

Scotland and the First World War: A Revision Guide

Domestic Impact of War: Industry & Economy

Describe the long and short term effects of the war on Scottish industries:

Shipbuilding short term impact

- By 1913 shipbuilding on the Clyde produced 757,000 tons and the total number of workers dependent on the industry was estimated at 100,000 or 14% of the working population.
- WWI had an immediate impact on Clydeside shipyards, where most of Britain's ships were built.
- Beardmore's at Dalmuir, Browns of Clydebank and Fairfields at Govan were placed under Admiralty control. Others followed suit after passing of Munitions of War Act in 1915. Many of the battleships produced for the British navy were produced on the Clyde.
- Clyde yards were innovatory and bred a skilled workforce that was reasonable to well-paid and led to job security. Men were proud to work in the shipyards.
- Clydeside shipyards benefitted greatly from the war time boom, with the three leading yards winning orders worth over £16 million.
- Between 1914 and 1918 a total of 481 warships were built on the Clyde, and profits were good.

Shipbuilding long term impact

- International trade slumped and so did the shipbuilding industry.
- Orders for new ships dried up and unemployment rose.
- High unemployment in the shipbuilding industry led to unemployment in Scotland's iron and steel industries too. These industries relied on shipbuilding to maintain orders.

Coal, Iron & Steel short term impact

- Prior to WWI there was a huge expansion of heavy industry. Iron and steel both benefitted from the boom in shipbuilding.
- Coal mining went through huge developments before WWI and exported 60m tons of coal per year.
- Steel output doubled during the war.
- 90% of armour plate produced for ships and tanks came from Glasgow.
- 24,000 men in full-time employment in the Clyde valley in the iron and steel industries.
- Coal exports stopped due to the outbreak of war; however the increased need for coal in domestic markets more than offset this loss.
- WWI produced an enormous inflation in demand for the products of Scottish heavy industry. (All sectors experienced a period of huge expansion)
- Coal mines were taken under the control of the Government which led to an increase in safety standards, higher wages for workers and very little unrest.

Coal, Iron & Steel long term impact

- The Coal industry received a short boom in the 1920s. However, Scottish coal fields made a £5m loss as the price of coal per ton dropped from £4 to £1.
- After WWI the world economy slumped – the impact was magnified in Scotland due to its reliance on heavy industry.
- 1920s 100,000 men permanently unemployed in Scotland who had previously worked in heavy industry.

Jute short term impact

- Employed thousands of people in Dundee (25% of all male workers and 67% of all female workers in the city worked in Jute factories).
- The industry faced difficulties before the war, most notably the development of Jute factories in Calcutta, India where Jute could be produced at a cheaper price.
- During the war Dundee's jute industry boomed as demand for sandbags rose for use in the trenches.
- War demand topped 6 million jute sacks in one month. Profits rocketed.
- The Jute industry was also protected by a Government ban on Jute being processed in Calcutta.

Jute long term impact

- Industry went into a rapid decline after the First World War. There was no longer the same demand for sandbags.
- Factories in Dundee needed new investment and repair and with Calcutta Jute back on the market after the ban Jute prices fell. Many Dundee factories were faced with closure, leaving a large percentage of the workforce unemployed.

Fishing short term impact

- Major industry before the First World War, employing over 32,500 men. By 1917, employing fewer than 22,000 men.
- White fish industry decimated, only herring industry remained stable.
- North Sea almost totally closed to fishing.
- Fishing only allowed in inshore areas on the West coast, banned in the Firth of Clyde.
- East coast ports taken over by the Admiralty, neutral fishing boats banned.
- Loss of herring trade to Russia and Northern Germany caused a slump. Royal Navy Reserve (Trawler Section), 8,000 strong, kept the industry going when restrictions elsewhere prevented its operation. 2,000 of these fishermen came from Lewis.
- Restrictions on how much could be fished pushed up prices and by 1917 white fish was rationed.
- From 1917 onwards: slight improvement to industry when the Germans started unrestricted submarine warfare.
- Many of the Scottish fishermen and merchant navy sailors who lost their lives came from the Western Isles; a local perception that these areas suffered disproportionately.

Fishing long term impact

- Industry did recover but the war had created problems such as: fuel cost rises, old export markets were gone, compensation for boats used during the war was seldom enough to repair them.

Explain why food prices rose & the reasons for the introduction of rationing

- Food became increasingly scarce and more expensive as the war progressed. Government promoted self-sufficiency by introducing measures to make more farmland arable.
- Attempt to grow more in Scotland not very successful as amount of suitable land was limited; many were hill farms. Only 5 out of 19 million acres were under crops.
- Labour shortage as many had volunteered to fight in the war; more men in this industry than elsewhere. Number of farm workers dropped by 18,000 over the course of the war.
- Main contribution from farming in Scotland was from sheep farming: wool and meat.
- Sheep industry enjoyed full employment and high wages from 1916, when the Government bought all of Scotland's wool production.
- Average wage of a ploughman more than doubled by 1919.
- Oats and vegetables all increased in amount being farmed and yield because of the need to grow more home products.
- Food shortages led to 'meatless' days by 1918: Wednesdays and Fridays in Scotland.
- Food rationing in operation in Scotland by 7 April 1918.

Explain the land issue in the Highlands and Islands.

- Many Highland soldiers had been promised land in return for volunteering during WWI.
- However, there was still a shortage of decent land in the Highlands and Islands and very few soldiers were ever given their land.
- Highland crofters had enjoyed security of tenure from 1886. The 1919 Land Settlement (Scotland) Act released funds and allowed the Board of Agriculture to compulsory purchase private land for returning soldiers. However, the process was lengthy and the government did not have the funds to pursue it.
- Land raids occurred, especially by ex-servicemen who expected land on their return from the trenches, in areas like Lewis, Uist, Skye and Sutherland. Land raiders essentially stole land they believed they were entitled to. In many cases Land Raiders went unpunished.

Describe the impact of the post war economic decline upon Scottish emigration in the 1920s

- Emigration was the preferred answer to unemployment and during the decade 1921–31 Scotland lost 8% of total population.
- There was an economic slump in the heavy industries. Employment insecurity in the cities there were periodic slumps due to the trade cycle. There was a decline in general, but especially heavy industries like shipping, coal, jute.
- 1920s unemployment levels grew as soldiers returned from the Great War.
- The economic decline was the main factor in causing high levels of emigration. However, other issues also played a role:
- Empire Settlement Act 1922 provided the first large-scale state-assisted migration programme undertaken by the British government.
- Under the Empire Settlement Act over 400,000 people received state subsidies totalling £6 million, assisting their travel to a variety of places within the Empire, during the inter-war period.
- Emigration agencies, eg Canadian emigration agents had offices in Glasgow, Inverness and Aberdeen.
- Easier to travel: steam crossings took about a week to Canada. Emigrants could easily return home if unsuccessful.
- Scottish workers had a very good reputation and were sought after. In particular, farm workers were often guaranteed work.