

Wesham During the Great War

by

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Literature Review

The Great War has, since its conclusion, been the topic of extensive study. Initially, research focused on the military aspect of the conflict. However, during the 1960s, studying the social effect of the conflict developed as a distinct genre of research. More recently a thematic approach has emerged. This challenges and expands understanding of continuums and changes in political allegiances, gender roles and the economics of specific industries. Studies of the conflict's impact have been considered from the perspective of specific counties, cities and towns. Given the trend to undertaking studies on smaller geographical areas, it would seem a natural progression to assess the impact of the conflict on a single parish. Justification for studies as localised as 'Wesham During the Great War' can be found in Williams's, *Researching Local History the Human Journey*. He asserts that micro-level studies provide a snap shot of a community at a specific time, thus enabling community experiences to be set within the national context.¹

The parish on which this research focuses, Medlar-with-Wesham, subsequently referred to as Wesham, is located in the southern Fylde area of Lancashire. During the Great War the parish comprised 1,960 acres and 2,155 inhabitants.² Wesham's economy was based on three textile mills, fifteen farms, a railway station and 34 shops.³ This mixture of industrial, commercial and agricultural characteristics sets Wesham apart from the subjects of many other existing single place studies.⁴ Also, in contrast to the many one place studies which have analysed the military participation of a particular locality, this research will explore how Wesham's community participated in the national war effort on both the military and home fronts.⁵

¹ M. Williams, *Researching Local History The Human Journey* (United Kingdom: Longman, 1996), pp. 109 – 152.

² Based on the description of the parish in *Barratt's Directory for Preston and Districts*, 1917, p. 706.

³ DVPR1/7/6 Schedule for the District Valuation 1910 Finance Act Medlar with Wesham: nos 0-603 (LRO).

⁴ Some examples include G. J. Bryant, "Bolton and the Outbreak of the First World War" *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, Volume 138 (1988), pp 181-190. C. A. Joy, 'War and Unemployment in an Industrial Community: Barrow-in-Furness 1914-1926,' unpublished PhD, University of Central Lancashire, 2004 and S. J. L. Gower, 'Wolverhampton During The Great War,' unpublished PhD, University of Birmingham, 2000.

⁵ Lancashire examples include S. Williams, *Brindle & Hoghton Pals* (Chorley: Brindle Historical Society, 2008). and V. Bannister, *Southport's Splendid Hearts: A tribute to the men of Southport who gave their lives in the Great War* (Southport: Watkinson and Bond, 2002).

Moreover, this study is of interest to the current residents of the parish, as it has evolved from a request for research into Wesham War Memorial. Many residents view the monument as the ‘badge of the community’ and there had been particular interest in telling the story of the five Gillett brothers.⁶ When recounting her experience of the Remembrance Sunday service, one resident stated, ‘Every year when they read the names out and it gets to those Gillett boys I think about if the family lost all their sons.’⁷

Illustration 1: Wesham War Memorial March 1921⁸



It was quickly established that the long held community belief relating to the Gillett family was a misconception. The Gillelts were not brothers, although two were cousins. However, this prompted more questions about Wesham and the Great War, resulting in this research. The

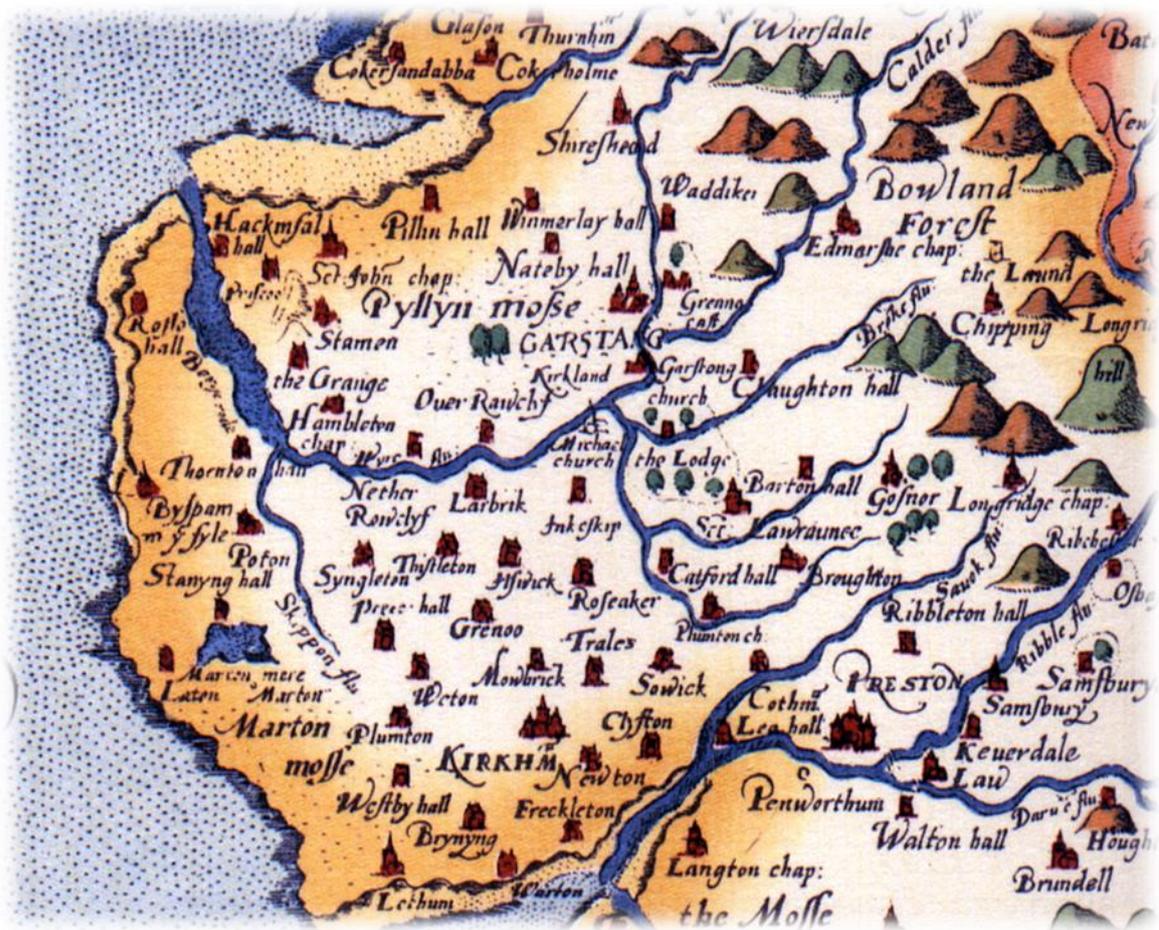
⁶ Interview with Wesham resident RN (April 2011).

⁷ Interview with Wesham resident AM (October 2009).

⁸ The photograph was taken in March 1921 following the formal unveiling ceremony. It has been provided by the family of George Crompton’s widow.

original interest generated by the war memorial arose from a perception, considered by Wesham residents to be derogatory, that the parish is an ‘extension of Kirkham.’⁹ This attitude developed due to the parish’s proximity to the ancient town of Kirkham.¹⁰ In 1296 the granting of a seigniorial borough charter enabled Kirkham to establish ecclesiastical and commercial ascendancy, becoming the ‘first capital of the Fylde.’¹¹ This position remained unchallenged until the Fylde coastal resorts of Blackpool, Lytham and St Anne’s, and the port of Fleetwood expanded during the second half of the nineteenth century. Illustration 2: The Fylde Extracted from Saxton’s Map of Lancashire, demonstrates Kirkham’s dominance within the Fylde prior to the industrial revolution.¹²

Illustration 2: The Fylde Extracted from Saxton’s Map of Lancashire



⁹ P. Fleetwood-Hesketh, *Murray's Lancashire: Architectural Guide* (London: John Murray, 1955), p. 162.

¹⁰ R. C. Shaw, *Kirkham in Amounderness: the story of a Lancashire Community* (Preston: R. Seed & Sons, 1949) provides the most comprehensive history of the town. See also J. W. Gallagher, *Roman Kirkham and the Fylde* (Kirkham: Fylde Guides Publishing, 2004).

¹¹ D. Pearce, *The Story of the Fylde* (Derby: Breedon Books Publishing, 2000), p.10 and M. Ramsbottom, *A Historical Tour Around the Town of Kirkham* (Kirkham: Hedgehog Historical Publications, 2012), pp. 5 – 7.

¹² Christopher Saxton's 1577 map of Lancashire is available from Lancashire Records Office (LRO). The map is reproduced in many local studies, including A. Crosby *A History of Lancashire* (Chichester: Phillimore & Co Ltd., 1998). His chapter on 'Early Modern Lancashire' includes the Fylde of the map on p.57.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, factory-based textile production began in Kirkham and subsequently dominated the town's economy.¹³ Between 1801 and 1851 the population increased twofold to 2,799. This included a number of Irish immigrants influenced by the Irish agent of the owners of Kirkham's flax mill.¹⁴ In comparison to other Lancashire textile towns, this growth was not exceptional. As Crosby noted in *A History of Lancashire*, textile towns such as Bolton, Oldham, Blackburn and Rochdale witnessed as much as a fourfold population increase during the same period.¹⁵ In the face of this expansion, Wesham remained a rural backwater as demonstrated on Illustration 3: Extracted from the 1840 Ordnance Survey Map. By 1851 Wesham's inhabitants numbered only 170, housed in 29 dwellings.¹⁶

The arrival of the railway had a contrasting effect upon the two areas of the parish. Medlar changed little and remained agricultural, Wesham however, altered considerably. The siting of the train station, within Wesham away from the centre of Kirkham, was the catalyst for Wesham to become 'the industrial centre' of the district.¹⁷ In 1852, the first textile mill was erected and subsequent building meant that by 1877, Wesham was transformed into a 'semi-urbanised area.'¹⁸ Further expansion occurred in 1907 following the relocation, from Kirkham, of the Fylde Union Workhouse to the parish. In 1911 the number of Wesham residents had risen to 1,896, occupying 390 dwellings, with a further 259 staff and inmates occupying the workhouse.¹⁹ Comparing the 1840 map to one completed seventy years later, clearly demonstrates the change that occurred in the Wesham area of the parish, as seen in Illustration 4: Extracted from the 1911 Ordnance Survey Map.

¹³ F. J. Singleton, 'The Flax Merchants of Kirkham,' *The Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, **126** (1977).

¹⁴ Ramsbottom, *A Historical Tour Around Kirkham*, p. 12.

¹⁵ A. Crosby *A History of Lancashire* (Chichester: Phillimore & Co Ltd., 1998), pp. 87 - 89.

¹⁶ 1851 Census of Population accessed via ancestry.co.uk

¹⁷ *Kirkham Historic Town Assessment Report*, Lancashire County Council (2006), p. 19.

