

YESTERDAY'S NEWS.5

Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914. At first, recruitment was voluntary. Within three weeks, almost 300,000 British men had signed up.

It soon became apparent, however, that this war was not going to be over quickly. The 'Derby Scheme'—named after Lord Derby, the Director-General of Recruiting—was introduced. All eligible men—those aged 18 to 41 and not in a 'reserved' occupation like farming, teaching or the clergy—were asked to make a public declaration as to when they were going to enlist. Canvassers, often retired soldiers, went round the country putting pressure on eligible men to sign up. In November, the 'Derby Scheme' came to Tiree:

RECRUITING MEETINGS AT TIREE

'Captain H. Malcolm of Poltalloch, [from the] Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, held a series of meetings last week on Tiree to explain the present need of men both for home defence and for foreign service. He very specially emphasised the call to young men to offer themselves for military service at home, and pointed out that this would set free other experienced and trained men for service at the front, and that the greater the number of men to join the Army at once, the sooner the War would be brought to a close. He gave a very clear explanation of the conditions of service, the rate of pay, etc. The meetings were held at Cornaig, Scarinish and Balemartine [schools], and were all well attended, Captain Malcolm's calm, well-reasoned and impressive statement of the present situation making a deep impression. Captain Ross, VD Cornaig, was present at the Cornaig and Balemartine meetings and in both places gave eloquent and stirring recruiting addresses.' (*Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser*, 21 November 1914, 3)

John Ross, from Bressay, Shetland, was a teacher at Cornaig School. The 'VD' was the Volunteer Officers' Decoration for twenty years' service in the Volunteers Force, the precursor of the Territorial Army.

Many Tiree crofters were ineligible because of their reserved occupation. The following month, Lady Frances Balfour, the aunt of the Duke of Argyll wrote to the paper: 'Better far the untilled croft, the unused boat, the vacant place at the fireside, more endurable the suspense and the fear than the memory that those of our own name and flesh have failed in courage, in a sense of duty that they have done nothing to save the ruined and desolate homes of Belgium. Better far to know our brethren have died "With their backs to the field and their face to the foe/And, leaving on earth

no blot on their name/ Look proudly to heaven for their death-bed of fame.” If their hearts are at the Front, let it not be the women who hold them back’ (*Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser*, 5 December 1914, 8).

She was supported by an anonymous correspondent going under the name ‘Patriotism’ (social media handles are nothing new):

ISLAND OF TIREE AND THE WAR

‘In your issue of 21st November, a report is given of the visit to Tiree of Capt. H. Malcolm of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, with the object of getting recruits. It would be interesting to know how many men, if any, responded to Capt. Malcolm’s appeal. From all accounts, there are scores of young men in Tiree who would make very good recruits. Why do they not come forward to defend their country in the darkest hour in its history like the thousands of young men who have done so from the other Islands in the Hebrides?—I am etc. PATRIOTISM (*Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser*, 26 December 1914)

This was vigorously rebutted: ‘My attention has been drawn to Lady Frances Balfour’s and the Duke of Argyll’s criticism on the young men of Tiree, my native island, which appeared in the columns of *The Oban Times* lately, and in Justice to my fellow-islanders, I crave space for a few remarks. Lady Frances reminds us that the island sent about 400 men to the field of Waterloo. At that time the population of Tiree was over 5000, whereas today it numbers about 1800. I have it from good authority that today about 200 sons of Tiree are serving their King and Country, including those serving in the Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Forces, and I think accordingly that this is quite in proportion with the number who served at Waterloo. I am in the proud position to state that I have six nephews serving their King and Country since the commencement of the War; but I regret that one of them has fallen a victim of the enemy, in the person of the late Sergeant Neil MacLean, 2nd Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who was killed at Lille on 22 October last. I am, etc., CEANNAVAUGH’ (*Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser*, 26 December 1914)

‘I know of no less than thirty sons of Tiree who have nobly rallied to the colours, and these born and bred in Tiree, not to speak of the scores of those sons of Tiree parents who, through necessity and ambition, have settled in our large cities. Moreover, at present we have serving in our Mercantile Marine dozens of Tiree men, holding responsible positions on board our hospital and transport ships, fighting for King and Country quite as much as those in the firing line. Next week, I may add, will appear a list of names of Tiree men who are with the colours. I am, etc., TIRISTEACH (*Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser*, 9 January 1915, 3)

Local committees were set up to encourage recruitment:

ARGYLL RECRUITING APPEAL COMMITTEE: THE LOCAL TRIBUNALS

'The local Tribunals for the County of Argyll under Lord Derby's Recruiting Scheme are as follows:

Tiree

H[ugh] MacDiarmid, Island House [the factor]; Thomas Barr, [farmer] Balephetrish; Colin Brown, Scarinish [who tenanted the Temperance Hotel]; Kenneth Mackenzie, Scarinish Villa [the piermaster]; Lt.-Commander Walter H. Sugden, Oban. Convener H. MacDiarmid; Clerk M. MacLean, Kirkapol. Tiree [the Registrar].' (*Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser*, 4 December 1915)

Hector MacPhail told this story about this unpopular committee. Hector Grahame, a 26-year-old man from Balephuill, picked up the Kenneth MacKenzie, who was disabled. He carried him to the end of the pier, saying 'You're not going to send any more young men to their deaths in Flanders.' However, bystanders intervened.

As more men were needed at the front, conscription came into effect on 27 January 1916. In all, 208 men and women are listed in Tiree *Roll of Honour* for the First World War, including forty men who died, three who became prisoners of war, and four who won medals for gallantry. In particular, many Tiree men served in the Merchant Navy.