn a’r Rhyfel Mawr* (Caernarfon, 2014), and Aled Job, ‘John Williams, Brynsiencyn a’r Rhyfel Byd Cyntaf’, *Barn*, 310 (November 1988), 10, and 311 (December 1988), 33. For John Redmond, see: John S. Ellis, “‘The methods of barbarism’ and the ‘rights of small nations’: war propaganda and British pluralism”, *Albion*, 30, 1 (Spring, 1998), 49-75 (71-4).

²⁴ Robert Pope, ‘Welsh Nonconformists and the state’, p. 171; Robert Pope, ‘Capeli Cymru a’r Rhyfel Mawr’, 216-7.

²⁵ Gethin Matthews, “‘Un o flynyddoedd rhyfeddaf hanes’: cyflwyno’r Rhyfel Mawr yn nhudalennau *Cymru* yn 1917’, in Matthews (ed.), *Creithiau*, pp. 163-82.

individual level it was often the voice of a respected local figure such as a minister that carried more weight than the rhetoric of a national dignitary.²⁶

There are problems with coming to conclusions about how ‘the chapels’ as a whole regarded the war because one of the core features of Welsh Nonconformity was the autonomy of each congregation. For the Independents (‘Annibynwyr’, the equivalent to England’s Congregationalists) and the Baptists, the right of each individual church to organize its own internal affairs was a central characteristic of their organizations: even though each congregation belonged to the respective denominational Union and regional assembly (‘cymanfa’) there was no central control over them. The organization of the Methodist denominations (both Calvinistic and Wesleyan) was more centralized, yet here too there was room for each individual congregation to plough its own furrow.²⁷

Therefore, there is a problem of evidence: how can the prevailing viewpoint in all of these chapels be gauged? Only in a tiny minority of cases can we know the content of the sermons preached during the fifty-two months of war. On those occasions when a sermon was summarised in the local newspapers or denominational journals, one cannot say how representative they were, as they were often reports of special services or, occasionally, sermons that were deemed newsworthy because their message was unusual or challenging.²⁸

²⁶ Gerwyn Williams, *Y Rhwyg* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1993), pp. 22-3.

²⁷ For more details on the distinctions between the four principal denominations, see: Densil Morgan, *Span of the Cross*, pp. 15-23.

²⁸ Three examples of this are the ‘striking sermon’ by the Revd A. W. Wardle, ‘Militant Christianity’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 19 October 1914, p. 5, the ‘striking sermon’ by the Revd Robert Greenshields, ‘War’s Justification’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 26 April 1915, p. 4, and the ‘striking sermon’ by the Revd F. Sparrow, ‘Challenge of the hour’, *South Wales Daily Post*, 19 October 1915, p. 2.

It also seems clear that the two daily newspapers of Swansea were more likely to print accounts of ‘patriotic’ sermons that chimed with their own editorial line.²⁹

More concrete evidence for the chapels’ attitudes sometimes comes from reports of the meetings of the local associations. One such example comes from December 1914, when the annual meeting of the Welsh-language Independent chapels for West Glamorgan was held at Soar chapel. The resolution passed declared that ‘while firmly holding that war as a means of settling international disputes is against the genius of the spirit of the Gospel of Christ’, they were of the ‘opinion that this country was compelled to enter into this disastrous conflict because of the aggressive military spirit of the German Empire and its utter disregard of the rights of small nations and the honour of international treaties’. A sentence that followed is revealing: ‘We also greatly rejoice that a goodly number of our young men, members of our churches, have already volunteered for active service, and we do pray and hope that many more will follow them.’³⁰ Thus, in this pronouncement for public consumption in the fourth month of the war, the die was cast. Not only was Britain’s cause just, but the number of volunteers provided by the chapels was to be celebrated and the recruiting campaign encouraged.

It is likely that the local leaders of Nonconformity came to the decision to back the war effort wholeheartedly without the direct intervention of the most outspoken proponents of recruitment: there is no evidence to suggest that the likes of the Revd John Williams,

²⁹ One such example is the account of the sermon preached by the Revd F. Sparrow in August 1915, ‘Our Nation’s Greatness’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 24 August 1915, p. 5.

³⁰ ‘Churches and war’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 10 December 1914, p. 5.

Brynsiencyn, gave recruiting sermons from Swansea pulpits.³¹ However, two men from Swansea were amongst the signatories to ‘An Appeal to the Manhood of Wales’ (‘Apêl at Wŷr Cymru’), which was published in numerous newspapers in October 1914, and was described as a ‘Nonconformist War Manifesto’.³² The *Cambria Daily Leader* heartily approved of this ‘patriotic manifesto’, summarizing its contents on a page that was full of exhortations to Swansea’s young men to volunteer.³³

It is especially pertinent that the Swansea newspapers were enthusiastic in their support for recruiting efforts. One of the particular ways in which this worked itself out was in stoking a sense of competition between organizations as to who could provide the greatest number of recruits.³⁴ This rivalry operated at a variety of levels: it can be seen in the nationalistic rhetoric of figures such as Lloyd George, who urged his compatriots to volunteer to avoid the ignominy of being seen to be less loyal than the English, Scots or Irish.³⁵ It operated at the

³¹ The Revd John Williams preached at Cruglas chapel in September 1914, and at Trinity Church in October 1915, but the reports make no mention of any statements regarding recruiting: “‘Brynsiencyn’”, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 14 September 1914, p. 6; ‘Cruglas, Abertawe’, *Y Cymro*, 30 September 1914, p. 12; ‘Nodion o Abertawe’, *Y Darian*, 4 November 1915, p. 3.

³² ‘Nonconformist War Manifesto’, *Amman Valley Chronicle*, 3 October 1914, p. 4; ‘Welsh Leaders – A War Manifesto’, *Barmouth and County Advertiser*, 15 October 1914, p. 3. For the details of publication in six Welsh language newspapers, see: Gethin Matthews, ‘Eglwysi Anghydfurfiol Cymru a’r Rhyfel Mawr, 1914–15’, p. 48. The two Swansea signatories were John Williams of Waun Wen and the Revd J. Hywel Parry of Llansamlet. Three sons of the latter had volunteered; see, also, n. 46 and n. 53.

³³ ‘Carrying the flag of freedom’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 9 October 1914, p. 3.

³⁴ Neil Evans, ‘Military recruiting in Wales’, pp. 48-51.

³⁵ See, for example, the reports of his speech in Criccieth on 24 September 1914: ‘Mr Lloyd George – araeth annisgwyladwy yng Nghriccieth’, *Yr Herald Cymraeg*, 29 September 1914, p. 8; ‘Mr Lloyd George yng

level of the region or county, and at the level of the town. A report in a Cardiff newspaper in September 1914, which gloried in ‘Glamorgan’s great total’ of 22,500 recruits, broke the figure down by district and smugly sought to prove that Cardiff was way ahead of the other districts in the county.³⁶ However, the account in a Swansea newspaper disputed the figure of 1,100 given for Swansea, claiming it should have been 4,000.³⁷ When the Cardiff papers gave prominence to the fact that five men from one Sunday School class had volunteered, the *Cambria Daily Leader*’s retort was ‘We have done far better than that at Swansea’.³⁸

One item that became a staple of the *Cambria Daily Leader* in the later months of 1914 was the ‘Roll of Honour’, listing the names of the latest volunteers. A special souvenir edition published on 25 November 1914 organized the names by locality, and it declared:

West Wales has made a fine response. In giving evidence of it, we express the hope that the example of the brave lads whose names are below will inspire those who have not yet ‘fallen in’. The call is loud and clear. No man of recruiting age can hear it and disobey without dishonour.³⁹

Typical of many articles in the Swansea newspapers is the editorial published at the beginning of September 1914 which notes the volunteering record of numerous south Wales

Nghriccieth’, *Y Genedl Gymreig*, 29 September 1914, p. 8. Also, ‘Wales first’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 2 December 1914, p. 4.

³⁶ ‘22,500 recruits’, *South Wales Daily News*, 23 September 1914, p. 4.

³⁷ ‘The recruiting figures’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 23 September 1914, p. 5.

³⁸ ‘One better than Cardiff’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 9 September 1914, p. 6.