¹⁸ *Preston Guardian*, 16th October 1852, p.10 and J. Davidson Walker Medical Officer of Health, *Annual Report on the Sanitary Conditions of The Fylde Rural District 1876* (J. Rigby: Kirkham, 1877), p.18.

¹⁹ The 1911 Census of Population accessed via ancestry.co.uk

Illustration 3: Extracted from the 1840 Ordnance Survey Map



Illustration 4: Extracted from the 1911 Ordnance Survey Map



The availability of sources has enabled Kirkham to be, ‘well-treated by historians.’²⁰ In complete contrast, the recording of Wesham’s history has been as a minor inclusion to the area referred to as, ‘Kirkham and district.’²¹ Distinguishing Wesham from Kirkham has been problematic, with the naming of the railway station contributing to this. Despite the station being sited within the Wesham parish boundary, it was initially named Kirkham Station and only renamed the Kirkham and Wesham Station in 1903. Consequently, the two separate townships have been merged together in many sources.²² However, in some circumstances Wesham was indeed too small to sustain independent groups. Therefore, it was necessary to combine the resources of both communities, although invariably the groups took the name of the larger township. One such example would be the Kirkham Volunteer Training Corps.

The attempts by the parish to establish its own identity are evident in Wesham Parish Council documentation from as early as its formation in 1895. The Council Minute Books demonstrate the recently acquired ability to exert a level of autonomy from the wider township of Kirkham was valued by the Wesham councillors. Prior to the Great War, any offer made by Kirkham for the two townships to hold joint celebrations for significant events were rebuffed by Wesham. The council also refused to fund a joint Kirkham and Wesham fire service, instead opting to establish its own brigade. Having become accustomed to some level of administrative and financial independence, in 1912 the request by Kirkham Urban District Council for Wesham to amalgamate with them was met with a vociferous refusal.²³ The present day council continues to uphold the status of Wesham as a distinct community, emphasising in the most recent town plan that, ‘Other than sharing the railway station with Kirkham, Wesham is a town in its own right.’²⁴

Having established how this research evolved, the relevance of some of the primary sources used within this study will be discussed. Initially, those which determine the nature of the parish prior to the Great War will be considered. Following the approach used by Short in his *Land and*

²⁰ Ramsbottom, *Historical Tour Around Kirkham*, p. 4. The bibliography of the book, pp. 109 – 118, provides direction to over 20 titles about Kirkham. These include works by local historians, history societies, university dissertations and doctoral theses.

²¹ M. Ramsbottom, *Kirkham and Around Through Time* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2013), C. Rothwell, *Around Kirkham in Old Photographs* (Far Thrupp: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1994) and H. Fishwick, *The History of Kirkham in the County Palatine of Lancaster* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1876).

²² For example the exact location of the Kirkham/Wesham boundary has caused confusion in many sources. The boundary runs to the Wrongway Brook, south of the railway line. Therefore the two textile mills located immediately south of the railway line are in Wesham, although these are referred to as Kirkham mills.

²³ Medlar-with-Wesham Parish Council Minute Book 1895 – 1914.

²⁴ Medlar-with-Wesham Parish Plan Steering Committee, *Medlar-with-Wesham Town Plan*, (2008), p. 6.

Society in Edwardian Britain, documentation generated by the Finance Act 1910 has been used to establish that within the parish there was a high level of absentee ownership.²⁵ Those who owned the textile mills lived in either neighbouring Kirkham, or other parts of Lancashire. All of Wesham's farms were occupied by tenants, with the estate of the Earl of Derby being the parish's largest landowner. It is also noticeable that despite industrialisation, land use remained overwhelmingly agricultural. 87% of the 1,960 acres in the parish was utilised by farmers, indicating the enduring importance of food production to the parish's economy.²⁶

Figure 1.1: Land Occupation in Wesham, uses Short's farm size classification to identify small, medium and large farms.²⁷ It demonstrates that with only three farms under 50 acres and one over 300 acres, the majority of Wesham's farms were medium sized, the average size being 114 acres. In this respect, Wesham differed from Lancashire as a whole as 'small farms were characteristic of the county.'²⁸

Figure 1.1: Land Occupation in Wesham in 1911		
Land Occupied	Tenants²⁹	Estimated Length of Occupation³⁰
Up to 24.9 acres	Robert Swarbrick 13 acres	Arrived in Wesham in 1903
25 – 49.9 acres	James Sanderson 22 acres Luke Kirby & Edward Threlfall 29 acres	Occupied farm in 1901 Occupied farm in 1901
50 – 99.9 acres	James Lawson 72 acres Henry Blacoe 75 acres James Tunstall 83 acres Thomas Parkinson 90 acres Lawrence Abram 91 acres Robert Isles 94 acres	Occupied farm in 1901 Family farmed in Wesham before 1801 Occupied farm in 1901 Occupied farm in 1901 Farmed in Lea in 1901 Occupied farm in 1891
100 – 149.9 acres	James Wade 105 acres	Occupied farm in 1901
150 – 299.9 acres	Henry Eastham 146 acres Edward Kirby 166 Richard Parkinson 200 acres Jane Williamson 202 acres	Occupied farm in 1901 Arrived in Wesham in 1902 Arrived in Wesham after 1903 Farmed Over Wyre in 1901
More than 300 acres	Joshua Hall 319 acres	Occupied farm in 1901

²⁵ B. Short, *Land and Society in Edwardian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²⁶ DVPR1/7/6 District Valuation 1910 Finance Act Medlar with Wesham: nos 0-603 (LRO).

²⁷ Short, *Land and Society in Edwardian Britain*, p 239.

²⁸ Crosby, *History of Lancashire*, p. 97.

²⁹ DVPR1/7/6 District Valuation 1910 Finance Act Medlar with Wesham: nos 0-603 (LRO).

³⁰ The dates have been established using the 1851 – 1911 Census of Population and registration of births accessed via ancestry.co.uk. It is accepted that some of the farmers may have occupied their land prior to the first census on which they are recorded. R121b/70 Blacoe family wills (LRO).

Within the Lancashire context, the size of Wesham's farms may appear large. Yet, in the southern Fylde, farms of this size were common. Since the middle of the nineteenth century the district's major landowners had sought to alter farming practice. Large scale drainage of the moss lands had taken place and many small farms were amalgamated.³¹ Across the district several farms of around 400 acres emerged. Production in the district underwent a 'complete reversal of agricultural distribution,' moving from small scale arable farming to larger scale dairy farming.³² A notable feature of farming in Wesham, and demonstrated in Figure 1.1, is the apparent stability of land occupation. In 1911 only five of the fifteen farmers (highlighted in blue on Figure 1.1) had farmed in the parish for less than 10 years. All remained in situ by the start of the Great War. This suggests that the prevailing tenancy agreements enabled farmers to feel secure and maintain their farms in good order. When considering tenure, although earlier than the study period, Binns in his *Notes on the Agriculture of Lancashire with Suggestions for its Improvements*, wrote about the Fylde and the Earl of Derby that, 'Several of the farms are being increased in size to meet the skill and capital of respectable farmers and leases are granted for twenty-one years ... the Earl of Derby does not charge high rent.'³³ However, as tenancy agreements from the early twentieth century have not been located, it cannot be ascertained if the conditions Binns noted in the nineteenth century still applied.

As previously indicated, industrial expansion in Wesham was later than in other Lancashire cotton towns, but the textile trade quickly established itself as the major employment opportunity within the parish. Unfortunately, sources recording the business activities of these mills have not been located. Assumptions regarding this aspect of Wesham's socio-economics are drawn from census records, contemporary newspaper reports and the surviving documentation of the textile unions.³⁴ Figure 1.2: Wesham's Mills, has been compiled from several trade directories.

³¹ Crosby, *History of Lancashire*, pp. 96 - 98.

³² R. H. Williams, *Regional Essay: Enclosure, Drainage and Changing Land Utilisation in the Western Fylde District of Lancashire* (Preston: Lancashire County Council) p.34 (LRO).

³³ J. Binns, *Notes on the Agriculture of Lancashire with Suggestions for its Improvements*, (Preston: Dobson and Son, 1851), p.131.

³⁴ DDX 1089 Preston and District Power-Loom Weavers, Winders and Warpings' Association (LRO).

Figure 1.2: Wesham's Mills		
Mill Name	Mill Owner	Mill Size
Brook Mill	Jones, Butler & Co. Ltd.	30,000 spindles
Phoenix Mill	Thomas Moss & Sons	1,200 looms – produced prints, cambrics and twills
Wesham Mill (referred to in some sources as Bowdler Mill)	Wesham Mill Company	65,340 spindles

Having identified the dominant industries in Wesham's economy, namely agriculture and textile production, it is also worth noting that there were 50 other smaller commercial enterprises in the parish. Figure 1.3: Wesham's Small Businesses, lists all those who inserted a commercial listing in *Kelly's Directory of Lancashire*, 1913 edition.³⁵ These include a variety of shops some of whose products, such as the china dealer, suggest that Wesham residents were able to afford to purchase more than subsistence products. The diversity of trades people indicate their function is to support the textile and agricultural sector, such as, blacksmiths and a cattle dentist, while others are connected to the construction trade. The number of carriers and a carriage proprietor demonstrate the continued value of the horse in transporting people and goods in and around the parish. Despite the profusion of small scale commercial activity in the parish, Wesham residents would have to visit Kirkham to access a bank or leisure activities such as the cinema, although the number of beer retailers suggests that this need was well catered for.

³⁵ *Kelly's Directory of Lancashire* (London: Kelly's Directories Ltd, 1913) p. 646.

