

# Rhuddlan Foundry

Francis Corbett was chairman and managing director of the highly successful firm Messrs. Corbett, Williams & Son Limited, Phoenix Iron Works, Rhuddlan. Mr F A Goldsmith was manager. The large variety of agricultural machines produced by the works sold nationally and internationally, in Europe and as far away as Australia, India, South America and South Africa. Welsh Journals Online records that a report on the Smithfield Show (an annual show of livestock and farm machinery held in London) referred to the stand of Corbett, Williams & Son, Rhuddlan, as having a 'large exhibit notable for its varied nature and the keen up-to-date character of everything entered. As winners of over three hundred first prizes, gold and silver medals, the firm has gained high distinction for their manufactures which are British made throughout'.



Phoenix Iron Works products, 1910

However, with the shortage of ammunition at the start of the war and the offer of lucrative contracts by David Lloyd George, Minister of Munitions, the works were extensively used for shell case production at the expense of agricultural equipment, a situation which continued after the cessation of hostilities. In particular, shell cases for 18 pound (by weight) shells were manufactured and, following standard practice, these were sent elsewhere to be fitted with detonators and explosives.

Francis Corbett, a Territorial Army officer pre-war, became heavily involved in military activity early in the call to arms and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the 5th Royal Welsh Fusiliers. Running an avid recruitment drive and effective in encouraging large numbers of men to enlist, he was allocated duties in the drilling of his new recruits. During the war period, he and another two directors of the firm plus about forty-five per cent of the labour force were absent in the military, the shortfall partly made up by women, Belgian refugees and men unfit for combat.



Captain Francis Corbett

Post-war the collapse of currencies, fuel and transport shortages and inability to compete with advances made in design and production in non-munitions factories in Britain and overseas, particularly in America by companies such as Massey-Harris and International Harvester, the Phoenix foundry of Corbett, Williams & Son closed in November 1923. It re-opened later under new ownership as a manufacturer of industrial castings.



Munitions workers and shell cases 1916

L - R: David Jones, Harry Griffiths, Iorwerth (brother of David) and Evans (Pen-y-Bont).