³⁹ *Cambria Daily Leader*, 25 November 1914, p. 6.

towns, before declaring: 'And with pride we can now say that Swansea has as honourable a place on the roll.'⁴⁰

It is also important to note the influence of rivalry at a more local level. In Swansea's newspapers clubs and societies made a great show of the number of young men they had provided for the armed forces. Rugby clubs, in particular, boasted of their patriotic commitment to the war effort and, as can be seen in the report that almost all of the players of the Baycliffe, Mynyddbach and Mansel clubs had volunteered, there was a domino effect.⁴¹ As the teams publicly enlisted *en bloc*, it provided a challenge for other local teams to emulate their commitment, or risk being seen as lacking in masculine virtues. However, the 'Roll of Honour' that was printed on many occasions by the *Cambria Daily Leader* from late September through to November 1914 was principally arranged by workplace. Again, this can be read as a competition, in which the employers sought to assert their patriotism and loyalty by the length of their list of volunteers: 'Swansea's sons who are doing their duty'.⁴² Thus although the emphasis of this article is upon the role of chapels as foci of recruitment, it is important to bear in mind that the young men who volunteered were also associated with other institutions and networks. Many individuals can be named who appear on the 'rolls of honour' of both their chapels and their workplaces: some of these are known to have been

⁴⁰ 'Duty's many calls', *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 2 September 1914, p. 4. See also 'Welsh recruiting', *South Wales Daily News*, 11 September 1914, p. 6.

⁴¹ 'Footballers to the fore', *South Wales Daily Post*, 7 September 1914.

⁴² This is how the men are referred to in 'Roll of Honour', *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 16 September 1914, p. 3.

See the special souvenir edition of the *Cambrian Daily Leader*, published on 23 October 1914, and its masthead listing the attributes 'patience', 'endurance' and 'valour'.

associated with sports teams.⁴³ In an urban society such as Swansea the young men encountered pressure from diverse institutions to ‘do their bit’.

In this febrile atmosphere, in which ‘loyalty’ and ‘duty’ were commodities to be measured and displayed, a debate raged between Anglicans and Nonconformists as to who was contributing most to the war effort. On a visit to the Rhondda valley in October 1914, a correspondent of *The Times* noted ‘the keenest rivalry between Churchpeople and Nonconformists as to which will supply the larger number of recruits’; to him this ‘healthy rivalry’ was a boon, as it helped ‘towards the accomplishment of a great patriotic undertaking’.⁴⁴

Thus, while the sincerity of Nonconformist ministers who cited the justness of the British cause was undoubtedly genuine, there were also other motivations at work as they spoke publicly in favour of recruitment. They had to be seen to be supporting the war effort to refute any suggestions that they were less ‘loyal’ than the Anglican clergy. There are many examples of Swansea Nonconformist ministers sharing platforms with Anglican vicars and others at recruiting meetings in the early months of the war. At one of the biggest and most publicized recruiting meetings in Swansea, held at the Albert Hall on 16 September 1914, there was a variety of speakers from the fields of local politics and industry, and an array of clergymen that included the local rabbi and a Catholic priest as well as Anglicans and Nonconformists. The speech of the Revd James Owen (retired minister of Mount Pleasant

⁴³ The list of thirteen volunteers from Tirdonkin colliery in September 1914 includes five men from Caersalem Newydd; the list of nine volunteers from Mynydd Newydd colliery includes three from Caersalem Newydd and two from Mynydd Bach: ‘Roll of Honour’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 19 September 1914, p. 6; ‘Roll of Honour’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 22 September 1914, p. 3. See also: Gethin Matthews, *Gwrol Ryfelwyr Caersalem Newydd* (Treboeth, 2014), pp. 11-12.

⁴⁴ ‘Miner soldiers’, *The Times*, 6 October 1914, p. 3

Baptist church) was particularly well received by the *South Wales Daily News*, which reprinted a sizeable section of his ‘notable speech’. The reporter also included many indications of the audience’s response, such as ‘it was better to die fighting for liberty than to live the life of a slave (Cheers.)’⁴⁵. There are other examples of recruiting meetings being held on chapel premises where Anglican priests spoke alongside Nonconformist ministers.⁴⁶

Of those chapel ministers who spoke at Swansea recruiting meetings, perhaps the most prominent was the Revd H. C. Mander, minister of Mount Pleasant Baptist church. He addressed a public meeting at the Congregational Schoolroom, Cockett, on 1 October with a speech that ‘roused the audience to enthusiasm’, according to the glowing report in the *South Wales Daily Post*, which declared him a ‘Patriotic Swansea Pastor’. A summary of Mander’s arguments make it clear that his logic followed the same as that of many other ministers: as Germany had adopted a ‘brutal doctrine’ which ‘denie[d] all that is in the Christian religion and was contrary to the Sermon on the Mount’, the ‘present attitude of Britain’ was ‘justifiable’. The minister proudly declared that forty members of his flock had volunteered to serve.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ ‘Swansea’s lead’, *South Wales Daily News*, 17 September 1914, p. 6. See also ‘Abertawe to the front’, *South Wales Weekly Post*, 19 September 1914, p. 9.

⁴⁶ For one example where an Anglican curate (Revd W Scudamore, St Paul’s, Landore) spoke at a nonconformist venue alongside the Revd H. C. Mander, see: ‘Carrying the flag of freedom’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 9 October 1914, p. 3. For another, when the vicar of Llansamlet (Revd M. Griffiths) spoke in the vestry of Seion, Llansamlet alongside the Revd G. Hywel Parry (minister of Bethel), see: ‘Still there is room’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 21 October 1914, p. 6.

⁴⁷ ‘Patriotic Swansea Pastor’ *South Wales Daily Post*, 2 October 1914, p. 3.

As well as providing recruits, the chapels sought to aid the war effort in many different ways during the early months of the war. Practical assistance was offered to recruits, with chapels providing space and facilities for servicemen to engage in constructive pastimes (and thus away from the temptations of public houses): Mount Pleasant chapel was one of many that provided a club house for recruits.⁴⁸ A number of chapels organized groups to knit or sew garments for soldiers.⁴⁹ The chapels directed their fund-raising efforts to charitable concerns that sprang up from the war situation, such as the Prince of Wales' National Relief Fund and the Belgian Refugees' Fund.⁵⁰

Yet there was still some disquiet echoing through the public sphere as questions arose as to whether the chapelgoers were doing all they should in the core requirement of encouraging recruitment to the Army. A newspaper report in October 1914 noted that:

Seventy per cent of the recruits who have left Swansea to join branches of Lord Kitchener's Army have stated on their attestation papers that they belong to the Church of England denomination. This seems strange having regard to the strength of Nonconformity in this district.⁵¹

⁴⁸ 'Swansea and the recruits', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 27 October 1914, p. 4.

⁴⁹ 'Women of Morryston', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 6 November 1914, p. 5; 'Making soldier's garments', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 11 December 1914, p. 4; 'Sewing shirts for soldiers', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 26 February 1915, p. 2.

⁵⁰ 'Approaching £13,000', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 21 October 1914, p. 2; 'Local Belgian Refugees' Fund', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 9 December 1914, p. 3.

⁵¹ 'Seventy per cent', *South Wales Weekly Post*, 10 October 1914, p. 3.

The reporter spoke to Major Anderson who confirmed the figures, and suggested that perhaps men with no strong religion convictions ‘fell in with the crowd to escape tasks which might be allotted them if they stayed away [from church]’.⁵²

Some local Anglicans sought to impugn the contribution of Welsh Nonconformists. A Llansamlet Church magazine claimed that ‘Welsh Disestablishers have hitherto abstained from enlisting in Lord Kitchener’s Army’, and included a poem which castigated the Nonconformists’ lack of commitment. The *Cambria Daily Leader*’s editorial called it ‘a particularly offensive instance’, countering with the example of two Llansamlet ministers, one who had sent three sons to fight, the other, two.⁵³

Within a month of this episode, the *Cambria Daily Leader* sought to address the issue head-on by enquiring of the town’s churches and chapels how many of their congregation had volunteered for service. A large number responded, resulting in a list published on 1 December 1914 detailing how many had enlisted from over fifty places of worship, the majority of which were Nonconformist.⁵⁴ It must be acknowledged that this data is problematic. The figures were supplied by the individual chapels and churches, and it is not known how each institution counted its number of volunteers. Perhaps some chapels only counted those who were members or regular attenders at the services, while others included

⁵² For further examples of the problems with accepting the religious affiliation stated on recruiting forms, see: Gervase Phillips, ‘Welsh soldiers in the British Army’, 98-9.