Figure 1.3: Wesham's Small Businesses			
Name	Type of business	Name	Type of Business
William Barker	Insurance Agent	Edward Kent	Grocer
Margaret Bennett (Mrs)	Confectioner/Post Office	Mary Jane Magee (Mrs)	Shopkeeper
Jane Birch (Mrs)	Shopkeeper	Henry Marquis	Beer retailer
Edward Bolshaw	Grocer	Elizabeth and Florence Meaden (Misses)	Drapers
Edward D. Bolshaw	Draper	Elizabeth Moxham (Mrs)	Shoemaker
John Bolshaw	Greengrocer	Pearson and Knowles Coal and Iron Co. Ltd.	Coal merchant
Alfred Boulton	Decorator	John Peers	Clogger
William Bradshaw	Shopkeeper	Robert Poole	General dealer
Thomas Brewer	Tinplate worker	Robert Porter Poole	Shopkeeper
William Butler	Insurance agent	Richard Procter	Beer retailer
Joseph Cartmell	Shopkeeper	James Sanderson	Milk retailer (also a farmer)
Robert Charnley	Carrier/shopkeeper	Thomas Seeds	Carrier
Catherine Cookson (Mrs)	Butcher	Ellen Singleton (Mrs)	Provision dealer
Henry Cookson	Joiner	William Singleton	Lamp and oil dealer
Hugh Cornall	China dealer	Mary Jane Snape (Mrs)	Grocer
Joseph Cornall	Steam miller	Robert Swan & Son	Butcher
John Coupe	Grocer	Henry Swan	Butcher
William Crompton	Fish fryer	Thomas Thomson	Cattle Dentist
William Dickinson	Carriage proprietor	Albert Threlfall	Blacksmith
William Edmondson	Coal merchant	George Tomlinson	Watchmaker
John Forshaw	Plumber	James Warburton	Blacksmith
Fylde Industrial Co-operative Society Ltd. (No 2 Branch)		Jane Williamson (Mrs) & Sons	Butcher (also a farmer)
William Greenhalgh	Clogger	Thomas Wilson	Grocer
Thomas Hadway	Shoemaker	Harry Winckley	Plumber
Elizabeth Holmes (Mrs)	Shopkeeper	John Noble Wright	Wheelwright

The Minute Book of the Medlar-with-Wesham Parish Council includes a list of all those who stood for election and the number of votes they received. Regrettably, there is no list of those eligible to vote. The minutes demonstrate that much of the council business was concerned with

securing improvements to pavements and sewers, and increasing postal services to the parish. When combined with other sources, they provide an insight into the formal leadership of the parish. From the election of the first council, in 1895, until the Great War, at least one mill owner had been elected on each occasion, despite never living in the parish. Farmers continued to be well represented, although the last elected council prior to the Great War did reflect the diversity of occupations within the parish, though without any female representation, as demonstrated in Figure 1.4: Wesham Parish Council 1913.³⁶

Figure 1.4: Wesham Parish Council 1913			
Councillor	Occupation	Wesham Resident	Known Political Allegiance
William Edmondson	Coal merchant	Lived in Kirkham - operated coal businesses in Kirkham & Wesham	
William Moon	Spinner	Yes	Labour
Richard Hope Bowdler	Wesham Mill owner	Bowdler family lived in Kirkham and St Anne's	Liberal
Joseph Woods	Own means	Yes	
William Potter	Railway signalman	Yes	
Richard Parkinson	Farmer	Yes	
James Sanderson	Farmer	Yes	

Evidence is emerging of an informal community leadership role for Wesham's Roman Catholic priest, Father Frederick d'Heurter, who is often asked by the parish council to take an active role in non-religious community events. This may in part be due to the enduring strength of Catholicism in Lancashire as a whole, but particularly in the southern Fylde.³⁷ Catholics comprised over 25% of Wesham's population.³⁸ Additionally, for several years, Father d'Heurter was the only cleric living in the parish. His personality was such that even today current residents recall their families had 'great admiration and respect' for him.³⁹ He appears to

³⁶ Wesham Parish Council Minute Book 1894 – 1914.

³⁷ F. J. Singleton, *Mowbreck Hall and the Willows: A History of the Catholic Community in the Kirkham District of Lancashire* (Bolton: The Catholic Printing Company of Farnworth, 1983), pp 11, 21, 43 – 45. There is suggestion that the influx of Irish workers into Kirkham, and their descendants remaining in the district bolstered the Catholic congregation.

³⁸ *Kelly's Directory of Lancashire* (London: Kelly's Directories Ltd, 1913) p. 646.

³⁹ H. Gill Autobiography (Kirkham Library Local Studies Collection).

have demonstrated his concern for Wesham residents' welfare in addition to their spiritual needs. In February 1914 Irish born Wesham resident, George Nicholson, stood in as a cook, on the trawler, Doris. The ship sank with all hands lost. Following this Father d'Heurter wrote an open letter, published in the *Manchester Guardian*, instigating donations for George's widow and children.⁴⁰ He also contacted the Preston and District Power-Loom Weavers, Winders and Warpers' Association and was granted £2 in response to his appeal.⁴¹ This contribution reflects favourably on the union, as the dead man had previously been employed on the railway, while there is no record of the parish council showing similar practical support.

This study is indebted to the residents who provided documents, photographs and personal testimonies, aiding the interpretation of how Wesham responded to the Great War. However, aware that personal reminiscences can often be 'contaminated,' albeit unintentionally, prior to being included these testimonies have been subject to the same scrutiny as all other sources.⁴² Where they have been incorporated they have provided information not available from other sources, and supplement the sometimes bland and impersonal records accessible in public deposits.

The *Kirkham and Wesham Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, published in Kirkham in October 1914 and March 1915, has been invaluable to this study. The editions contain jingoistic articles, and record the varied activities the community undertook to support the war effort. They also include a list of those who volunteered for military service. Despite acknowledging that the list was not compiled from official sources, and therefore inclusions and omissions will have occurred, this document is the only known attempt to record the volunteers of the district.⁴³ By comparing the list to the 1911 Census of Population, assumptions regarding the level of volunteerism in Wesham have been reached. The volunteer lists also allow comparison of enlistment levels at two distinct stages of the conflict, the first following the declaration of war in August 1914, the second in the spring of 1915 when any initial confidence regarding a swift British victory had dissipated. The unpublished memoir by Wesham born Oswald (Ossie) Aiken, who as a naïve

⁴⁰ <http://www.fleetwood-fishing-industry.co.uk/fleetwoods-trawlers-lost-at-sea/> accessed October 2013

⁴¹ DDX1089 1/7 Minutes of the Preston and District Power-Loom Weavers, Winders and Warpers' Association (LRO).

⁴² J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 1999), pp. 198 - 202.

⁴³ *Kirkham and Wesham Soldiers and Sailors Gazette* (Kirkham: Rigby Printers 1914 & 1915). The 1914 edition can be accessed at the Local Studies Collection St Anne's library. This research is indebted to David Parkinson for the loan of both editions.

youth anxious for adventure, volunteered for army service in September 1914, adds a personal perspective, enhancing the statistical data created to demonstrate Wesham's volunteer levels.⁴⁴

In assessing the impact of the conflict on civilians, the minute books of the Lancashire War Agricultural Committee and the Lancashire War Agriculture Executive Committee document how government involvement in agricultural production changed as the conflict continued.⁴⁵ Newspapers accessed include the *Preston Guardian*, which is acknowledged as being sympathetic to issues that affect farmers. While the *Preston Herald* is not pro-labour, it does report on the activities of local trades unions and manufacturing industries, such as textile production. The *Manchester Courier* and *Manchester Evening News* provide a broader county context. The *Lytham St Anne's Express* records the meetings of the Military Service Tribunals (MST) and, in the absence of other sources, provides the only insight into individual appeals. As the reporting of the MST appears to have focused on arguments during the committee meetings, it is not clear if the published articles are an objective and balanced account of the process. The newspapers also record challenges faced by Lancashire's civilians including rising food prices and government legislation which began to infringe on all sections of society. They also contain accounts of how the unexpectedly high number of casualties meant that many Lancashire buildings were requisitioned for use as military hospitals. This included part of the Fylde Union Workhouse and a council school. Records from the parish's schools document how children's education was affected by the conflict.⁴⁶

To contextualise Wesham's experience of the Great War selected encompassing texts have been referred to. Marwick's pioneering study from the 1960s, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* established a concept of total war, whereby a combined effort of both the

⁴⁴ David Parkinson is in possession of the memoir of Oswald Aiken. Referred to fondly as Ossie by many residents, his military career began in the 7th Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. While on the Western Front he was injured. During his recovery he 'saw no future in going back to France' and joined the 1/3 Kings Africa Rifles serving in East Africa until being demobbed. A recording of this period of his military career and artefacts he collected are maintained at Leeds University reference - GB 206 Liddle Collection AFE 01.

⁴⁵ CC/WAM War Agriculture Committee Minute Books and CC/WEM Executive Sub-committee Minute Books (LRO).

⁴⁶ CC/EXKL 3/1 Kirkham and Wesham Council School Minutes, CC/EXKL 4 Kirkham and Wesham Handicraft Centre Log Book, SMWM1/1 & 2 Wesham, St Joseph's RC School Log Books (LRO).

military and civilian fronts was needed to pursue a modern conflict. This, he suggested, would inevitably cause political, economic and societal change.⁴⁷ Recently the extent of change that Marwick suggested, particularly for women and the working class, has been challenged. DeGroot in his *Blighty*, agrees that the protracted nature of the conflict meant societal change was inevitable. He reasons, however, that the speed with which society returned to pre-war social mores indicates the changes witnessed were, post-conflict, not as enduring as Marwick concluded.⁴⁸ Winter's *The Great War and the British People* provides a robust quantity of statistics, which highlight subtle regional differences to the national experience.⁴⁹ Wilson's *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War 1914-1918*, in addition to considering the national perspective, also explored the rural Essex parish of Great Leighs.⁵⁰ While not directly comparable to Wesham, the social hierarchy appears sufficiently similar to assist in assessing the role of the minority elite in a rural parish.⁵¹ The most recent of the encompassing texts is *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, in which Gregory has a strong focus on assessing the experiences of the working class.⁵²

These studies also consider the effect of volunteering and the introduction of conscription as intrinsic to societal response to the conflict. Of particular interest is the extent to which Winter argues patriotism prompted huge numbers to volunteer for military service, while in contrast, Gregory asserts that unemployment significantly contributed to voluntary enlistment levels.⁵³ Considering this from a Lancashire perspective several local studies have focused on the establishment of specific battalions. Maddocks's *The Liverpool Pals: 17th, 18th, 19th & 20th Battalions The Kings (Liverpool Regiment)* notes the influence of Lord Derby in encouraging more than 4,000 men of the district to volunteer. This study challenges the perception that the early volunteers were either unemployed or from the working class, by establishing these battalions comprised the backbone of Liverpool's commerce.⁵⁴ Turner's work considers how, in Accrington, the mayor, followed Lord Derby's example by harnessing local loyalties to raise the

⁴⁷ A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British society and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1989).

⁴⁸ G. J. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996).

⁴⁹ J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

⁵⁰ T. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Polity, 1985).

⁵¹ Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, pp. 170 – 181.

⁵² A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁵³ Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, p. 33 and Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp. 30 -33.

⁵⁴ G. Maddocks, *The Liverpool Pals: 17th, 18th, 19th & 20th Battalions The Kings (Liverpool Regiment)* (London: Leo Cooper, 1991).

Accrington Pals.⁵⁵ Steadman's study on the Salford Pals, considers how poverty influenced recruiting in Salford.⁵⁶ These texts will provide national, regional and occupational comparatives from which to ascertain if Wesham conforms to, or differs from, the trends they have identified.

