

Military Training at RGC

Before the outbreak of War there was already a link with Gordon Highlanders Territorials. Senior boys from school joined "E Section" and went to camps at Aboyne and Tain. They practised route marching, field tactics, sham battles and grave digging.

The Gordon Highlanders had freedom of the College grounds from start of war for drills

In December 1914 a Cadet Corps was formed by about 150 senior pupils, assisted by staff. They drilled on Saturday afternoons as part of a scheme of physical training. There was also a Signalling section. Money was given by parents and staff to buy instruments for a drum and fife band.

In 1915-16 Military drill became part of the curriculum. The 3 highest classes trained as instructors, each in charge of a squad of younger pupils. This was to encourage character and leadership.

Most pupils volunteered for active service immediately they were old enough. Conscription was not introduced until 1916.

By February 1915 over 700 Gordonians were already on military service. The lists was probably incomplete as an appeal was published in the local press for more names.

The War effort at RGC

Waste land at the back of the school was cultivated for growing potatoes and keeping chickens.

The College's woodwork shop in the college was allocated for the re-training of disabled servicemen

From 1916, a War Savings Association was formed. The Governors invested some of their funds in War Bonds.

In 1916 in co-operation with the Serbian Relief Fund, a number of Serbian boys (aged 9-18) were received into the school for instruction in English

In 1917 pupils raised money for food for the starving children of Belgium, and for disabled sailors and marines.

Senior pupils did agricultural work during the summer holidays 1917 and Forestry work in 1918

September 1918: classes suspended till the end of the month to release about 300 boys over 14 to work on the harvest, living in camps at Newmachar, Badenscott and Fordoun

Munitions workers

The College received a request to help train munition workers. Classes were arranged for women and also men not of military age. These were so successful that an extra member of staff had to be taken on to help.

The College workshops were kept open 9 hours a day.
6 days a week.

By 1917, 859 workers (mostly women) had been trained and 527 of them had been found places in factories in Aberdeen and Coventry.

In Aberdeen existing engineering works, such as Hendersons and Barry, Henry and Cook (in King Street) and McKinnons (in Spring Garden) were converted to make shells and small arms ammunition.

The nose cones of the shells, or Fuzes, were extremely complicated things to make. Women comprised the bulk of the workforce, using special lathes to do the tricky engineering tasks.

A narrow-gauge railway line used to run from the old Goods Station (now Union Square) along the quayside at Market Street and then down to Waterloo Quay. This was specifically for munitions.

Former pupil Alexander F.P. Roger (1888-93) was knighted for his work as Director of Trench Warfare Supplies at the Ministry of Munitions.

Teaching Staff

The first casualty among the staff at the outbreak of war was Herr Emil True (Modern Languages) who was forced to resign as an “enemy alien”

The first teacher to be called up was William Murray (Maths) in March 1915. He returned to his post after the war but was badly shell-shocked.

Teachers of military age were not considered exempt from field service. Of 17 eligible members of staff, 13 were called up. Three were killed.

The Governors’ policy was to continue to pay their salaries, minus the amount of their military pay. Their posts were kept open until they returned.

15 temporary replacements were appointed: 5 men and 10 women. One of the women who arrived in 1916 was Miss Ellenor Herbert, who must have impressed because she was offered a permanent post after the war and taught at Gordon’s until 1961.

Also kept on was Miss Catherine MacKenzie (French and Spanish) who taught from 1917-46. Most women were replaced when the men teachers returned.