⁵³ ‘A strange production’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 5 November 1914, p. 4. The minister with three sons serving was doubtless the Revd J. Hywel Parry.

⁵⁴ ‘Churches and war’, *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 1 December 1914, p. 6. See also the editorial, *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 3 December 1914, p. 4.

those with family connections. It is certain that some figures were inflated to stress the chapel or church's contribution to the war effort. There is a degree of uncertainty in the numbers given: Brynhyfryd Baptist chapel gave the figure of 'six or eight', while St Mark's (Anglican) Church, Waun Wen, and St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church gave round figures of 100 and 300 respectively, indicating that they gave an estimate rather than rigorously counting the volunteers.

However, despite the problems with the individual returns, it is still possible to come to a conclusion from the data that the chapels of Swansea were making a notable contribution to the war effort. From the four principal denominations, 640 adherents were noted as volunteers; this was a larger number than the 480 from the Anglican churches and the 350 from the Roman Catholics. Certainly, a conclusion was drawn by the newspaper itself, which declared that 'There is certainly no reproach open to Nonconformity'.

The next pattern to note is that there was a substantial difference in the numbers that had volunteered from the various places of worship, ranging from the single-figure totals recorded by twelve chapels to the 300 estimated by St Joseph's. A large part of the variance can be explained simply by the size of the congregation, and so the data in Table 1 includes the number of members in each chapel, from which an indication of the proportion of the chapel membership that had volunteered in the first four months of the war can be obtained.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ It is acknowledged that this measure can only be taken as a very rough guide, given that the chapels would have counted adherents as well as full members in their total, and given the uncertainty about how widely the different chapels cast the net.

Table 1: The numbers of volunteers from various Swansea churches and chapels, as noted in the *Cambrian* 1914⁵⁶

Name of Chapel	Language	Denomination	No of Recruits (Dec 1914)	Estimate of membership	% re
Bethesda	W	B	12	332	
Capel Gomer	W	B	15	409	
Libanus, Cwmbwrla	W	B	22	449	
Philadephia, Hafod	W	B	12	198	
Brynhyfryd Baptist Chapel	W	B	“6 or 8”	355	ei
York Place Chapel	E	B	7	178	
Mount Pleasant	E	B	30	832	
Tabernacle, Skinner Street	E	B	55	237	
Pantygwydr Uplands	E	B	12	221	
Mount Calvary, Port Tennant	E	B	6	--	

⁵⁶ Recruitment figures from ‘Churches and War’ and the supplementary figures given in ‘Churches and the War’, *Cambrian Daily* membership figures for the Baptists, Calvinistic Methodists and Congregationalists come from the denominational handbooks for 1914 where the information comes from the handbook for 1917. The figures for the other chapels are the number of communicants in 1914.

Mount Calvary [Manselton]	E	B	6	180
St Helens, Madoc Street	E	B	42	136
Memorial, Walter Road	E	B	20	295
Mount Zion	E	B	22	170
Siloam, Pentre Estyll	W	I	12	606
Siloh, Glandwr	W	I	15	599
Zoar, Carmarthen Road	W	I	12	296
Henrietta Street	W	I	6	181
Ebenezer	W	I	18	643
Cwmbwrla Congregational	W	I	26	458
Carmarthen Road	E	I	40	559
Danygraig	E	I	30	118
Fleet Street	E	I	14	65
Fabians Bay	E	I	15	333
Manselton Congregational Chapel	E	I	20	197
St Helens, St Helens Road	E	I	10	190
Hill Chapel (Congregational)	E	I	5	235
Rhyddings Chapel, Finsbury Terrace (Congregational)	E	I	12	217
St Paul's, St Helens Road (Congregational)	E	I	6	231
Walter Road Chapel, English Congregational	E	I	15	276
Babell, Cwmbwrla	W	CM	4	249
Cruglas	W	CM	5	145
Alexandra Road	E	CM	20	205
Argyle	E	CM	12	358
Rhyddings	E	CM	12	144

Terrace Road	E	CM	5	100
Bethel, Manselton	E	CM	6	149
Brunswick Chapel, St Helens Road	E	WM	51	267
St Albans Road Wesleyan Chapel	E	WM	4	56
Hafod United Methodist	E	United Methodist	18	150
Oxford Street	E	United Methodist	20	180
Pell Street	E	Primitive Methodist	20	95
Albert Hall		Non-denominational	155	
Central Hall		Forward Movement	22	
Forward Movement Hall, St Thomas		Forward Movement	10	
Salvation Army Hall		Salvation Army	30	
High Street Unitarian Church		Unitarian	21	150
Goat Street Synagogue		Jewish	25	
St John's Church, Hafod		C of E	69	
St Thomas Church		C of E	90	
St Gabriel's		C of E	100	
St Jude's		C of E	46	
St Matthew's and St George, High Street		C of E	22	
St Mark's, Waunwen		C of E	100	

St Luke's Cwmbwrla	C of E	"50 to 60"
St Joseph's Roman Catholic	RC	300
St David's (RC)	RC	50

Denomination:

B = Baptist

CM = Calvinistic Methodist

I = Independent

WM = Wesleyan Methodist

The variance shown by this analysis is very large, ranging from 1.6 per cent for Babel, Cwmbwrla, to a barely believable 31 per cent for St Helens Baptist chapel. However, the average figures for the three largest denominations are broadly similar: 6.6 per cent for the Baptists, 4.9 per cent for the Independents and 4.7 per cent for the Calvinistic Methodists. Thus, there is no evidence that there was a substantial difference in the recruiting patterns between the denominations as a whole.

The outliers in the list – such as the four chapels in the three principal denominations giving figures of over 20 per cent of their membership as volunteers – make it problematic to conduct a rigorous analysis of the data. All four of these were English-language chapels, and so separating the chapels by language gives the figures of 7.4 per cent of the membership of English-language chapels as opposed to 3.4 per cent of the Welsh-language chapels. For the three principal denominations, the English-language chapels give figures that are over twice those of the Welsh: 8.6 per cent as opposed to 3.9 per cent for the Baptists; 6.9 per cent as opposed to 3.2 per cent for the Independents; and 5.8 per cent as opposed to 2.3 per cent for the Calvinistic Methodists. However, a conclusion that the Welsh-language chapels were less enthusiastic in their support for the war than their English-language counterparts must be treated with caution.

Firstly, the sample is small enough for a few outliers to skew the data, and – given the problems with the reliability of the numbers – it is possible that the enthusiasm of some chapels to report the highest possible number of volunteers has distorted the picture.

Secondly, there are local factors to be considered. The Welsh- and English-language chapels

were not necessarily in the same areas, with a preponderance of Welsh-language chapels in the northern part of the district and English-language chapels in the south, closer to the docks and the centre of town. It is well established that recruitment patterns were strongly influenced by local factors, and in particular economic considerations.⁵⁷ Thus, it is reasonable to expect differences between an area where (male) employment was highly dependent on the docks trade, and an area where coalmining or tinplate production predominated. Perhaps a degree of the divergence between the Welsh- and English-language chapels comes from the uncertainty of employment for dockers, labourers and sailors in the early months of the war.

Another factor to be considered is the age profile of the chapels' membership. In places in urban Wales which were on the linguistic frontier between Welsh and English in this period, such as the Swansea district, there was a tendency for fewer younger people to speak Welsh than their parents' generation.⁵⁸ One of the consequences of this was the establishment of English-language daughter chapels by the older Welsh causes, the better to secure the younger generation's adherence to their parents' religious beliefs.⁵⁹ It follows from this that there could be a higher proportion of younger men in the English-language congregations, leading to a higher rate of recruitment. Therefore, the variance in the recruitment from Welsh- and English- language chapels probably can be mostly explained by these factors. Although it is not possible to ignore the general pattern of fewer recruits from Welsh-

⁵⁷ Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies 1914 – 1916* (Barnsley, 2007), pp. 106-10.

⁵⁸ Heini Gruffudd, 'Iaith gudd y mwyafrif: y Gymraeg yn Abertawe ganol y bedwaredd ganrif ar bymtheg', in Hywel Teifi Edwards (ed.), *Cwm Tawe* (Llandysul, 1993) pp. 105-42 (124-5).