Agriculture was the parish's second largest employer. Therefore, by establishing the pre-war nature of this sector, the extent to which this altered during the conflict can be ascertained. Mutch in his, *Rural Life in South-West Lancashire 1840-1914*, considered the pre-war balance in landlord/tenant/worker relationships. Whilst the method of farming in South-West Lancashire differs from Wesham, significantly, the Derby Estate owned much of the land in both areas.⁵⁷ Regional variation in the decline of female agricultural employment prior to the conflict is discussed by Verdon in her, *Rural Women Workers in Nineteenth Century England*. In south-eastern England, gangs of women workers assisted in harvesting, ensuring seasonal, if not permanent employment persisted. However, technological developments and changes in social attitudes were eroding this traditional employment practice. In contrast, in western England, the decline applied year round.⁵⁸ Male employment practices are explored by Green in his, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer 1870 – 1920*. He provides evidence of the comparative wealth of Lancashire's agricultural workers, establishing that the county was one of only five where average wages exceeded £1 a week. Additionally, in Lancashire casual labour was utilised less frequently as tied farm service and 'live in' arrangements endured into the twentieth century.⁵⁹

Examination of the impact of the Great War on national agricultural practice has been completed by Dewey. His work includes, 'Food Production and Policy in the United Kingdom, 1914 – 1918,' in which he suggests that the government initially presumed food supplies could be maintained. However, as the conflict continued, events forced the government to intervene to

⁵⁵ W. Turner, *Accrington Pals* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 1993).

⁵⁶ M. Steadman, *The Somme 1916 and Other Experiences of the Salford Pals* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2006).

⁵⁷ A. Mutch, *Rural Life in South-West Lancashire 1840-1914* (Lancaster: Centre for North West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster, 1988).

⁵⁸ N. Verdon *Rural Workers in Nineteenth Century England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002).

⁵⁹ F. E. Green, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer 1870 – 1920* (London: P. S. King & Son Ltd., 1921). also for continuance of farm service see S. A. Caunce, 'The Hiring Fairs of Northern England, 1890-1930: A Regional Analysis of Commercial and Social Networking,' *Agriculture Past and Present*, 217 (1), (2012), pp. 213-246.

prevent food shortages.⁶⁰ In his, 'Production Problems in British Agriculture During the First World War,' Dewey identified potential risks to increasing home food production and assessed the effectiveness of the government's instrument of addressing these, the County War Agricultural Executive Committees (CWAEC).⁶¹ The effect of a CWAEC has been studied by Armstrong in his *Kentish Rural Society During the First World War*. He established, in Kent, that family-operated farms emerged from the conflict financially stronger, and the larger estates weaker, thus altering the landlord/tenant relationship.⁶² A more localised study was undertaken by Crowe in her, 'Profitable Ploughing of the Uplands?' which focused on a sub-district of the Westmorland War Agricultural Committee.⁶³ Having established that the three main costs associated with farming in the study area were rent, wages and animal feed, Crowe advocated that tenanted, family operated farms were, to some extent, sheltered from price increases in all but animal feed. She concluded that, 'it was impossible to lose money in farming just then.'⁶⁴ Whilst the geology is different from that in Wesham, land occupation and the reliance on family labour were very similar.

Mansfield's work, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism*, examines rural community relationships in the Marches, with a particular emphasis on the tensions that existed following the implementation of the Military Service Act 1915. Exemption from compulsory military service could be granted by a MST, although the perception amongst the rural poor of the Marches was that farmers' sons were too readily granted exemption.⁶⁵ Appeals to MSTs were often impassioned pleas by those who perceived that they had justifiable cause to be exempted from military service. Yet, as Mansfield's work demonstrated, rulings often caused tensions in the community. A further level of arbitration if dissatisfied with an MST decision was to appeal to a county tribunal. McDermott has examined the role of the Northamptonshire County Appeals Tribunal from several perspectives: those of farmers, conscientious objectors, industry, sole traders and the MSTs. His *British Military Service Tribunals, 1916-18: 'A Very Much*

⁶⁰ P. E. Dewey, 'Food Production and Policy in the United Kingdom, 1914 – 1918: The Alexander Prize Essay,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, Vol. 30, (1980), pp. 71-89.

⁶¹ P. Dewey, "Problems in British Agricultural Production During the First World War", in B. A. Holderness and M. Turner (eds), *Land, Labour and Agriculture, 1700-1920: essays for Gordon Mingay* (London: Hambledon, 1991), pp. 241 – 254.

⁶² W. A. Armstrong, "Kentish Rural Society During the First World War", in B. A. Holderness and M. Turner (eds), *Land, Labour and Agriculture, 1700-1920: essays for Gordon Mingay* (London: Hambledon, 1991), pp. 109 – 132.

⁶³ H. Crowe, "Profitable Ploughing of the Uplands? The food production campaign in the First World War", *Agricultural History Review*, **55** (2007), pp. 205-228.

⁶⁴ H. Crowe, "Profitable Ploughing of the Uplands?" p. 206.

⁶⁵ N. Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism, 1900-1930* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

Abused Body of Men, ' suggests the MSTs, rather than being deliberately biased or unsympathetic, were aware of the disagreeable nature of their task. He suggests that the difficulty MSTs faced in reaching decisions were made more challenging as government directives regarding exemption changed frequently. He also asserts that, in attempting to reconcile the manpower requirements of both the home and military fronts, it was inevitable their decisions would be openly criticised.⁶⁶

Examining the role of women during the Great War developed into a distinct genre of research. Several studies have been selected to support an assessment of the impact of the Great War on Wesham's women. To establish the status of women in the parish prior to the conflict, Garrett's 'The dawning of a new era?' enables comparison to employment opportunities available nationally.⁶⁷ While Pugh's *The March of the Women: A Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women's Suffrage*, adds context to female political activism in Wesham.⁶⁸ Auchterlonie's work *Conservative Suffragists: The Women's Vote and the Tory Party*, is a particularly useful study, as the Fylde was known to be a Conservative stronghold. Her text considers the extent to which, prior to the conflict, some in the Conservative Party were in favour of limited female enfranchisement as a pre-emptive to wider social reform.⁶⁹

Studies which consider the role of women during the conflict include, Gullace's 'Female Patriotism in the Great War.' She suggests that women's willingness to engage in paid or voluntary work was often portrayed by the government as unconditional support of the war effort, while female involvement in anti-war organisations was often overlooked.⁷⁰ The use of female imagery for propaganda purposes is explored by Grayzel in, *Women and the First World War*.⁷¹ Thom considers war work from a national perspective in her, 'Women and Work in

⁶⁶ J. McDermott, *British Military Service Tribunals, 1916-18: 'A Very Much Abused Body of Men*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

⁶⁷ E. Garrett, 'The dawning of a new era? Women's work in England and Wales at the turn of the twentieth century,' in Nigel Goose (ed), *Women's Work in Industrial England, Regional and Local Perspectives* (Herefordshire, 2007), pp. 314 - 362.

⁶⁸ M. Pugh, *The March of the Women: A Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women's Suffrage, 1866-1914*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁶⁹ M. Auchterlonie, *Conservative Suffragists: The Women's Vote and the Tory Party* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007).

⁷⁰ N. Gullace, 'Female patriotism in the Great War', *War, Women and Society 1914-1918* <<http://tlemea.com/Gullace.asp>>[accessed October 2012]

⁷¹ S. R. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (Harlow: Longman, 2002) see also. A. Marwick, *Women at War, 1914-1918* (London: Croom Helm for the Imperial War Museum, 1977), pp. 27 - 36.

Wartime Britain.’ She discusses the difficulty in defining ‘war work,’ as the term encompassed efficient home economics, voluntary work and paid employment.⁷² De Vries’s ‘Women’s Voluntary Organizations in World War I’ explores the extent of women’s voluntary work, considering the benefits for both the country, and the women involved.⁷³ The work of CEWACs in challenging farmers’ hostility to employing women is evaluated by Twinch in her, *Women on the Land*.⁷⁴

Academic opinion is divided as to extent to which female enfranchisement was achieved as a result of women’s war work. In the 1960s Marwick suggested the vote could be attributed to this work. Recently Mayhall’s ‘Suffrage and Political Activity’ re-evaluated his conclusion. She indicates the momentum of the pre-war suffrage movement would have resumed unabated, after the conflict, had concessions not been granted. Additionally, women eligible to vote in the 1918 election were those over 30 years old and either a rate payer or married to a rate payer. For the most part this excluded those who had been engaged in industrial war work. She further considers the extent to which some women felt betrayed by the Representation of the People Act 1918. Voting inequality remained, as men over the age of 21, and those over 19, if they had been engaged in military service, were eligible to vote. The suffrage movement continued to campaign for voting parity, until this was achieved in 1928.⁷⁵

A separate genre of work focuses on the intensifying of working class political consciousness. To ascertain the extent to which this occurred within Wesham, the position of the textile industry, housing and the labour movement, will be established, prior to and during the conflict. Fowler’s *Lancashire Cotton Operatives and Work, 1900 - 1950*, allows comparison of the status of Wesham’s textile workers to others in the county.⁷⁶ One of which was the candidate for the Fylde constituency. The fluctuating fortunes of the textile sector during the Great War are discussed by Dupree in her, ‘Foreign Competition and the Interwar Period.’ Initially, disruption

⁷² D. Thom, ‘Women and work in Wartime Britain,’ *Women and Society 1914-1918* < <http://tlemea.com/Thom.asp> > [accessed October 2012]

⁷³ J. de Vries, ‘Women’s Voluntary Organisation in World War One,’ *War, Women and Society 1914-1918* < <http://tlemea.com/devries.asp> > [accessed October 2012]

⁷⁴ C. Twinch, *Women on the Land: Their story during two world wars* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1990).

⁷⁵ L. Mayhall, ‘Suffrage and Political Activity,’ *War, Women and Society 1914-1918* < <http://tlemea.com/Mayhall.asp> > [accessed October 2012]

⁷⁶ A. Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives and Work, 1900-1950: a social history of Lancashire cotton operatives in the twentieth century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

to the traditional export markets forced many mills to temporarily close or work short time. This contributed to large numbers of textile workers volunteering for military service. Although, by spring 1915, trade returned to pre-war levels, and then expanded as manufactures fulfilled lucrative military contracts. This resulted in a labour shortage in some cotton towns.⁷⁷

In assessing the housing conditions of the working classes Gauldie's, *Cruel Habitations: A history of working-class housing 1780-1918* and Burnett's *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1985*, have been used to provide a comparison to Wesham. Gauldie notes that, despite an increasing raft of legislation designed to improve working class dwellings, immediately prior to the Great War, the majority of the urban and rural poor inhabited low quality, often overcrowded dwellings. While Local Authorities had been encouraged to erect council housing, dwellings were predominantly constructed by speculative builders. Additionally, in considering the number of available houses, since the 1910 District Land Valuation, some of the very worst housing had been demolished, but insufficient homes had been constructed to replace them.⁷⁸ Burnett suggests that, during the conflict, increased construction costs and diminishing rent yields, curtailed speculative building. Improving working class housing became a peace time aspiration. Co-operation between political parties resulted in the Wheatley Act of 1924 and enabled 190,000 council houses to be constructed by 1925.⁷⁹

Adelman's *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945*, provides an understanding of the divergent ideologies and multifaceted affiliations within the labour movement that aligned with a minority Labour Party. Prior to the Great War, policy differences and a lack of centralised organisation prevented the Labour Party developing into a major national political force. In contrast, at a local level, particularly in the industrialised north, local trade councils or trade unions supported candidates to achieve positions as councillors or poor law guardians.⁸⁰ Tanner, in his *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900 – 1918*, considered the position of the Labour and Liberal parties prior to the Great War by region. He established that the Liberal and not Labour Party was the party of choice for the working class. Emphasising this, his regional analysis found that

⁷⁷ M. Dupree, 'Foreign Competition and the Interwar Period,' in M. B. Rose (ed), *The Lancashire Cotton Industry A History Since 1700* (Preston: Lancashire County Books, 1996), pp. 265-295.

