

WW1 Military Appeal Tribunal documents held by Gloucestershire Archives

Gloucestershire Archives holds a variety of documents in a number of collections relating to Military Appeal Tribunals held in Gloucestershire between 1916 and 1918. The collections have now been researched in detail and information relating to individuals has been indexed and transcribed to help show what documents have survived and which collection(s) they can be found in.

During WW1 over 40 Local Military Tribunals were held in Gloucestershire (which includes Bristol) and they also dealt with up to 100,000 appeals. An appeal could be made by the man being called up, his employer or the Military. The case files relating to these men were ordered to be destroyed by the authorities in 1921, but those cases dealt with by the Thornbury Local Tribunal have survived and are held in two collections (Finding reference D3789 Boxes 12a, 12b and D1578/8/3/1). In a number of cases, paperwork relating to a man's appeal is split between both collections. The number of appeal case files is 1086.

The documents for each individual can range from just a personal letter or note, to a number of appeal forms giving details such as name, age, home address, marriage date, occupation and their employer's details. In some of the forms details about the man's grounds for appeal are recorded. The files have been indexed to show what paperwork survives and whether it is in D3789, D1578/8/3/1 or both.

Once a Local tribunal had made a decision, either the man or the Military could appeal to one of five County Appeal Tribunals which were held at Bristol, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Lydney and later Stroud.

Over 10,000 appeals were heard at County level. Brief details were recorded and have survived (Finding reference D570/1/2). The details include the name of the applicant, their address, occupation, reason for appealing and the date the case was heard. D570/1/2 has also now been indexed and shows that, 175 of the 1086 Local Thornbury Appeals were referred to one of the County Tribunals.

The details which were recorded as to why a man was appealing can be revealing. They were recorded as codes, for example (a) meant an appeal because the man was undertaking work of National Importance. Perhaps the most interesting grounds for appeal was code (f) which was for being a Conscientious Objector.

Codes for grounds of appeal under either were;

- a. On the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that the man should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work in which he is habitually engaged; or
- b. On the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that the man should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work in which he wishes to be engaged; or
- c. If he is being educated or trained for any work, on the ground that it is expedient in the national interests, that instead of being employed in military service, he should continue to be educated or trained; or

- d. On the ground that serious hardship would ensue, if the man were called up for Army service, owing to his exceptional financial or business obligations or domestic situation; or
- e. On the ground of ill-health or infirmity; or
- f. On the ground of a conscientious objection to the undertaking of combatant service; or
- g. On the ground that the principal and usual occupation of the man is one of those included in a list of occupations certified by Government Departments and that it is expedient in the national interest that he should continue in such occupation.

The date of the appeal was also recorded, (except for appeals from the Bristol area) and is particularly helpful in terms of further research using newspapers. The County Appeal Tribunals were reported in detail, but anonymised, in the local papers (see the Gloucester Citizen, Gloucester Journal, Gloucestershire Echo, Cheltenham Chronicle and for Bristol the Western Daily Press) usually a day or so after the Tribunal had been held. The date given in D570/2/1 allows the information contained to be matched with the newspaper report, and the man identified. (Although the date is not recorded for appeals from the Bristol area, it can be determined to within a few days as the entries in D570/1/2 are generally in chronological order)

For example, in the Gloucester Journal dated 22 July 1916, a man was described as a Leaded Glass worker with details reported about why he should not be called up on conscientious grounds. The one piece of information the newspapers did not report was the man's name. However, with the details from the D570/1/2 index the man can be identified as Arthur Constance of 4 Marle Hill Court Road, Cheltenham. In addition, letters relating to the case from Miss Agnes Edith Bendy can be found in D570/3/3.

There was also an opportunity to appeal the decision of the County Appeal Tribunal to the Central Tribunal that was held in London, but only with their consent. 266 cases from Gloucestershire were sent to the Central Tribunal. The only information about the Central Tribunal cases recorded in D570/1/2 was the date of the appeal at the Central Tribunal and their decision. In a very few cases the Central Tribunal Paperwork survives in D3789 Boxes 12a, 12b and D1578/8/3/1.

Over 20 Tribunal and Army forms relating to a man's appeal have been found in the collections. The most common to have survived are R52 and R53 (Forms for exemption of Voluntary Attested men). These 2 forms were identical, with R53 being a duplicate of R52. They were printed on one sheet and once completed were separated. One copy stayed with the Local Tribunal and the other went to the Military Authorities. Other pairs of forms include R186 & R187 (Application as to exemption from Military Service) and R9 & R10 (notice of claim by employer). These and other blank forms and circulars dealing with the workings of the tribunals (in the range R1 to R244) can be found in D570/3/2.

The collection D1340 includes appeal forms and transcripts of proceedings at Military Service tribunals held in Gloucester to hear the cases of 31 conscientious objectors (many of whom were members of the Society of Friends), in March & April 1916 (finding reference D1340/C3/Z/1). The 31 names can be found in the online catalogue and in the index to D570/1/2.

A small random collection of Local and County appeal case files are held in D570/1/1. There are 62 cases which cover all parts of the county. The men's details can be found in the online catalogue

and (in most cases) the index to D570/1/2.

D570/3/1-3 contains a variety of documents, including official papers relating to the workings of the Tribunals, details of the treatment of conscientious objectors at Horfield Barracks, Bristol and personal letters relating to certain appeal cases.

D570/2/1-27 consists of 27 notebooks kept by the County Appeal Chairman and gives details of cases indexed in D570/1/2 (except for those from the Bristol area). Although the hand writing is very poor throughout the volumes, it has been possible to create an index for them by cross checking the dates and names they contain with the information in D570/1/2, and to therefore make them useable. Details in the notebooks can vary considerably, from just a name and a decision of the tribunal to several pages detailing why this man says he should not be called up.

For example, in the case of a farmer appealing, details can include the size of a farm that he runs along with the livestock he cares for. Sometimes there are references to a man's dependants- he may be looking after his widowed mother and widowed sister (her husband killed in the war) with two children as he is the only man left to work on the farm.

To summarise: research which focuses solely on one collection relating to the Military Tribunals listed below, may not reveal the full story. Research which looks through the whole collection may well reveal a more complete picture of a man's life during WW1.

Some of the indexed and transcribed material can be found by searching the Archives online catalogue. A more detailed index that shows what material across all the Military Tribunal Collections is recorded for an individual can be found on the Archives: "Gloucestershire Remembers WW1" page at:-

<http://www.goucestershire.gov.uk/archives/article/116632/Information-sheets-about-Gloucestershire-in-WW1-compiled-by-other-researchers>

Archives References:-

D570/1/1-3

D570/2/1_27

D570/3/1-3

D1340/C3/Z1

D3789 Box 1

D3789 Box 12a & 12b

D1578/8/3/1

David Drinkwater, August 2015