⁵⁹ R. Tudur Jones, 'Nonconformity and the Welsh language in the nineteenth century', in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains, 1801-1911* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 239-63 (256-60).

language chapels, it is unsafe to conclude that this reflects a greater degree of resistance to the war.⁶⁰

Despite the *Cambria Daily Leader*'s demonstration of local Nonconformity's contribution of manpower to the war effort, claims of the supposed lack of loyalty of the chapels did not disappear entirely, and they reappeared in the Swansea newspapers at various junctures during the course of the war.⁶¹ Once it had entered the public discourse, the notion that 70 per cent or more of recruits belonged to the Established Church was difficult to eradicate. Nonconformist ministers repeatedly had to refute the statistic, and the Swansea newspapers also showed their disapproval of the claim.⁶² Bishop Edwards of St Asaph repeated the assertion that 70 per cent of Welsh recruits were Anglican in March 1915, which was decried as 'mischievous' in a *Cambria Daily Leader* editorial.⁶³ The Dean of Lincoln came to Llanelli in October 1915 and declared that 80 per cent of the 'Welsh Fusiliers' [sic] were Churchmen.⁶⁴ The next month the claim of the rector of Llanystumdwy that 70 per cent of Welsh recruits were Anglicans was decried in a *Cambria Daily Leader* editorial as 'a stupid assertion'. The newspaper declared that the rector's insinuation that a pro-German Welsh preacher was inhibiting recruitment was 'dragging the whole of Welsh Nonconformity under

⁶⁰ The complications of local and regional patterns within Wales make this a complex issue, but there is a consensus that as a whole the volunteering rate amongst Welsh-speakers was less than that of English-speakers. Considering north Wales, Cyril Parry put more emphasis on cultural considerations than upon economic factors, in 'Gwynedd and the Great War', ante, 14, 1 (1988), 78-117 (82-8).

⁶¹ Many examples can also be found in the *Western Mail* from early 1915: see, for example: 'Welsh Nonconformists and the war', *Western Mail*, 25 January 1915, p. 7; 'An appeal to the churches', *Western Mail*, 29 January 1915, p. 6; 'Nonconformists and the war', *Western Mail*, 30 January 1915, p. 9.

⁶² 'Joint of two eras', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 9 December 1914, p. 3.

⁶³ 'The views of outsiders', *Cambrian Daily Leader* 17 March 1915, p. 4.

⁶⁴ 'Brethren in England', *South Wales Daily Post*, 5 October 1915, p. 5.

suspicion'.⁶⁵ In May 1917, whilst arguing for a further postponement of the Disestablishment Act, Bishop Edwards of St Asaph repeated his claim in the House of Lords that 'the great majority of those who volunteered for foreign service from Wales were Churchmen', leading to a strongly worded editorial in the *Cambria Daily Leader* that rejected these statistics, declaring 'Dissent has been as loyal as the Establishment'.⁶⁶

Promoters of recruitment could make explicit statements about the chapels impeding the flow of volunteers to the Army. At a major conference held in Swansea in May 1915 regarding the faltering recruiting campaign, the chairman of the West Glamorgan Recruiting Committee, H. N. Miers, 'told of one instance where after a recruiting meeting a number of young men had a meeting and decided not to join the Army, and he was sorry to say that the Nonconformist minister on the next day preached a sermon against recruiting'. There were vigorous responses to this statement defending Nonconformists' commitment to the recruiting effort. At the meeting itself a Congregational minister declared that in his denomination they had received 'instructions from headquarters to encourage [recruiting] in every way'.⁶⁷ Whether the incident could be substantiated was the subject of speculation in the pages of the *Cambria Daily Leader*.⁶⁸

Thus, it is possible to understand the numerous pronouncements in the Swansea papers by Nonconformist chapels regarding their contributions to the war effort not just as pride or

⁶⁵ 'Notes and comments', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 5 November 1915, p. 4.

⁶⁶ 'The Welsh Act', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 17 May 1917, p. 2.

⁶⁷ 'Recruiting's ebb', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 17 May 1915, p. 7. See also 'Swansea Valley recruiting', *Llais Llafur*, 22 May 1915, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Editorial, 'Swansea's sacrifice', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 18 May 1915, p. 4; 'Mr Miers' recruiting statement', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 20 May 1915, p. 6.

boastfulness, but as bulwarks against accusations of disloyalty. The numbers of recruits associated with particular chapels were regularly publicized in the newspapers as evidence of their commitment: the Rolls of Honour were visible badges of loyalty. One chapel for which this was particularly the case was the aforementioned Mount Pleasant Baptist chapel. The number of volunteers rose from the figure of forty quoted in September 1914 to '60 to 70' in February 1915.⁶⁹ When a Roll of Honour was unveiled in the chapel in March 1916 the newspapers reported it had 'about 150 names' on it.⁷⁰ The number swelled further as the war continued, so that by its end there were 289 names on the Roll of Honour, a figure commended by the Swansea newspapers as 'a great war record'.⁷¹ The Revd Mander, minister of Mount Pleasant Baptist church, was one of numerous Swansea nonconformist ministers who volunteered to serve as a chaplain to the forces.⁷² After a year ministering to soldiers on the Western Front he was back in Swansea, and was active in delivering lectures to chapels in West Glamorgan and beyond, sharing his thoughts on 'A Chaplain's Work in France'.⁷³

Another chapel for which the Roll of Honour was a visible symbol of its commitment was Tabernacle (Baptist), Waun Wen. When it was unveiled in February 1916 it contained 106

⁶⁹ 'Stranded abroad', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 5 February 1915, p. 6.

⁷⁰ 'A Roll of Honour', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 6 March 1916, p. 6.

⁷¹ 'Fighting Baptists', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 18 February 1919, p. 5.

⁷² Other Swansea ministers who served either as Army chaplains or were attached to the YMCA include the Revds F. Waldo Roberts (Dinas Noddfa); D. Picton Evans (Philadelphia, Morriston); W. F. Knight (Mount Calvary Baptist, Manselton) and William Jones (Forward Movement, Morriston).

⁷³ 'Swansea', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 15 May 1917, p. 4; 'Landore', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 18 July 1917, p. 4; 'Fforestfach', *Herald of Wales*, 4 May 1918, p. 2; 'Chaplain to the forces', *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 12 June 1916, p. 3.

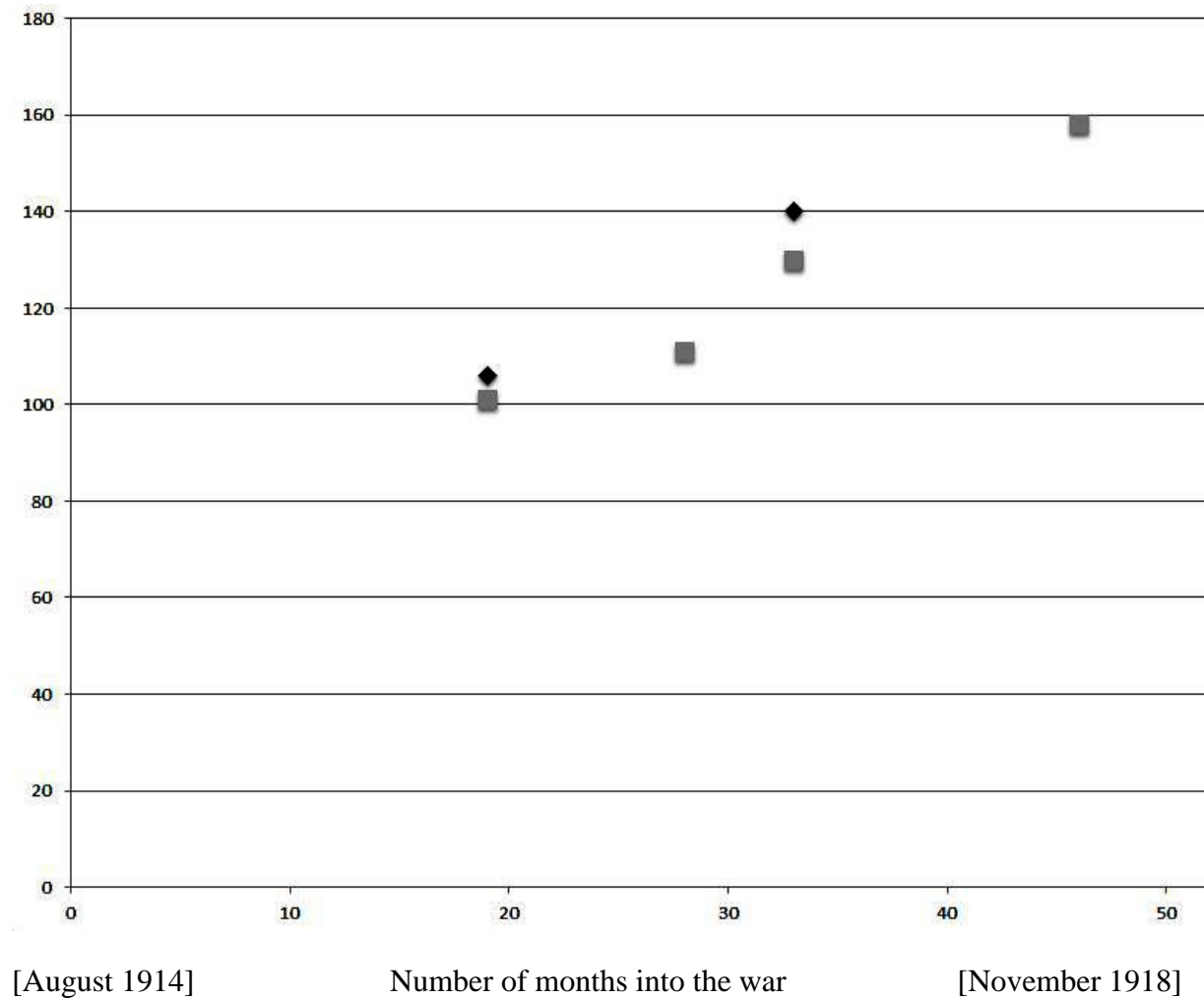
names (of whom 101 had been in the Bible class).⁷⁴ Eight months later the roll contained 111 men from the Bible class and by April 1917 there were 140 men, of whom 130 belonged to the Bible class.⁷⁵ ‘Nearly 160’ men of the class, commended as a ‘Patriotic Bible class’, were serving by May 1918.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ ‘Tabernacle’s Roll of Honour’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 14 February 1916, p. 3