⁷⁸ E. Gauldie, *Cruel Habitations: A history of working-class housing 1780-1918* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974).

⁷⁹ J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1985* (London: Methuen, 1986).

⁸⁰ P. Adelman, *The Rise of the Labour Party, 1880-1945* (London: Longman, 1986), pp. 19 - 44.

in southern towns labour had little influence. In the northern labour heartlands the Labour Party was often perceived to be distant from the electorate. He explores how this changed following the Great War. He suggests that Marxist theories, implying the rise of the Labour Party was an inevitable response to the trauma inflicted on the working class by a capitalist pursuit of the conflict, should be considered with caution. Tanner considers that the implosion of the Liberal Party caused by the rift between Asquith and Lloyd George during the conflict undermined their credibility. This coincided with a better funded and organised Labour Party, which ‘grew up’ during the conflict and was no longer willing to be a junior partner in a progressive alliance.⁸¹

By including encompassing and thematic texts and primary sources, sufficient evidence has been considered, to identify continuums and changes during the 1914 -1918 period in Wesham, and compare these to identified national trends.

⁸¹ D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Chapter 2

Wesham to the Eve of the Great War

Chapter 1 established how, in a 60 year period, Wesham evolved from a rural backwater into a small cotton town. Chapter 2 will now determine parish demographics in relation to the age and gender representation within the workforce. It will compare the standard of housing available to Wesham residents with that of the other Lancashire cotton towns. Reference will be made to the prevailing status of political parties in the parish. It will assess any progress for women into positions of authority in Wesham and establish their level of involvement with the suffrage movement. Finally, it will determine industrial working relationships in the parish's two largest employment sectors, textile production and agriculture.

Wesham at Work

The 1911 Census of Population demonstrates that 1,045 of Wesham's 1,896 inhabitants considered themselves to be in employment. Further analysis of this figure, such as establishing the age and gender of the workforce, provides a greater understanding of community structure. Figure 2.1: Wesham's Workforce, reveals that 42.1% of those in employment were women.⁸² This figure seems high when compared to the national total of just 29.7%.⁸³ However, the national figure disguises marked county variations. Proportionately, more women were employed in Lancashire than in any other county and, in the cotton towns, female factory workers were commonplace. In 1911, 58% of the 561 Wesham residents employed in textile production were female. This is comparable to the larger Lancashire textile towns, such as the 59% female workforce in Oldham.⁸⁴

⁸² 1911 Census accessed via ancestry.co.uk

⁸³ Joy, 'War and Unemployment,' p. 31.

⁸⁴ Crosby, *A History of Lancashire*, p. 104.

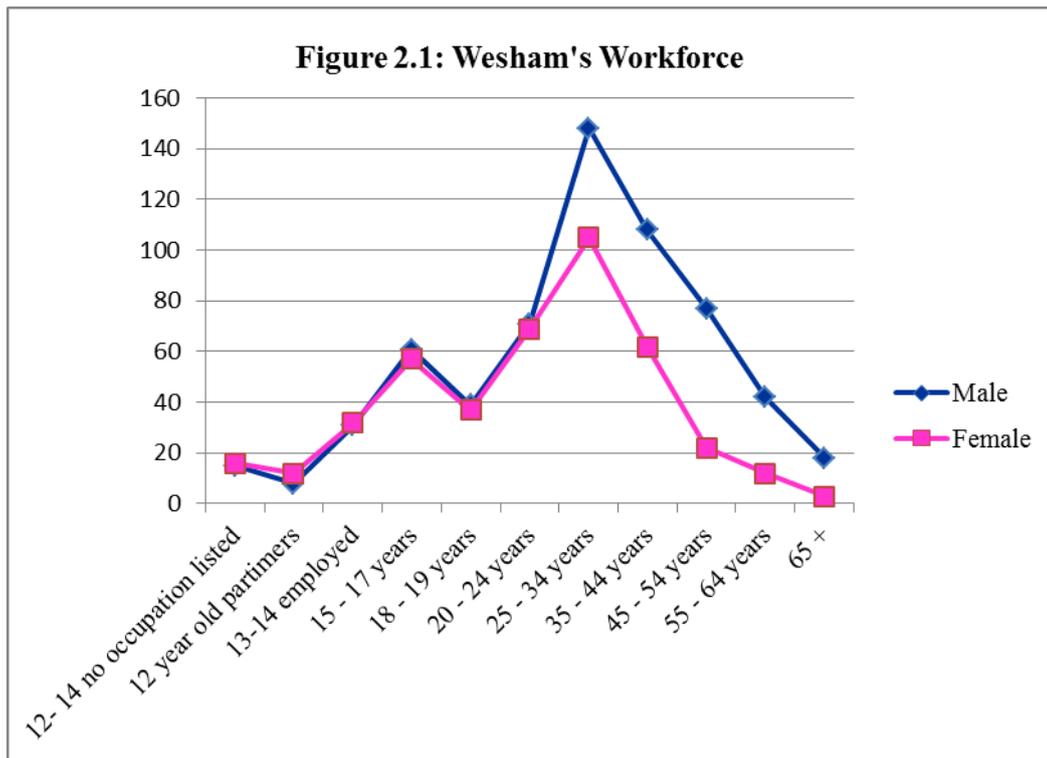


Figure 2.1 also provides evidence of another cotton town characteristic, namely the ‘part-timers.’ Whilst the official school leaving age was 14 years, local bye-laws allowed children aged 12 – 14 years, to work part-time and attend school. Fowler established that textile production enabled children and adult workers to achieve a ‘family wage,’ affording them a comfortable lifestyle.⁸⁵ Therefore, the financial contribution of Wesham’s ‘part-timers’ should not be underestimated as this age group equated to 8.1% of the parish’s total workforce. In contrast, of the 414 children who left St Joseph’s school between 1891 and 1914, only five stayed in higher education.⁸⁶ It has not been possible to establish whether this disproportionate number of children remaining in education, as opposed to those going to work, was due to family need or parental attitude to higher education amongst the working class. However, Marwick suggests that keeping children in education was indicative of the divide between working and middle class and thus, gives further indication as to the nature of the parish.⁸⁷ Illustration 5: Lunch Hour at Phoenix Mill, provides visual reinforcement of the age and gender balance within Wesham’s textile workforce.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives*, p. 73.

⁸⁶ SMWM1/3 St Joseph's RC School Admission Register, mixed department (LRO).

⁸⁷ Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 24.

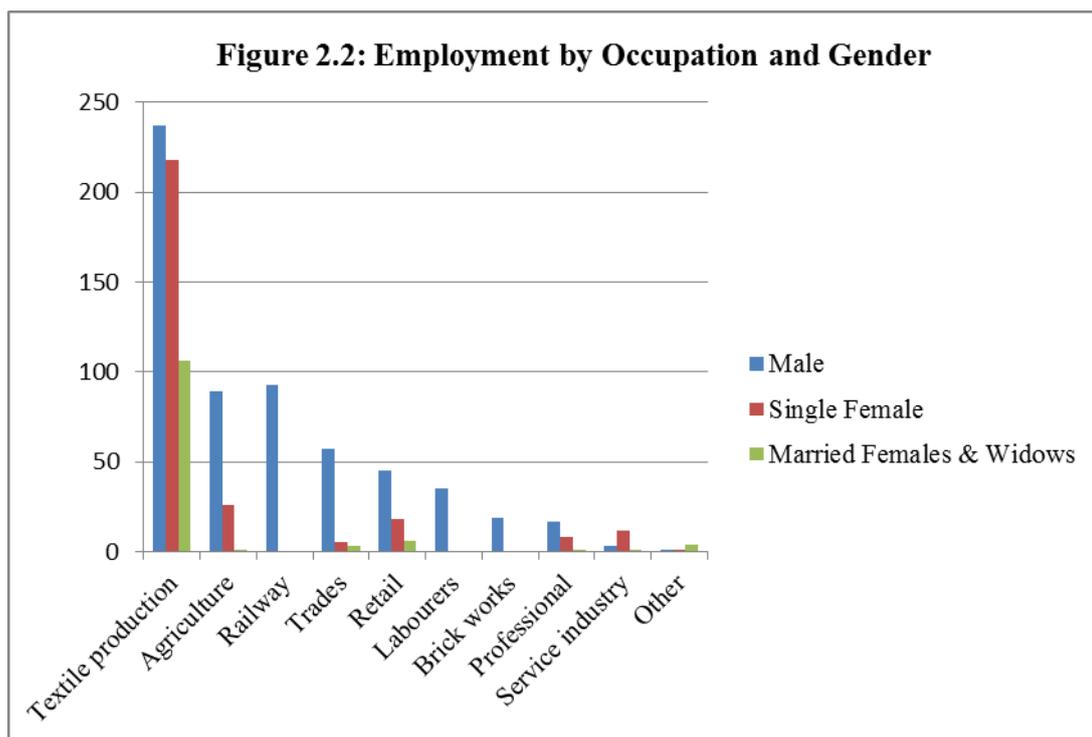
⁸⁸ Provided by Andrew Walmsley, Community History Librarian, St Anne’s Library.

Illustration 5: Lunch Hour at Phoenix Mill



Figure 2.2: Employment by Occupation and Gender, further reinforces the working class nature of the parish.⁸⁹ Only 2.5% of those in employment could be considered to be in a professional role. This small figure corresponds to the even smaller number of those engaged in domestic service, only 1.5% of those employed. Only three households had live-in servants, Lord Derby's land agent, the doctor and the Roman Catholic priest. Of the 50 small businesses identified in Chapter 1, all, except the co-op, were family run and accounted for 13% of the total workforce. The railway, with an entirely male workforce, employed 9.2% of the population and was the third largest employment sector in the parish. The brickworks, proportionately small, employing only 1.8% of the population, also had an all-male workforce. It has been impossible to assign to an employment sector the 35 male respondents who listed their occupation only as 'labourer.' This could imply that around 3.5% of the total workforce was engaged in casual and therefore financially precarious employment. Alternatively, the wide variety of employment opportunities within the parish would permit them to transfer their labour among several industries on a seasonal basis. Figure 2.2 also demonstrates that while employment opportunities for women nationally had broadened to include clerical and secretarial roles, with Wesham, such progressive practice was not evident.

