

# Recruitment and Conscription

Preparation: read the background sheet on recruitment.

Conscription was introduced in Britain in January 1916. It was introduced through the Military Act. All men aged 18-41 had to join the army. There were exceptions for certain jobs but anyone who did not want to join had to be put through a tribunal. The tribunal would decide what would happen to them.

## Learning Objectives

- understand what conscription was, why it was introduced and what different reactions there were to it in Horsham.

[Further: draw your own opinion about conscription and if you think it was the right thing for the government to do.]

## Exercise 1: Opinions on Conscription

Source cards will be laid out on different tables in the classroom.

In your group take a look at the source on your table. On your group sheet try to answer all of the following questions in the time provided.

1. Who was the source written by?
2. What is their opinion about conscription?
3. What reasons do they give to support their opinion?

Move round to the next source when your time is up and repeat the exercise. Do this until you have read all the sources.

## Exercise 2: What do you think?

Your group should now have a range of views of conscription from a range of different people. Using this information and the background sheet on recruitment and conscription as a group discuss which opinion you agree with most.

Report your group's conclusion back to the class and your reasons why.

As a class discuss your answers. Think about two key questions.

- a. Do you think conscription was *necessary*?
- b. Do you think it was *right*?



Source A

**On August 19<sup>th</sup> 1916 the West Sussex County Times reported a Chaplain's view of objectors:**

At a patriotic meeting at Bath the Rev. C. W. Wilson, chaplain to the Forces, rector of Walcot, who has been through the Gallipoli Campaign, said that, as a clergyman of the Gospel, as Christian man, he denounced the conduct of the conscientious objectors as utterly cowardly and unworthy of manhood. Let them put their consciences in their pockets, and come up and lie on the bare ground, under shot and shell, sweat under the blazing sun, be covered with filth and grime 'til no friend could recognise them, chew hard biscuit and bully beef scorched in the Eastern sun and see if such treatment did not produce a manhood which was absolutely absent from them at the present time.

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Source B

**In January 1916 the West Sussex County Times recorded this anonymous letter titled 'London Opinion'**

'Cowardice doth make Conscientious Objectors of us all' (Confessions of a slacker). Talking of Conscientious Objectors, of course, a lot of slackers were turned into 'Quakers' by the first mention of conscription.

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Source C

**In March 1916 the West Sussex County Times reported recordings of the Tribunal cases held in Horsham for those who didn't want to join the army. Two of the cases reported were those of individuals who called themselves Conscientious Objectors.**

*Conscientious Objectors*

The tribunal then heard the case of the workman who claimed absolute exemption as a Christian; as such he did not belong to this world – his life hopes and portion were outside I. He belonged to Christ's Kingdom and was therefore opposed to taking life or in any way helping others to do so. Mr Bostock pointed out that he need not carry a rifle – he could be a non-combatant. Recommended for service. The Military representative: by helping a wounded man you would be acting as a Christian! – Applicant said that if he could do it without becoming part of a system he would. He did not wish to take up a lawless attitude but he did desire to do what he was convinced was right. Recommended for non-combatant service.

A gardener 31 year of age, out of employment, applied for absolute exemption on the ground that he had a conscientious objection to taking combatant service. He said he was a person gathered to the Lord Jesus in Christ's name, and as baptised unto Him and unto His death he was unable conscientiously to take the life of any of Christ's creatures whom Christ died for, or to making munitions for others to kill. – The Tribunal summarily commended applicant for non-combatant service.

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Source D

**Poem sent home on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1916 By Private W. Dinnage, 7<sup>th</sup> royal Sussex Regiment and reported in the West Sussex County Times.** © West Sussex County Council Library Service and Record Office

*Christmas Night in the Trenches*

It was Christmas night in the Trenches,  
The water was up to our knees,  
There was nothing to break the silence,  
But occasional shots or a sneeze.

The officer sat in his dug out  
Cursing he Kaiser and Huns,  
As he thought of his Xmas Dinner  
And wished he was far from the guns.

The Sergeant looked gloomy and dismal,  
As he sat in the candle flare.  
Then he gazed at his biscuits and bully  
With sorrowful brooding stare.

The Corporal in charge of the outpost  
Was facing the cold, bitter breeze,  
Watching the first streak of daylight  
While a mouse was nibbling his cheese.

Tommy Atkins stood boldly on sentry,  
Watching the star shells soar high.  
Then he thought of his leave to England  
And turned to his mates with a sigh.

We've been out here over a year, mates,  
Filling these sandbags with dirt,  
When we're not busy marching or digging  
We are searching for things in our shirts.

**Somehow I think we are winning,  
The papers keep telling us so,  
But I'd like to know when the slackers  
Are coming to give us a blow.**

**The longer that we grin and bear it  
The longer they'll all stay at home.  
We shall all be wearing long whiskers  
Before they cross over the foam.**

**Perhaps we'll soon get conscription  
And serve them all out with a gun.  
We'll have our Xmas Duff then in England.  
While they carry on with the fun.**

Source E

1916 Poster printed in Sully Oak near Birmingham but put up around the nation including in Horsham. The poster was created by anti-conscription Christian campaigners.

**PEACE & WAR**

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**CHRISTIANS** Remember  
God is Love. Love is not in War.  
**JESUS SAID:**  
"Love your Enemies. Bless them that Curse you"

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**BEWARE OF  
CONSCRIPTION**

The Aim of the National Service League is to  
introduce Conscription, which leads to

- Destruction of Home Life,
- Loss of Individual Liberty,
- Inefficient Education and Business Training,
- Slavery to a Military Despotism.

(Consider the large numbers of Respectable Conscientious Youths, fined & imprisoned in Australia and New Zealand  
for objecting to conform to such tyranny.

**MEN! STAND FIRM FOR PEACE  
THE RIGHTS OF YOUR SONS & THE  
BROTHERHOOD OF ALL NATIONS**

For Peace and Anti-Conscription Literature, apply, 326 Tiverton Road, Bournbrook

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S. Fortune, The Caxton Press, Commercial Buildings, High Street Selly Oak. Telephone 176 Selly Oak.

Poster: 1999.653 © Horsham District Council's Horsham Museum & Art Gallery



LOTTERY FUNDED

### Group Source Sheet

Group Name: \_\_\_\_\_

|          |    |
|----------|----|
| Source A | 1. |
|          | 2. |
|          | 3. |
| Source B | 1. |
|          | 2. |
|          | 3. |
| Source C | 1. |
|          | 2. |
|          | 3. |



|          |    |
|----------|----|
| Source D | 1. |
|          | 2. |
|          | 3. |
| Source E | 1. |
|          | 2. |
|          | 3. |