⁷⁵ ‘Three sons serving’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 23 Nov 1916 p. 1; ‘Tabernacle’s proud record’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 20 April 1917, p. 2.

⁷⁶ ‘Patriotic Bible class’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 7 May 1918, p. 3.

Figure 1: The growth of the Roll of Honour at Tabernacle, Waun Wen



◆ - Number of names on Roll of Honour

■ - Number of men from Bible Class

It is likely that the vast majority of chapels established these Rolls of Honour in the early months of the war, and kept them on display in prominent places throughout the conflict.⁷⁷

Very few of these original documents (as opposed to those created after the war's conclusion) have survived in the Swansea area, but there is a 'Rhol o Anrhydedd' ('Roll of Honour') in Mynydd Bach chapel, which lists the first nineteen men of the chapel to volunteer. In capitals at the bottom of the roll, it says 'Gweddiwch drostynt' ('Pray for them').⁷⁸

One notable feature of the Mynydd Bach Roll of Honour is the number of volunteers who served with the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC): seven out of nineteen. This might lead one to the conclusion that these men chose a non-combatant unit in order to square their religious beliefs with their desire to serve. There is a similar over-representation of men serving with the RAMC in the neighbouring Baptist chapel, Caersalem Newydd: sixteen of the 81 names. However, care must be taken here, as the majority of these men were members of the Treboeth Silver Band, who joined the Welsh Field Ambulance as Territorials in July 1913.⁷⁹ Most of them were colliers, working either at Mynydd Newydd or Tirdonkin mines. Thus, although there are many chapels where there is a higher than expected number of

⁷⁷ For other examples of chapels unveiling their Roll of Honour see 'War's justification', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 26 April 1915, p. 4 [St Andrew's Presbyterian – 'over 20' names]; 'Hafod's Roll of Honour', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 27 December 1916, p. 2 [Philadelphia, Hafod – twenty-five names]; 'Members with the colours', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 1 January 1917, p. 3 [Mount Calvary, Manselton – forty-five names]. The fact that most chapel Rolls of Honour produced at the end of the war are organized by date of enlistment rather than alphabetically indicates that they were created from a list that was updated as the war progressed. See: Gethin Matthews, *Gwrol Ryfelwyr Caersalem Newydd*, p. 6.

⁷⁸ Mynydd Bach chapel also has the Roll of Honour created after the end of the war, containing the names of fifty-nine men and one woman who served in the armed forces.

⁷⁹ Gethin Matthews, *Gwrol Ryfelwyr Caersalem Newydd*, p. 6.

recruits who served with the RAMC, and it cannot be discounted that the men's faith guided them to join a non-combatant unit, it is also possible that this pattern can be explained by other, local, factors.

A revealing example of a chapel that was commended for the number of its recruits in spite of its small congregation appeared in a report from January 1916:

Carmel Church is not one of the largest in Morriston, but has the good record of having 36 of its members and adherents with the Colours. The members have subscribed so as to supply each with 'The Soldiers' and Sailors' Pocket Book', published jointly by the Baptist and Congregational Unions, and they have also supplied their 'boys' with scarves, etc. A collection is made every Sunday in 'the soldiers' and sailors' box' in the lobby, and as many as 10 to 15 of the above number receive gifts or money every month.⁸⁰

An incident in Carmel chapel offers a glimpse into how the faithful in the middle of an unprecedented war were able to reconcile their belief in a just and loving God with the horrors of which they were fully aware. Soldiers home on leave were routinely the recipients of presentations from their chapels, given in an evening of entertainment. There are hundreds of reports of these meetings, especially in the latter stages of the war: the soldiers' gifts routinely included medals and wallets, often Bibles or other religious books, and frequently valuable gifts such as wristwatches.⁸¹ In April 1916, Lance-Corporal Thomas Llewelyn

⁸⁰ *Herald of Wales*, 22 January 1916, p. 8.

⁸¹ See for example the reports of numerous such events in local chapels, 'Home from the front', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 18 January 1917, p. 2.

Evans of the Welsh Regiment received a watch and cigarettes in an event organized by the Carmel Young People's Guild, in gratitude for his return unharmed from the battles around Ypres and Loos. One of the ladies present declared her belief that it was the prayers of the Carmel congregation that had kept him safe. Evans replied: 'Pam na allwn gredu hynny?' ('Why should we not believe that?').⁸²

Chapels' annual reports often echo this idea that the prayers of the congregation were instrumental in ensuring the well-being of their brothers-in-arms (both physically and spiritually). The Revd Samuel Williams, minister of Siloh, Landore, wrote in his address in the chapel's annual report for 1915 of his gratitude that none of the twenty-eight men from his flock serving in the armed forces had been killed. He continued: 'Gweddiwn am iddynt hwy, ynghyd a'r lleill sydd yn y gwersylloedd gwahanol yn paratoi [sic] gael nawdd y Nef dros eu personau a'u cymeriadau' ('We pray that they, together with the others who are preparing in the various camps, shall receive the protection of Heaven for their persons and their characters').⁸³ The annual report for 1916 echoed these sentiments, again giving thanks to the Lord that none of the fifty-three servicemen from Siloh had been killed, declaring: 'Gweddiwn yn ddibaid ar iddynt gael eu diogelu yn gorphorol ac enidiol rhag dinystr y magnelau, a rhag picellau tanllyd y fall yn anad dim' ('We pray unceasingly that they may be kept safe in body and spirit from the destruction of the artillery and above all from the fiery arrows of the devil').⁸⁴ Again in 1917, Siloh's report could take solace that none of the sixty-eight men serving had been killed: 'Mawrhawn y gadwriaeth eithriadol fwynheir gan blant Siloh mewn byddin a llynges, a diolchwn yn ddyddiol am dani, gan ddisgwyl gwawr dydd