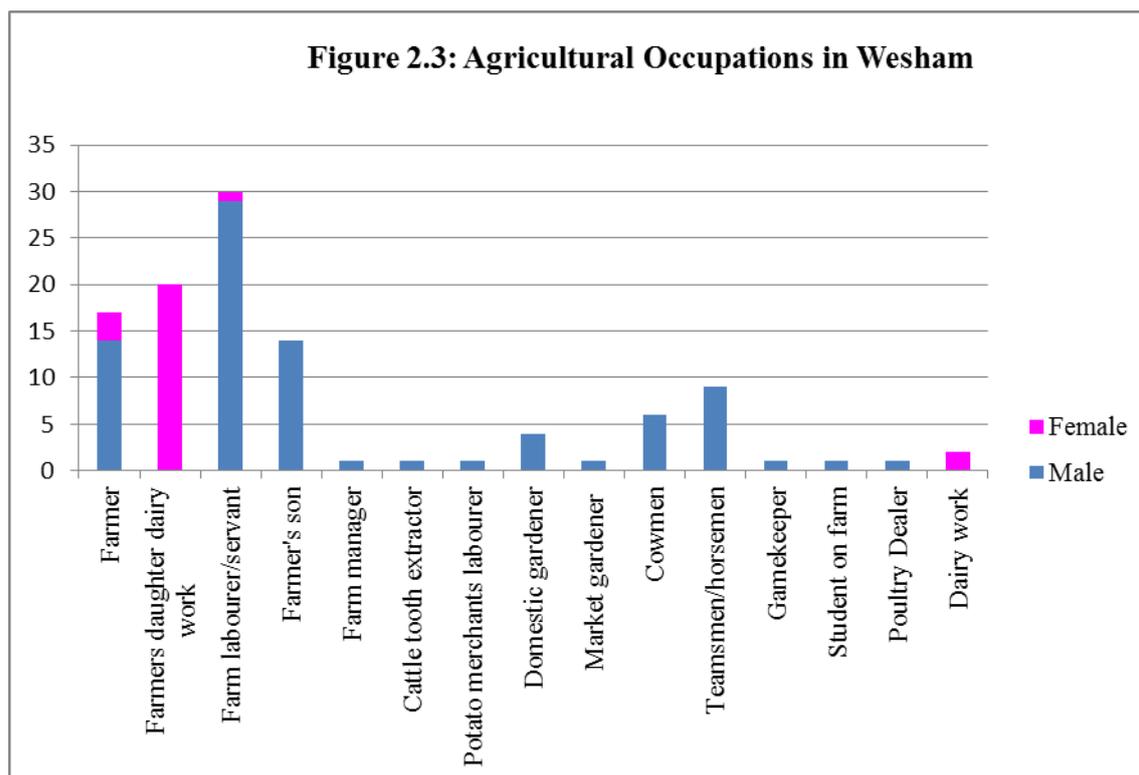
⁸⁹ 1911 Census accessed via ancestry.co.uk



Despite industrialisation, agricultural employment was proportionately the second largest occupation in the parish, occupying 13.6% of the population. Clearly, Wesham's farms relied on family labour as 58% of those with an agricultural occupation were related to the farmer. It is probable that this total is under representative, as only two farmers' wives are recorded as assisting on the farm. This in some way follows a national trend noted by Garrett, whereby the work of wives assisting in family businesses was often not recorded on the census.⁹⁰ The continuance of live-in farm labour is demonstrated by the 22 non-family agricultural workers recorded as living on Wesham's farms. By 1913, 72.5% of the agricultural land in Wesham was 'utilised for grazing and the majority of the arable products grown to provide food for the stock.'⁹¹ This is borne out by an analysis of the types of farm work undertaken in the parish, and listed on Figure 2.3: Agricultural Occupations in Wesham.

⁹⁰ Garrett, 'dawning of a new era?' p. 357.

⁹¹ A. Moss, 'The Fylde a Geographical Study of the Rural Economy,' unpublished PhD, University of Liverpool, 1932.



The dairy farming nature of the district may also account for the reliance on family and live-in labour. Dairy farming is much less subject to seasonal vagaries, and the labour needs to be readily at hand for milking. Wesham's proximity to the expanding coastal resorts and urban areas provided farmers with a ready market for their milk. Figure 2.3 also demonstrates a clear gender differentiation of work, with dairy work appearing to be an entirely female domain and work with horses, entirely male. The decline in the number of women employed in agriculture nationally is also recognisable in Wesham.⁹² Only one woman not related to the farmer was employed in agriculture. The reason for this was stated by Mr Bradley, a farmer from the neighbouring parish of Weeton, 'the mills sprang up and women could go there and work for 30s a week.'⁹³

In summation, prior to the Great War, employment opportunities for Wesham residents remained predominantly entrenched in the traditional stereo-typical gender roles. The professional and clerical roles, increasing available to women nationally, were not afforded to Wesham women. The emerging professional and middle class households remain significantly in the minority. As

⁹² Garrett, 'dawning of a new era?' p. 323 and J. K. Montgomery, *The Maintenance of the Agricultural Labour Supply in England and Wales During the War* (Rome: International Institute of Agriculture, 1922), p.51.

⁹³ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 24th March 1916.

was typical of a cotton town, the number of women employed appreciably exceeded the national average and children financially contributed to household incomes. The proximity of employment opportunities in the textile industry resulted in a reliance on family labour within the farming households.

Housing and Home Ownership

This section will consider the quantity and quality of Wesham's housing stock. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the poor condition of homes available to the working classes began to concern the government. Landmark legislation such as the 1855 Nuisances Removal Act, the 1866 Sanitary Act and the 1875 Public Health Act, gave local authorities the power to improve housing stock in their area. However, the zeal with which the legislation was implemented varied across the country.⁹⁴ When considering the Lancashire cotton towns, Fowler concluded that the typical form of house construction in the latter half of the nineteenth century was the two – up and two - down terraced house. Around 1890 and symbolic of increased prosperity, this basic type was enhanced to include a parlour and an outdoor toilet connected to mains drainage.⁹⁵ Notwithstanding the improvements noted by Fowler, the majority of the working class lived in often over crowded, poor quality housing. So much so, that Marwick asserted that on the eve of the Great War, 'bad housing came second to malnutrition as a social evil.'⁹⁶

Housing construction in any quantity did not begin in Wesham before 1852, as previously demonstrated on Illustration 4.⁹⁷ The following three illustrations chronicle Wesham's housing development showing improvement in quality over a 50 year period. Illustration 6: Wesham's First Terraced Houses, were constructed by the mill owners, for their workers. Whitworth Street and Garstang Road were sited within the immediate vicinity of the railway line and textile mills. Illustration 7: Station Road, shows houses of a better quality. These dwellings had some finer architectural features around doorways, window lintels, and roof lines. Many of those on the left had three stories with the ground floor used for shop accommodation. The superior terraced

⁹⁴ Gauldie, *Cruel Habitation*, p. 140.

⁹⁵ Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives*, p. 71.

⁹⁶ Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 24.

⁹⁷ PR3218/3/26 Medlar with Wesham tithes rent charge 1932. 1892 and 1911 Ordnance Survey Maps of Wesham and district and DVPR1/7/6 District Valuation 1910 Finance Act, valuation book and working map (LRO).

housing, Illustration 8: Dwellings on Garstang Road North, was constructed slightly further away from the industrial activity. These dwellings also benefited from a small front garden, bay windowed parlour and a flushing toilet. Other than the farm houses and Mowbreck Hall, these homes had the highest rateable value, between £11 15s and £14 10s, compared to the mill owned dwellings, valued between £4 10s and £4 5s. Whilst the initial housing development was undertaken by the mill owners, by 1910, the housing stock of the parish was predominantly owned by small investors.⁹⁸

Illustration 6: Wesham's First Terraced Houses⁹⁹



⁹⁸ DVPR1/7/6 District Valuation 1910 Finance Act, valuation book and working map (LRO).

⁹⁹ Photograph provided by Andrew Walmsley, Community History Librarian, St Anne's Library.

Illustration 7: Station Road¹⁰⁰



Illustration 8: Dwellings on Garstang Road North¹⁰¹



¹⁰⁰ Author's own postcard.

¹⁰¹ Provided by Andrew Walmsley, Community History Librarian, St Anne's Library.

The 1910 sanitary inspectors' report stated that in Wesham each dwelling had their own privy, with over 40% of dwellings benefiting from flush toilets.¹⁰² Therefore, suggesting that housing legislation had been implemented in the parish. The relatively late construction of Wesham's housing stock appears to have afforded the working class decent quality terraced homes. Although, almost absent from Wesham's housing stock, is the semi-detached and detached house. Only six semi-detached and one detached dwellings, excluding the farmhouses and Mowbreck Hall, are identified on the 1911 Ordnance Survey Map. The small number of the more expensive dwellings correlates to the small number of residents in the parish who would have been able to afford this type of home. Whilst it must be acknowledged that reasons other than finance influence purchasing decisions, Fowler notes that, in some Lancashire cotton towns, home ownership was rising steadily, and was as high as 30% in Burnley and 10% in Blackburn.¹⁰³ In contrast, owner occupancy, at 7.5% in Wesham, was comparatively low.

An enduring cause of poor public health was overcrowding. However, Gauldie established that from the national perspective, overcrowding had been in decline since 1851. By 1911, the national average number of persons per inhabited house was 5.2.¹⁰⁴ In Wesham, the average was 4.8 persons. 66% of households occupied a dwelling that was recorded as having five or more rooms and there are no instances of households living in one room.¹⁰⁵ This suggests overcrowding was not common in Wesham. Nevertheless, amidst these apparently positive statistics, there are exceptions. 11 people lived at 26 Garstang Road, one of the parish's earliest terraced dwellings.

Wesham's housing stock comprised comparatively good quality terraced dwellings. As Illustration 4 demonstrated, 'back-to-back' houses were not constructed in Wesham. The number of inhabitants per household is lower than the national average. The small number of semi-detached and detached dwellings is consistent with the already identified small number of professional households. This is also reflected in the lower number of owner occupiers in comparison to other cotton towns.

¹⁰² Wesham Parish Council Minute Book, 26th April 1910.

¹⁰³ Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁴ Gauldie, *Cruel Habitations*, p. 320.

¹⁰⁵ Household occupancy based on the 1911 census accessed via ancestry.co.uk

Politics, Wages and Industrial Relations in Wesham

At the national level, prior to the Great War the relationship between trades unions, workers and employers was strained to such an extent that Marwick referred to the period as ‘a whirlpool of industrial strife.’¹⁰⁶ During the first decade of the twentieth century, some of those campaigning for female enfranchisement felt compelled to use tactics described as ‘revolutionary.’¹⁰⁷ The Independent Labour Party (ILP) and a small number of women attained local legislative positions such as councillors, magistrates and Poor Law Guardians.¹⁰⁸ Within this context, this section will establish the prevailing conditions in Wesham.

