

How far did methods of training and recruiting troops change over time?

MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN PERIODS : c.1250s-1700s

The Medieval Period

In the early Medieval Period, kings relied on the feudal levy to raise an army, but by the late Medieval Period this was changing. As tactics changed, kings needed fewer knights. Though the nobility still provided cavalry, there was a wider use of infantry (especially after the Black Death). **Scutage** allowed kings flexibility to pay only for the men they needed, on contracts for the duration of a campaign e.g. Welsh longbowmen in France. These men came ready-trained and with their own equipment. Kings also made use of the **Assize of Arms** (all freemen 16 to 60 to serve if called for) to increase the number of recruits rapidly.

***WELSH EXAMPLE :** Following the conquest of Wales by Edward I Welsh bowmen were recruited into the English army. Like other soldiers at the time they were ready trained. They were used extensively in wars in Scotland and France e.g. at Agincourt.*

The early modern period

During the early modern era there were further changes in recruitment and training. Early Tudor armies followed the pattern of medieval armies – a mix of nobles and paid soldiers. However, Tudor kings, worried by the power of the nobles, began to develop the Assize of Arms into **the muster**. This meant a large force could be raised quickly, though they were not well-trained. From 1573 **Trained Bands** appeared – hand-picked men trained to use newer weapons such as the pike and musket. Officers still tended to be drawn from the higher ranks of society.

The Civil War saw major changes. Parliament created the “**New Model Army**”, a trained, disciplined and paid professional army, with promotion based on ability, not birth. Charles II disbanded it in 1660, but in its place, he created the first modern regiments e.g. the Coldstream Guards (part Royalist, part NMA). **Recruiting parties**, led by officers, visited local fairs and markets to find volunteers. There was also a wide use of foreign mercenaries e.g. Hanoverians.

***WELSH EXAMPLE :** During the Civil War Wales was a key recruiting ground for the Royalist army. It became known as the “nursery of the king’s infantry.”*

The earliest Welsh Regiment to be formed was the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in 1689. It was recruited largely in North Wales by Henry Herbert and supported William II in his battles in Ireland against James II.

INDUSTRIAL PERIOD : c. 1750s - 1800s

Training and recruitment in the 18th and 19th centuries

There was little change in recruitment and training until the late 19th century. The **navy** continued to rely heavily on **press gangs**, while the army continued to make use of recruiting officers. The latter half of the 19th century, however, witnessed significant change as a result of developments in warfare and government legislation.

However, in the 1850’s the **Crimean War** (1853-56) and the **Indian Rebellion** (1857) **highlighted weaknesses in recruitment and training**. The Prussian victory over France in 1870-71 also showed the importance of a modern, well-trained professional army.

In 1853 the navy ended impressment and introduced continuous service contracts, with a pension;

In the 1870’s **Cardwell’s army reforms** brought the following series of changes:

- fixed 12-year terms (six in the army, six in the reserve)
- purchase of commissions was ended
- existing regiments were reorganized in localities and given local names e.g. the 24th Regiment of Foot became the South Wales Borderers and was based in Brecon.

As a result of these reforms the British Army now had a constant supply of well-trained soldiers and the quality of officers improved.

***WELSH EXAMPLE :** Cardwell’s reforms saw the creation of two new regiments based in Wales – the Welsh Regiment, based in Cardiff and the South Wales Borderers based in Brecon.*

MODERN PERIOD : c.1900s-present day

The 20th century saw major changes, particularly in recruitment. The army has traditionally relied on volunteers, but during the latter part of World War I, and then again during World War II, conscription was introduced to ensure that Britain had enough fighting men. The period after World War II also saw compulsory military service during peacetime

World War I

In 1914 the small British Army grew rapidly through **volunteers**. **Propaganda** helped persuade over 2.5 million recruits to volunteer for “Kitchener’s Army”. **Recruitment offices** were set up across the UK, 54 million **posters** were printed, 8 million letters were sent out and 20,000 speeches were made. Many men joined **Pals Battalions** with friends from their own areas. They were given at least 3 months training before going to the front.

In **1916** with casualties increasing and the number of volunteers falling, for the **first time in history conscription** was introduced. Men between 18 and 41 were eligible. By the war’s end 2.5 million conscripts had been enlisted.

***WELSH EXAMPLE :** Because of the Welsh traditions of nonconformism, it was thought that few Welshmen would volunteer. However, when war broke out, men across Wales responded to the call. The recruitment offices in Cardiff in August could not cope with the numbers. Many also joined Pals Battalions e.g. The Rhondda Pals.*

World War II

World War II also saw **conscription** introduced. It was introduced in May 1939, before war began, and was the first ever peacetime conscription. All men aged 18-41 were eligible and over 3 million conscripts served in the armed forces (as well as 1.4 million who volunteered).

The post-war period

In **1948** the government introduced **National Service** of 18 months for men aged 17-21 (conscription by another name). ended in 1960 when Britain returned to a smaller, volunteer, standing army. In the 21st century the **modern army is more selective**, with recruits serving up to 22 years. Basic training is 14 weeks, followed by a year of specialist training – a far cry from previous centuries.