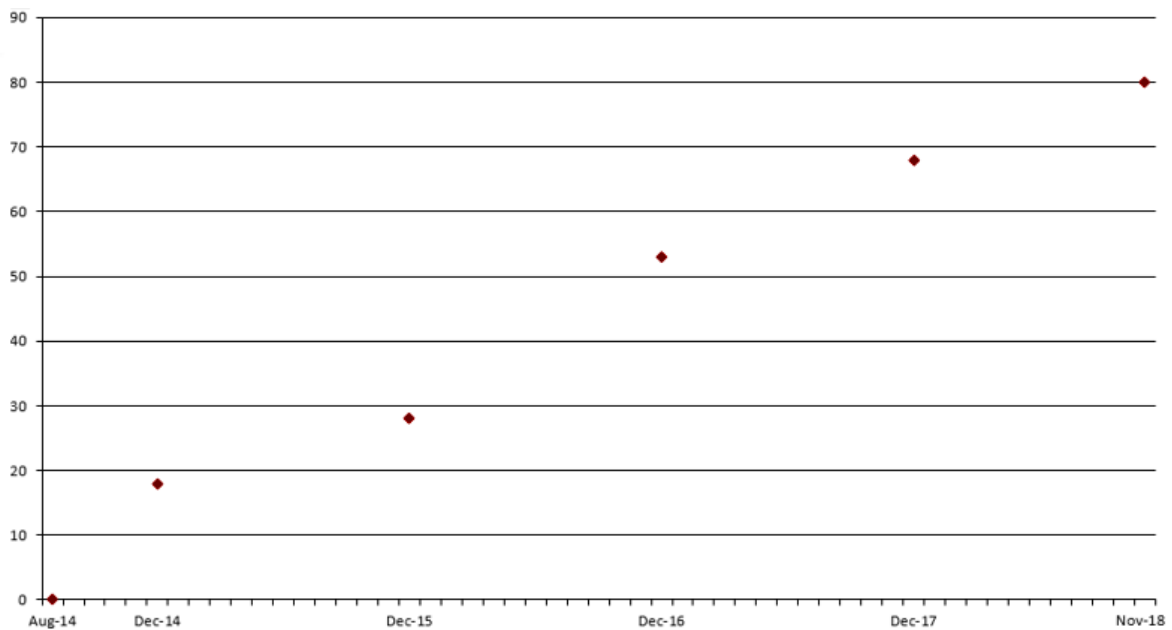
⁸² 'Treforus', *Y Darian*, 4 May 1916, p. 6; 'Morrison', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 13 April 1916, p. 1.

⁸³ S. Williams, 'Anerchiad', *Adroddiad Blynyddol Siloh, 1915*, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Y swyddogion, 'Anerchiad', *Adroddiad Blynyddol Siloh, 1916*, p. 2.

heddwch i dori ar ein byd.’ (‘We extol the remarkable protection that is enjoyed by Siloh’s children in the army and navy, and we give thanks daily for it, as we await the dawn of the day of peace to break on our world’).⁸⁵

Figure 2: The growth of the number of servicemen named in Siloh’s Annual Reports



Similarly, the Annual Reports for Ebenezer echo these sentiments that the congregation’s prayers are contributing to ensuring the safety (both physical and spiritual) of the men in uniform: ‘Yr ydym yn gweddio ar eu rhan, gan hyderu y diogelir eu bywydau a’u cymeriadau, ac y cawn eu gweled eto yn dychwelyd i’n plith yn iach a dianaf’ (‘We pray for them, trusting that their lives and characters will be safeguarded, and that we shall see them

⁸⁵ Y swyddogion, ‘Anerchiad’, *Adroddiad Blynyddol Siloh, 1917*, p. 2.

again returning to our midst, healthy and unhurt').⁸⁶ The Annual Reports for both Siloh and Ebenezer display concerns about how the war affected the smooth running of the cause. Siloh's report for 1915 begged for assistance in running the Sunday Schools, now that so many of the class teachers had been called away. In the report for 1916, Ebenezer's minister lamented the fact that so many members had left the congregation over the previous two years without securing a letter of commendation so that they could join another chapel.⁸⁷

Yet in trying to make sense of the situation, even after the dark year of 1917, the chapels' leaders could try to discern some divine purpose in the conflict.

Mantais yw edrych ar yr argyfwng presennol fel *atebiad* oddiwrth Dduw i'r hyn oedd yn codi o'n sefyllfa fel gwledydd. A gadawer i ni wrando arno fel atebiad sydd yn dod oddiwrth 'Dduw ein *hiachawdwriaeth*' – atebiad yn cael ei amcanu i'n gwella a'n puro. Ac os prawf yn iachawdwriaeth i wledydd ein Cyfaindir, bydd y fendith yn fwy na digon i gyfarfod â'r colledion i gyd.⁸⁸

(It is advantageous to look upon the present crisis as an *answer* from God to that which was arising from our situation as countries. And let us listen to it as an answer that is coming from 'the God of our *salvation*' – an answer that is designed to improve us and purify us. And if it proves to be a salvation for the countries of our Continent, it will be a blessing that more than makes up for all of the losses.)

⁸⁶ W. James, 'Anerchiad', *Eglwys Ebenezer Adroddiad, 1914*, p. 2.

⁸⁷ W. James, 'Anerchiad', *Eglwys Ebenezer Adroddiad, 1916*, p. 2.

⁸⁸ W. James, 'Anerchiad', *Eglwys Ebenezer Adroddiad, 1917*, p. 2.

When a chapel did suffer the loss of a member while serving on the front line, he was, as one would expect, mourned and commemorated by the community. The first Wesleyan casualty of the war from Swansea, Sergeant-Major Ernie Huxtable was mourned as ‘a Devout Christian worker’ and ‘Our Hero’.⁸⁹ As early as 1916, Swansea chapels were establishing plaques to those who had fallen. Two brass tablets were unveiled at Alexandra Road Chapel in November 1916, one naming all those from the chapel who had served and the other commemorating Corporal David Dupree, killed while serving in the Welsh Guards.⁹⁰ The reports from Tabernacle Chapel, Waun Wen, also made references to the numbers of men from the congregation who had been wounded or killed, such as the account from April 1917 which noted that ‘Seven had made the supreme sacrifice, one had been reported missing and 25 had been wounded’.⁹¹ On the death of a chapel member, it became usual for the organist to play the ‘Dead March’ from Handel’s *Saul* as the congregation stood in mourning.⁹²

As well as being mourned by the individual chapels, there was a movement to note the collective contribution of Swansea’s Nonconformists to the roll of those who had died. A service was held in January 1917 to remember the ninety men connected with thirty-two local chapels who had ‘laid down their lives in the great struggle’.⁹³

⁸⁹ ‘Landore’, *Swansea and Gower Wesleyan Church Record*, 18, 10 (October 1914), 8-9.

⁹⁰ ‘Swansea memorial service’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 20 November 1916, p. 4. For more on Dupree see ‘Dai Dupree’, <http://war-memorials.swan.ac.uk/?p=250> [last accessed January 2017].

⁹¹ ‘Tabernacle’s proud record’.

⁹² See, for example, ‘Pentre Estyll’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 19 February 1917, p. 7; ‘Scroll of fame’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 3 July 1917, p. 3; ‘Memorial service at Cwm’, *South Wales Weekly Post*, 13 October 1917, p. 2.

⁹³ ‘Fallen Free Churchmen’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 8 January 1917, p. 1.

However, the devolved structures of the Nonconformist denominations meant that there was no central authority able to impose a common approach to all the stresses and strains raised by the war. The meetings of the local assemblies (*cymanfaoedd*) or the national unions could debate the issues and pass resolutions (such as the one noted earlier by the West Glamorgan Welsh Independents in December 1914).⁹⁴ On the other hand, there are reports of numerous series of meetings which reveal little debate on the business of fighting the war. In the reports of six meetings held by the Swansea district assembly of the Welsh Baptists between September 1914 and January 1917, only two resolutions were passed which had anything to do with the war.⁹⁵ This point also extends to the minutes of meetings in individual chapels: beyond a few references to collections for causes such as the military hospital, and allowing the building to be used for fund-raising concerts, there is nothing in the minute books of Caersalem Newydd.⁹⁶ In contrast to the lack of discussion of military matters, there was a constant stream of resolutions at local and district meetings regarding the evils of alcohol and the liquor trade.⁹⁷

The lack of dissent voiced by the chapels during the war could reflect the political reality that it took courage to express any opinion contrary to the prevailing discourse about the war. Any opinion that was lukewarm in its support for Britain's war effort could be seized on as an expression of disloyalty, with repercussions for both the individual and any chapel or

⁹⁴ See n. 30.