Prior to the Great War, Wesham was located in the Blackpool Parliamentary Division. The division was created in 1885, as a whole it comprised 27 parishes including the coastal resorts, the port of Fleetwood, Kirkham and rural areas. Since it was established, a member of the Conservative Party had represented the division in parliament.¹⁰⁹ In the years prior to the Great War, the division as a whole was ‘unshakably Tory.’¹¹⁰ The Kirkham Conservative Club, the first permanent political party building in either Kirkham or Wesham, opened in 1910.¹¹¹ In 1912, the Kirkham District Liberal Association, under the chairmanship of Mr Bowdler, opened, although, opponents expected it would be ‘bankrupt in three years.’¹¹²

William Moon’s election to the Wesham Parish Council demonstrates the labour movement had established a limited political presence in the district. This was not the case for women, as previously demonstrated in Figure 1.4. Yet, there were women’s groups within the Blackpool Parliamentary Division campaigning for female enfranchisement: the Blackpool and Fylde branch of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Society (NUWSS) and the Blackpool Conservative and Unionist Women’s Franchise Association (CUWFA).¹¹³ These two organisations worked collaboratively hoping to persuade Wilfred Ashley, MP for the Blackpool

¹⁰⁶ Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ S. S. Holton, *Feminism and Democracy Women’s Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900 – 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, pp. 76 – 97 considers the role of women similar to Selina Cooper in Nelson and Ada Chew in Nantwich who were both elected to their local Board of Poor Law Guardians.

¹⁰⁹ F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918* (Aldershot: Parliamentary Research Services, 1989), p.311.

¹¹⁰ Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 130.

¹¹¹ Ramsbottom, *A Historical Tour Around the Town of Kirkham*, p. 77.

¹¹² *Lytham St Anne’s Express* 22nd December, 1916.

¹¹³ Auchterlonie, *Conservative Suffragists*, p. 200.

Parliamentary Division, to support female enfranchisement. While meetings were held in Blackpool, Lytham, St Anne's and Fleetwood, there is no indication any took place in Kirkham or Wesham. Furthermore, none of the women listed as having committee responsibilities within the groups were Kirkham or Wesham residents.¹¹⁴

Interest in trades union membership in Kirkham and Wesham can be traced to the textile trade. In the 1890s, the Kirkham Operative Cotton Spinners' Association was established. This amalgamated in 1906, with the Preston Provincial Operative Cotton Spinners' Association.¹¹⁵ By 1914, membership of The Preston and District Power Loom Weavers, Winders and Warpers' Association (subsequently referred to as the Association) was sufficient for subscriptions to be collected in separate Kirkham and Wesham 'books.' In contrast to the textile workers, there is little to indicate there was agricultural or railway worker union activity in the parish.¹¹⁶

Lancashire's agricultural workers achieved higher wages than those in rural counties.¹¹⁷ At this time, wage levels were attributable to competition with other industries, rather than the influence of agricultural unions. However, in the south-west area of Lancashire, in spring of 1913, there was a challenge to the established balance of power. Agricultural workers in Ormskirk and Speke went on strike, demanding a minimum weekly wage of 24s.¹¹⁸ Mutch suggests that Lord Derby and his agent, Mr Hale, and other land owners, offered to act as mediators between the farmers and their workers. However, farmers dismissed the strikers and drafted in labourers from Ireland.¹¹⁹ The strike was brought to a successful conclusion for the labourers, largely due to 'solidarity action by railway men.'¹²⁰ Their refusal to transport produce harvested or carted to

¹¹⁴The names of those who occupy committee positions within the Blackpool and Fylde branch of the NUWSS are listed in the article published in the *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 25th April 1913. Research suggests they were from Blackpool and Bispham. Those from the CUWFS include Lytham and St Anne's residents.

¹¹⁵ A. Marsh, V. Ryan and J. B. Smethurst, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions. Volume 4* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1994), p. 36.

¹¹⁶ The National Agricultural Labourers' Union had, by 1913, established 26 branches between Preston and Liverpool and had a membership of around 2,000. *Manchester Courier*, 16th June 1913. No mention of any branch in the Kirkham district has been located. Reference to the Kirkham and Wesham branch of the National Union of Railwaymen occurs in the *Preston Guardian* in 1921. Prior to that date individuals may have joined a Preston or Blackpool branch of the union or the precursory Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants.

¹¹⁷ Green, *History of the Agricultural Labourer*, p. 177. R. Lennard, *English Agricultural Wages* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd, 1914), p. 150. He suggests that in Lancashire the average agricultural wage was 21s. See also Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, p. 57. Weekly wages for agricultural workers in Herefordshire were less than 18s in winter and 20s in summer.

¹¹⁸ *Manchester Courier*, 16th June 1913.

¹¹⁹ Mutch, *Rural life in South-West Lancashire*, p. 56.

¹²⁰ Mutch, *Rural life in South-West Lancashire*, p. 57.

the railway by migrant labourers threatened the supply chain. Significantly, this demonstrated the strength of co-ordinated trades union action.

There is no evidence of any disruption to production in Wesham. Two factors may have prevented this. Firstly, the workforce on Wesham's farms was predominantly family members or live-in labourers. They would be unlikely to strike, given their close relationship to the farmer. Secondly, to offset the ready availability of alternative employment within the parish, Wesham's agricultural workers were probably offered competitive terms and conditions.

In the months immediately preceding the Great War, the working relationships at Wesham's Phoenix Mill were tested. In March 1914, representatives of the Association were called to the mill to meet with the manager regarding his refusal to allow, 'weavers to take their own boys to learn weaving.' The outcome was that the parents accepted 'a week's wages in lieu of notice.'¹²¹ This attempt by the parents to secure employment for their offspring reinforces the importance of children's wages to Wesham families. Also, as the children were not permitted to stay in employment at the mill, it demonstrates the Association had little sway in that negotiation. The extent of the Association's influence was demonstrated later that month, as illustrated in this account of proposed industrial action in support of an individual. Wesham resident, and book collector for the Association, Walter Leigh, received notice to leave his employment. A synopsis of the event from the Association's minute book follows:-

On the 23rd March, at a meeting between Association officials and the mill owners, it was alleged that Walter had threatened violence towards the mill manager. The Association suggested that Walter be suspended, rather than his employment terminated. However, the decision was not revoked. The Association resolved that a meeting of wider workforce would be held to ascertain their willingness to give their notices in support of Walter. On 7th April the Association reported that there was no unanimous support for a strike. Walter was therefore unemployed, and awarded victim pay, until the 28th April when he began an employment trial for an insurance company. Throughout this period Walter continued to collect the Kirkham book, until resigning it on the 5th June following his decision to remain with the insurance company.¹²²

¹²¹ DDX1089 1/7 Minute Book of the Preston and District Power-Loom Weavers, Winders and Warpers' Association, 14th March 1914 (LRO).

¹²² DDX1089 1/7 Minute Book of the Preston and District Power-Loom Weavers, Winders and Warpers' Association, 23rd March 1914 – 28th April 1914 (LRO).

There is no record of the events that led to Walter's dismissal for the alleged threat of violence, which could have been unprovoked or in defence of a colleague, although the proposition for a suspension does hint at some measure of Walter's guilt. The Association's willingness to support a strike is contrasted by the reluctance of the workers. This suggests the workforce had little disposition for industrial action in support of an individual, or Walter could simply have been unpopular.

In the years immediately prior to the Great War, wage differentials were a focus for social reformers. Reports suggested that households, with an income of less than £1 a week, were living in abject poverty. Nationally, only 7% of those in employment earned more than £160 annually and were, therefore, liable to income tax.¹²³ Fowler considered that a household income of £2 per week provided an acceptable standard of living in this period.¹²⁴ In assessing the earnings of textile workers, adult weekly wages ranged between 20s 3d to 25s.¹²⁵ If these wage levels applied in Wesham, including the contributions from wives and children, it would be possible for households in the parish to achieve the lifestyle Fowler described.

This section has traced the emergence of a labour movement in the district, clearly linked to the textile trade, if not amongst agricultural workers. While the millocracy and farmers persisted on the parish council, a member of the textile workforce had also been elected. However, women remained unrepresented within positions of authority. The industrial unrest, witnessed immediately prior to the Great War elsewhere, did not occur in the parish, partly due to a compliant workforce and the lack of union power in the district. The potential earning from the two largest employment sectors in the parish afforded most households an acceptable standard of living.

Conclusion

After examining the quality of dwellings, establishing average household occupancy, identifying a clearly defined gender differentiation in employment opportunities within the parish, a final

¹²³ Marwick, *Deluge*, pp. 20 - 23.

¹²⁴ Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives*, p. 44.

¹²⁵ *Manchester Courier*, 13th March 1914.

conclusion regarding the socio-economic status of Wesham prior to the Great War has been reached. It seems unlikely that more than three residents earned sufficient to be reach the income tax threshold, given the occupational structure in the parish. Yet, widespread poverty is not apparent. The variety of shops suggests residents had more than a subsistence level existence. Housing stock, although predominantly terraced houses, was not of the poorest quality. The lack of female political participation and the preponderance of women's conventional employment are at variance with the emerging demand for female emancipation. Relationships between employers and the workforce appear settled, although, employers retained the ascendancy in any negotiations. Therefore, on the eve of the Great War, Wesham presents largely as a traditional, conservative working class community. This is the basis from which any continuums and changes will be established.

Chapter 3

War Begins

Britain's declaration of war, on the 4th August 1914, was greeted enthusiastically by cheering crowds outside Buckingham Palace. In contrast, in some provincial towns and cities, the news was received with horror.¹²⁶ These extreme responses were not widespread and a more pragmatic attitude of 'being in, we must win' was evident.¹²⁷ For the most part politicians, employers, trade unions, workers and the wider population, united. Pennell, however, cautions against national unity being perceived as a display of 'war enthusiasm.' She suggests that the initial responses to the conflict were later misrepresented by politicians, such as Lloyd George, to develop a justification for participating in the conflict.¹²⁸ Despite their need to latterly seek validation, in August 1914 it was widely believed this would be a short war and, therefore, the government saw no reason for intervention in business or private life. Eager to promote continuity, the slogan 'Business as Usual' headlined local and national press.¹²⁹ To encourage enlistment the now infamous jingoistic refrain 'It will all be over by Christmas,' reverberated across the nation. This chapter will explore the initial impact of the conflict in Wesham, considering the community's military and civilian responses.

The Rush to the Colours

Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, anticipated a war of attrition, for which Britain, with a comparatively numerically small army, was ill prepared. Parliament sanctioned an increase in the size of the army and a recruiting campaign began. By December 1915 'Kitchener's Army,' or the New Army, comprised 2,466,719 men.¹³⁰ This unprecedented number of volunteers is popularly depicted as the 'rush to the colours.' This section will establish how large Wesham's 'rush' was, and place it within the national context. It will consider factors that influenced volunteering, whilst acknowledging that decisions would be personal. Marital discord as a reason for enlistment is difficult to establish, although, Wesham's oldest volunteer appeared before the Kirkham Petty Sessions, accused of persistent cruelty towards his wife in the spring of

¹²⁶ Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 24 - 27.

