

The Tribunals: Judging Conscience

Much has been written of the Tribunals which judged the consciences of some of the men who claimed exemption. Certainly, the standard of justice varied from one tribunal to the next – and many men were not given the chance to argue their case as tribunals could sometimes be resistant to the very idea of objection, seeing their role to be recruitment, rather than to apply the law and recognise genuine COs. Indeed, although the lay members were meant to apply the law like judges, some tribunal members seemed to see it as their patriotic duty to test or insult men applying for exemption on conscience grounds, and were reluctant to give anything but partial (a CO would be in the military but in a non-fighting role) or conditional exemption (a CO would be exempted from the military as long as he undertook approved work of national importance). You can see Bristol CO Ronald Lovell's exemption certificate [here](#). There is also [a letter from a local Methodist minister confirming Ronald's conscientious beliefs](#) which was presented in evidence to the Tribunal.

In addition, anyone who was working in an industry seen as being linked to the war, such as mining, was deemed to already be involved in the war and hence could be prevented from arguing any principled objection. If not deemed necessary for the war efforts at home, such men found themselves in military hands.

In June 2016 Remembering The Real World War 1 re-enacted Walter Ayles's tribunal hearing – [this video about Walter shows part of the event](#). A transcript of the hearing is available in the Remembering the Real WW1 booklet *Refusing to Kill*.

See also the pdf on this website relating to *Walter Ayles*.