⁹⁵ September 1914: a resolution to present a Bible to every local Baptist volunteer ('Cwrdd Dosbarth Abertawe', *Seren Cymru*, 6 November 1914, p. 10), and May 1915: a resolution condemning the sinking of the *Lusitania* ('Cwrdd Dosbarth Abertawe', *Seren Cymru*, 11 June 1915, p. 11).

⁹⁶ Gethin Matthews, *Gwrol Ryfelwyr Caersalem Newydd*, pp. 3-4.

⁹⁷ For the report of a lively public meeting addressed by, among others, the Revd H. C. Mander and Dr J. A. Rawlings see: 'Workers would welcome prohibition', *South Wales Weekly Post*, 28 July 1916, p. 2.

denomination he or she might be seen as representing. Even statements from the pulpit that would, in normal circumstances, be taken as legitimate viewpoints could be subject to ridicule or worse if they went against the prevailing discourse. A minister speaking in Aberdulais declared that he could not conceive ‘of anything more like hell than war’, and his statement was scoffed at in the *Cambria Daily Leader* as a ‘strange outburst’.⁹⁸

Perhaps the most outspoken of Swansea’s ministers, and certainly the one who was most willing to run the risk of swimming against the tide of publicly-expressed opinion, was Dr J. A. Rawlings, minister of Sketty’s Wesleyan church. Despite all the portents suggesting that it would be a controversial move, he insisted on attempting to give a speech at his chapel on the subject of ‘The World’s Debt to Germany’ in late August 1914. The meeting was repeatedly disrupted as the minister tried to build a case that distinguished between the Kaiser and the German nation, with cries of ‘What about the Germans’ treatment of the Belgians?’ and renditions of ‘God save the King’.⁹⁹

In his public pronouncements, and as editor of the ‘Notes and Comments’ section of the monthly *Swansea and Gower Wesleyan Church Record*, Dr Rawlings’ position was nuanced. The very idea of war was utterly condemned. He wrote in November 1914 that war was ‘the Hound of Hell’, and that ‘The devil of militarism will not be cast out by the devil of War’.¹⁰⁰ Yet volunteers from the various Wesleyan churches were praised and their numbers counted and publicized. Dr Rawlings’ church in Sketty was particularly active in organizing refreshments and entertainment for the sixth battalion of the Welsh Regiment which was

⁹⁸ ““Hellish war””, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 24 March 1915, p. 3.

⁹⁹ ‘Sketty chapel scenes’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 31 August 1914, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Notes and Comments’, *Swansea and Gower Wesleyan Church Record*, 18, 11 (November 1914), 2.

stationed nearby, and established a 'Naval and Military Club'.¹⁰¹ The publication has numerous reports of Rolls of Honour being established by the churches, such as the one unveiled at Wesley Church in the spring of 1916 with 120 names on it.¹⁰² In the summer of 1916, Brunswick church held a special service at which four frames holding photographs of over seventy members in uniform faced the congregation.¹⁰³

Over the following months, Rawlings' refusal to abandon the Christian values of brotherly love and forgiveness continued to cause him trouble. He presided at a meeting of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in October 1915 at which Alderman David Davies (editor of the *South Wales Daily Post*) accused him and the organization of being 'pro-German'.¹⁰⁴ The fall-out from this was the very public resignation of J. Herbert Morgan from the position of secretary of the Sketty Wesleyan Brotherhood, of which Dr Rawlings was president. Morgan's communication, commended as a 'manly resignation letter of protest', was reprinted in the Swansea newspapers.¹⁰⁵ Dr Rawlings was not totally silenced by the numerous attacks on his position, but in the spring of 1916 he did withdraw from authoring the 'Notes and Comments' section. He declared that he had 'been plainly told that the views he holds on the question of war are an offence to the readers of the *Church Record*'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ 'Sketty', *Swansea and Gower Wesleyan Church Record*, 19, 6 (June 1915), 10; 'Sketty', *Swansea and Gower Wesleyan Church Record*, 19, 12 (December 1915), 10; 'Sketty', *Swansea and Gower Wesleyan Church Record*, 20, 3 (March 1916), 13.

¹⁰² 'Wesley', *Swansea and Gower Wesleyan Church Record*, 20, 5 (May 1916), 2.

¹⁰³ 'Brunswick', *Swansea and Gower Wesleyan Church Record*, 20, 7 (July 1916), 4.

¹⁰⁴ 'The Fellowship of Reconciliation', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 20 October 1915, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ 'Dr J. A. Rawlings repudiated', *South Wales Weekly Post*, 30 October 1915, p. 7; 'Dr Rawlings' attitude', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 23 October 1915, p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ 'Notes and Comments', *Swansea and Gower Wesleyan Church Record*, 20, 4 (April 1916), 1.

One development which was roundly condemned by Dr Rawlings and by numerous other chapel ministers in early 1916 was the introduction of conscription. As Robert Pope has noted, this development challenged the Nonconformists' most cherished tenets of the voluntary principle and freedom of conscience, and undermined the argument that Britain's war was 'against militarism in the name of freedom'.¹⁰⁷ Besides the philosophical problems consequential to the introduction of compulsory military service, there arose the very real problem of how to treat those who refused to serve in the military, including, of course, many who cited Biblical authority for their standpoint. As is well testified, the treatment of conscientious objectors could be very harsh, and this led to disquiet among Nonconformist ministers. A group of twenty-seven Swansea ministers signed a letter sent to the prime minister, H. H. Asquith, the local MP Alfred Mond and others which, while declaring that they had 'no sympathy with the slackers and shirkers', raised concerns about the harsh treatment meted out to genuine conscientious objectors. They contended that:

It is a betrayal of the cause, for which so many have nobly suffered, to break a man's conscience by forcing him into a service which he sincerely and evidently conceives to be wrong. It is plain that the conscientious objector is useless as a soldier. He may, however, become formidable as a martyr.¹⁰⁸

The meeting of the West Glamorgan Baptists in June 1916 also reflected this concern. The gathering unanimously passed a resolution 'That this Conference expresses its indignation at

¹⁰⁷ Robert Pope, 'Welsh Nonconformists and the State', pp. 175-7.

¹⁰⁸ 'Conscientious Objectors', *Cambria Daily Leader*, 5 June 1916, p. 3.

the vile language used by some of the military officers in the training centres. We also deprecate the cruel treatment dealt out to the conscientious objectors, and to those who feel they cannot agree with the behests of the officers.’¹⁰⁹ Yet it does not appear that in any of the annual meetings of the West Glamorgan Baptists was there a strong movement to distance the denomination from the war *per se*. Even in the latter stages of the war, the assembly sought to measure and make public the human contribution of the region’s Baptist churches to the war effort.

Table 2: Servicemen from West Glamorgan Welsh Baptist chapels, 1916 - 1918¹¹⁰

	Number of chapels associated with the assembly	Number of members	Number of members and adherents serving with the Army and Navy
June 1916	97	17,569	2,017
May 1917	98	17,848	2,507
May 1918	99	18,148	2,837

Despite these attempts to collate information about the contribution and sacrifices made by the denominations throughout the war, it does not seem as though concerted and consistent efforts were made to use this political capital for local leverage, nor for national leverage. In this case, there is a contrast to the Irish situation, where there existed a disciplined political party with an acknowledged leader (John Redmond) able to negotiate and win concessions on behalf of his followers. A decentralized religious movement such as Welsh Nonconformity had no such leader, and too many obvious fractures. Given that freedom of conscience and

¹⁰⁹ ‘Welsh Baptists’, *Herald of Wales*, 17 June 1916, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Information from ‘Cymanfa Bedyddwyr Gorllewin Morgannwg’, *Seren Cymru*, 7 July 1916, p.2; ‘Cymanfa Bedyddwyr Gorllewin Morgannwg’, *Seren Cymru*, 15 June 1917, p.2; ‘Cymanfa Bedyddwyr Gorllewin Morgannwg’, *Seren Cymru*, 28 June 1918, p.3.

thought was one of the central tenets of Welsh Nonconformity, it was not workable to construct a sustained united front. Furthermore, David Lloyd George was able to command unquestioning loyalty from the vast majority of Welsh chapelgoers, who had an expectation that as he was (nominally) one of them, he would look after their concerns and aspirations. Thus no religious leader rose at a national nor regional level to challenge the authorities and stake a claim for the interests of the Nonconformists as a whole.

