

Ithel Davies: The Experience of a Conscientious Objector

1894 - 1989

Ithel Davies was a barrister from the Aberystwyth area. He was an 'absolutist', meaning that he refused to either join the army or do anything that contributed to the war effort in any way. Absolutists were treated very harshly, partly because of the fear that they might influence others. Ithel belonged to the 'No Conscription Fellowship' (a movement that was opposed to military conscription) and he had encouraged a number of local young men to join. He was brought in front of a military tribunal in Parkhall Camp, Oswestry on 28th July 1916, accused of disobeying military orders.

Why did he refuse?

Ithel's reasons for refusing to join the army or do anything that would further the war effort are outlined in this extract from an article in **the Llangollen Advertiser dated 28th July 1916.**

PRIVATE ITHEL DAVIES. "POET AND IDEALIST."
CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR" COURTMARTIALED.

He based his objection on the definite Christian belief of love and brotherhood, and he would rather die a martyr's death than "betray the spirit within".....The Rev. R. E. Davies, Congregational pastor at Carmel, Llanllechid, near Bangor, said he had known accused from childhood, and he had always borne an exemplar character. Davies was a very serious, thoughtful young man, "a poet and an idealist," and he believed he was prepared to suffer anything for his religious convictions.

What happened to him because of his stance?

Ithel was arrested in April 1916 for refusing to enlist in the army. Because of his refusal to comply with any military orders, such as wearing a uniform, taking part in drill or sewing mailbags, he was subjected to harsh treatment, particularly in Mold, where he was put in a straightjacket for 6 hours (the normal limit being 2 hours). He was badly beaten up and had his nose broken. The matter of his treatment led to questions to the Minister of War in Parliament. He was sentenced to prison and hard labour several times, and was eventually released in April 1919.

After the war he became a barrister. He was also interested in politics, and he stood for the Labour Party in 1935 and the Welsh Republican Party in 1950.

1. What do you think of Ithel Davies' stance?
2. Put yourself in his shoes. Why did he persist in his objection despite the ill-treatment he received?
3. Imagine you are one of the officers dealing with Ithel Davies. How do you think you would have felt and why?