The urge to recognize publicly the contribution of chapel communities to the war effort continued after the Armistice brought the fighting to an end. In the eighteen months following November 1918 the chapels of Swansea organised a succession of events to welcome home the servicemen and unveiling ceremonies of Rolls of Honour to commemorate all those who had served.¹¹¹ These memorials differ widely in their design and their wording: some were created from a commercially-produced template, though most were specially commissioned. However, they have in common their commitment to the war as a just cause – the very title ‘Roll of Honour’ (or a Welsh equivalent) prominent on most of these memorials is indicative of this.

¹¹¹ See, for example, the reports of events to honour soldiers at five chapels: ‘Welcome home’, *Herald of Wales*, 29 March 1919, p. 6.

Table 3: Some of the First World War Rolls of Honour in Swansea's Nonconformist chapels¹¹²

Name	Denomination	Language of chapel in 1914	Number of men on Roll	Number of women	N in
Adulam, Bonymaen	B	Welsh	48	0	6
Bethel, Llangyfelach	CM	Welsh	22	0	4
Bethel, Sketty	I	Welsh	53	1	7
Bethesda +	B	Welsh	54	0	8
Caersalem Newydd, Treboeth	B	Welsh	81	0	5
Carmarthen Road	I	English	151	2	2
Carmel, Llansamlet	CM	Welsh	33	0	4
Carmel, Morriston	I	Welsh	66	0	5
Gorse Mission, Cwmbwrla	CM	English	88	0	6
Hill Congregational	I	English	42	0	-
Memorial Baptist*	B	English	32	0	-
Mount Pleasant +	B	English	289	12	2
Mynydd Bach	I	Welsh	59	1	3
Pantgwydr (Sunday School)	B	English	61	0	-
Philadelphia, Morriston	CM	Welsh	44	0	-
Salem (Capel y Cwm), Bon-y-maen	CM	Welsh	75	0	5
Seion, Morriston	B	Welsh	99	0	-
Siloh, Landore	I	Welsh	84	0	6
Sketty Wesleyan	WM	English	64	0	1

¹¹² For more information on these, see the webpages of the 'Welsh Memorials to the Great War' project: <http://war-memorials.swansea.gov.uk/>

Soar, Morriston	B	Welsh	51	1	6
Tabernacl, Cwmrhydyceirw	B	Welsh	27	0	2
Tabernacl (Sunday School), Morriston	CM	Welsh	49	0	5
Tabernacle, Waunwen +	B	English	approx. 160	0	2

* - possibly an incomplete Roll of Honour

+ - roll not extant – information from newspaper report

The Rolls of Honour for both Seion and Soar (Morrison), declared the fight was ‘Dros Ryddid a Chyfiawnder’ (‘For Freedom and Justice’); the one in Tabernacl, Morrison, declared it was ‘Rhyfel Ryddid’ (‘A War for Freedom’). Hill Congregational states that the members served ‘God, King and Country in the Great War 1914-18 of “Right against Might”’. Adulam (Bonymaen) declared that the men served ‘eu Duw, eu Brenin a’u Gwlad’ (‘their God, their King and their Country’). This memorial has at its centre an image of Lord Kitchener, which is astonishing given his antipathy towards the core principles of Welsh Nonconformity. The motto of the Welsh Regiment, ‘Better death than dishonour’ (or its Welsh equivalent, ‘Gwell angau na chywilydd’) appeared on the Rolls of Honour in Adulam, the Gorse Mission (Cwmbwrla), Tabernacl and Carmel (Morrison).

Despite the tone of these memorials, an unavoidable conclusion is that the legacy of the war for the chapels, as institutions, was malign. In addition to the personal trauma and grief suffered by so many of their members, the Nonconformist denominations lost ground as bodies with moral authority whose voice was respected and given space in public discourse. Considering Wales as a whole, Densil Morgan states that ‘institutional Christianity appeared to have become a function of the imperial cause’; the evidence presented here tells us that this was the case in Swansea.¹¹³ Having backed Britain’s military efforts so whole-heartedly, the chapels were left naked against charges of hypocrisy that might be levelled against them during the slow process of disillusionment with the war that gained momentum in the years after 1918. The patriotic language of the Rolls of Honour became something of an embarrassment, and many were removed from view in the decades after the war.¹¹⁴ Most of

¹¹³ Densil Morgan, *Span of the Cross*, p. 46.

¹¹⁴ One instance for which this was the case is Caersalem Newydd, Treboeth.

these Rolls have been lost, as so many of Swansea's chapels have closed after decades of decline.

It is remarkable that so many histories of Swansea chapels give the bare minimum of details regarding the involvement of the institution and congregation in the war. The history of Seion chapel, written by the Rev W. J. Rhys (the most prolific writer of Welsh Baptist chapel institutional histories), is typical. No mention is made of the ninety-nine men from the chapel who served in the war – a figure that included a son of the minister. Instead, the war is bitterly regretted as an evil force that impeded the Christian mission:

Ysywaeth goddiweddwyd y wlad yn haf 1914, gan ddrygfyd mawr y rhyfel, ac fe ymdaenodd fel chwa ddeifiol o fro annwn, a llesteirio rhediad yr Efengyl.¹¹⁵

(Unfortunately the country was overtaken in the summer of 1914 by the great evil of the war, which spread like a scorching wind from the depths of hell, and obstructed the spread of the Word).

The war imposed extraordinary stresses upon chapelgoers' faith. Many of the idealistic young Christians who joined up with notions of duty and honour had their faith challenged as they saw the evil reality of the war. An editorial in the *Cambria Daily Leader* in October 1917 (as soldiers were facing the hell of Passchendaele) saw the warning signs. The writer, who declared that he had himself visited the front the previous year, was scornful of the notion that a religious revival 'would proceed from the trenches':

¹¹⁵ William Joseph Rhys, *Hanes Seion Treforus: Ar Achlysur Dathlu ei Chanmlwyddiant* (Treforus, 1946), p. 62.

Generally speaking, the men are less religious than before ... The one question the soldier who will talk religion at all asks is: Why, if there is a God, does He allow the war to go on?¹¹⁶

Densil Morgan has warned against jumping to an over-simplistic conclusion, citing a wealth of evidence that some soldiers had their faith reinforced by their experiences, or even discovered religion for the first time.¹¹⁷ Yet, as all acknowledge, the overwhelming trend was towards the decline of religion, and however one might wish to measure it, this is particularly true of the once-proud chapel tradition of Swansea.

Despite the wealth of evidence that *is* available, there are gaps that cannot be filled. It is impossible to say how many un-minuted discussions took place about the justification for the war in chapel committees. We do not know whether the members of Carmel (Morriston), who had prayed for Lance-Corporal Thomas Llewelyn Evans, had their belief in the efficacy of prayer shaken when they learned that he was killed at Mametz Wood on 12 July 1916.¹¹⁸ We cannot say how many of the hundreds of Bibles presented to soldiers who returned to Swansea were actually read by them. We cannot give a rigorous answer to the counterfactual question, ‘what if the chapels of Swansea had refused to back the war effort?’

However, the evidence that is available allows us to state that the majority of the leaders and congregations of Swansea’s chapels supported the war effort, accepting the arguments about

¹¹⁶ ‘Grave problems for the churches’, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 5 October 1917, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ Densil Morgan, *Span of the Cross*, pp. 47-55.

¹¹⁸ <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/551828/EVANS,%20T%20L> [last accessed February 2017].

the righteousness of Britain's position. The involvement of the chapels in the recruiting drive was appreciated at the time, and was used to bolster Nonconformity's central position in Swansea's public discourse. The Rolls of Honour were public displays of loyalty to the British war effort: visible evidence to refute any allegations of lack of patriotism. Even those who had qualms about the growth of militarism and the incompatibility of warfare with Christ's message were loud in their praise of the young men from the congregations who had joined up. Individual chapel members who volunteered appreciated the fact that they were, in a real sense, representing their places of worship, as well as representing their town and their country.

In the months following the Armistice, the chapels still used the 'language of 1914' in their memorials to those who had served. However, having given so much for the British cause during the war, the rewards for the Swansea chapels were meagre indeed. The Church of England in Wales was disestablished in 1920, but by then the arguments that had raged on the issue for decades were irrelevant to the bulk of the Welsh population. As Welsh Nonconformity rediscovered its pacifist tendency, the human contribution – sacrifice, indeed – of the chapels to the war effort was discredited. Those Rolls of Honour that were not removed or lost became historical curios, barely noticed by dwindling congregations.