¹²⁷ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 12.

¹²⁸ C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 3. See also Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 10.

¹²⁹ Marwick, *Deluge*, pp. 11- 12.

¹³⁰ DeGroot, *Blighty*, pp. 43 - 46.

1915.¹³¹ Finally, this section will establish if the Wesham's volunteers were equally representative of all sections of the community.

In examining the rush to the colours, Gregory claims that, within the 2,466,719 total, are a small number for whom the term volunteering is misleading. He refers to a level of coercion, shown by the Bristol Poor Law Guardians, who refused to pay relief to able bodied men.¹³² The ultimatum, given by some landowners gave to their workers, enlist or be dismissed, was described as 'bullying' by Mansfield.¹³³ Such policy was not adopted within the rural Fylde. At the August 1914 meeting of the Fylde Board of Guardians, a board member reported that he had received a postcard from a former resident of the Kirkham Children's Home, who had joined the navy. He enquired if the Guardians were currently financially assisting other 'strapping young men who should join the army and have the chance to earn something.' The Chairman's response, that the board had no authority to suggest such action, indicates they would not adopt Bristol's approach.¹³⁴ Lord Derby, the largest land owner in the area, publically stated that, 'When the war is over I intend, as far as I possibly can, to employ nobody except men who have taken their duty at the front.'¹³⁵ The estate's land in Wesham was occupied by tenanted farms, and therefore, Lord Derby's comment would have little impact in compelling Wesham's agricultural families to enlist. However, in the neighbouring parish of Treales, the Derby estate retained sporting rights and employed several game keepers, including Wesham's Matthew Roskell. Did Lord Derby's comments contribute to Matthew enlisting in September 1914?¹³⁶

In some areas of the rural Fylde a subtle form of bribery, probably intended to remove perceived barriers to volunteering, such as job security and a reduction in wages, occurred. At a recruiting meeting held in a nearby agricultural parish, the manager of the Singleton Manor estate, promised workers who volunteered could return to their employment at the end of the conflict. Wages in Singleton must have been higher than those of a soldier indicated by a promise that the

¹³¹ PSK/h (acc.7285) Kirkham Petty Sessions (LRO).

¹³² Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 74.

¹³³ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, p. 89.

¹³⁴ *Preston Guardian*, 22nd August 1914, p. 6.

¹³⁵ DeGroot, *Blighty*, pp. 51-52.

¹³⁶ Matthew Roskell's occupation is recorded on the census and his military service record accessed via ancestry.co.uk

‘difference would be met by the estate.’¹³⁷ As suggested in Chapter 2, Wesham was occupied by tenant farmers who predominantly relied on family labour. Therefore, it would be unlikely that promises such as those made in Singleton, would have had any relevance to Wesham’s volunteers.

Escape from poverty and squalid living conditions are also considered contributors to enlistment. Mansfield provides several examples of agricultural workers, from the rural Marches, who received higher wages by volunteering.¹³⁸ Within Lancashire, Stedman’s *The Somme 1916 and Other Experiences of the Salford Pals* notes that the volunteers came from ‘the most notorious slums.’¹³⁹ It is unlikely that these factors influenced Wesham volunteers. As discussed in Chapter 2, dwellings were of an adequate quality. Prolonged occurrences of industrial unrest were not apparent and there was no long term unemployment in the parish. The *Preston Guardian*’s 1914 review of Kirkham and Wesham noted, ‘mills were fully occupied until the outbreak of the war.’¹⁴⁰

Many volunteers joined ‘pals battalions.’ Lord Derby, who was taking much day to day responsibility for recruiting, is acknowledged to have suggested to Kitchener, that local units could be raised by tapping the ‘powerful sentiments of loyalty felt by men, whatever their occupation, to town, country or community.’¹⁴¹ Synonymous with this recruiting style was the public meeting. Gregory claims that rousing speeches ‘created an atmosphere in which volunteering was seen as an appropriate act.’¹⁴² He also suggests that, volunteering in such a way provided the working class with an opportunity to receive public approval, from peers and those higher up the social ladder.¹⁴³ Such an event occurred on 31st August in Kirkham, where, it was recorded, that an audience of 1,200 was addressed by Lord Derby’s Agent, army officers and the local vicar.¹⁴⁴ An account of this event is provided by Ossie who wrote in his memoir:-

¹³⁷ *Preston Guardian*, 5th September 1914, p. 6.

¹³⁸ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, pp. 88 - 89.

¹³⁹ Stedman, *Experiences of the Salford Pals*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁰ *Preston Guardian*, 16th January 1915, p. 10.

¹⁴¹ Winter, *Great War and British People*, p. 30. See also Maddocks, *The Liverpool Pals*, for the influence of Lord Derby in local recruitment and Turner, *Accrington Pals* as an example of recruiting in a Lancashire cotton town.

¹⁴² Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 75.

¹⁴³ Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 77.

¹⁴⁴ *Preston Guardian*, September 5th 1914, p. 6.

The rhythm of our pleasant and comparatively uneventful life was disrupted in August 1914 by the advent of the Great War. Towards the end of that month fearful of missing the adventure, Stanley Baron and I attended a recruiting meeting at Kirkham and as a result marched from there to Preston, the following morning, together with about 150 other volunteers. We enlisted at the public hall in the 7th (Service) Battalion of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment and became part of Kitchener's first 100,000.¹⁴⁵

The march to Preston the following day was met with great excitement in the district. St Michael's School log book records, 'children taken to watch the departure of the young men to join Lord Kitchener's Army.'¹⁴⁶ A photograph of the 150 men of the rural Fylde, assembled in Kirkham with a placard entitled, 'For Kitchener from Kirkham,' was taken, following which, it was reported that, the Kirkham Band and Boy Scouts led the march passing cheering, flag waving crowds.¹⁴⁷ The number of recruits generated by the Kirkham meeting would have been considered a great success. More commonly recruiting meetings in rural areas produced 'one to a dozen recruits.'¹⁴⁸ Illustration 9: Some of our Recruits, was reproduced locally.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Unpublished memoir of Oswald Aiken, written in 1973, currently in the possession of David Parkinson.

¹⁴⁶ Access to the documents held by St Michael's School provided by the school bursar

¹⁴⁷ *Preston Guardian*, September 5th 1914, p. 6.

¹⁴⁸ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, p. 89.

¹⁴⁹ *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, October 1914.

Illustration 9: Some of our Recruits

SOME OF OUR RECRUITS.



“Quit you like men, be strong.”

B. Hargreaves, Photo, Kirkham.

While the passion and rhetoric exhorted at public meetings may have spurred some of those 150 to enlist, there would also have been others, like Ossie, who had been considering volunteering prior to attending the meeting. For those, these events provided a ‘moment of crystallisation,’ clarifying previous thoughts.¹⁵⁰ As previously discussed in Chapter 2, the middle class was in the minority within Wesham’s community. His father was the Station Master at Wrea Green, and his family circumstances had allowed Ossie to remain in post compulsory education at Kirkham Grammar School, after which he was employed as a railway clerk.¹⁵¹ This inevitably placed the family in this minority, as Ossie himself stated he had a ‘pleasant life.’ Gregory identified that many in a comparable position, but ‘clerks in particular, seem to have been particularly drawn to the army in 1914,’ in a quest for excitement.¹⁵² Ossie’s fear ‘of missing the adventure’ hints that this could have been a contributory factor in his willingness to volunteer.

¹⁵⁰ Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 76.

¹⁵¹ The military service record of Oswald Aiken accessed via [ancestry.co.uk](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=BritishArmyService&h=9136&indiv=try&o_vc=Record%3aOtherRecord&rhSource=2352) http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=BritishArmyService&h=9136&indiv=try&o_vc=Record%3aOtherRecord&rhSource=2352

¹⁵² Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 75.

DeGroot implies that some volunteered because their disposition was suited to army life, suggesting that, ‘war brings out the hidden soldier which lies within many men.’¹⁵³ Whilst, impossible to prove, this may account for the military service of Wesham resident and previously dismissed mill employee, Walter Leigh. Walter remained as an insurance collector, the position gained following his dismissal, until he marched from Kirkham on the 1st September 1914. He appears to have excelled in his army career, quickly gaining promotion to a non-commissioned officer. Despite being injured several times, at the end of the conflict he had become Wesham’s most decorated soldier, being awarded gallantry medals on two occasions. The impulsive, rash or brave character traits that terminated his employment at the mill are evident in the actions for which he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.¹⁵⁴

Enlistment was further encouraged by the British government propaganda which vilified the German leadership and exaggerated claims that their military had committed atrocities towards women and children. DeGroot suggests that this induced, in some volunteers, a need to protect their families from a ‘brutal foe.’¹⁵⁵ Within Kirkham and Wesham the local press was keen to emphasise the altruistic nature of Britain’s involvement in the Great War, implying volunteers would be ‘the helper of distressed and downtrodden Belgium.’¹⁵⁶ It is probable that Wesham residents did not need any news or propaganda to make them aware of the ease with which the German army was advancing through Belgium. The parish’s Roman Catholic priest, Father D’Heurter, was himself Belgian. By October 1914 two of his nephews had been killed while serving in the Belgian army, and his brother had been taken prisoner.¹⁵⁷ Additionally, a Wesham recalls that when Belgian refugees arrived at Preston train station, Father D’Heurter was called upon to translate, being a fluent speaker of Flemish and Walloons.¹⁵⁸ The first refugees arrived

¹⁵³ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 46.

¹⁵⁴ *The London Gazette* 9th November 1916 and 13th February 1917, *Preston Guardian* 6th January 1917 and Distinguished Conduct Medal citation accessed via ancestry.co.uk http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=View&r=5538&dbid=1913&iid=31825_217834-00889&fn=W.&ln=Leigh&st=r&ssrc=&pid=9079

¹⁵⁵ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 48.

¹⁵⁶ *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, March 1915.

¹⁵⁷ *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 16th October, 1914.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with RC June 2013. In attempt to find a documentary source to support this testimony extensive searches of the local newspapers have been undertaken, although nothing has been located. However, after visiting the Talbot Library, Preston, it has been possible to establish that Father D’Heurter was one of the most fluent linguists in the Liverpool Diocese. He is known to have spoken Dutch, Flemish, French, German, Italian, Spanish and English.

in Kirkham on 31st October, 1914 and the *Preston Guardian* noted that they had previously resided in St Nicholas, the birth place of Father D’Heurter.¹⁵⁹

Although, the Church of England clerics very visibly encouraged their parishioners to enlist, it has been suggested that, while the British Roman Catholic Church supported the war, their priests were publically far less vocal.¹⁶⁰ It is intriguing to consider if Wesham’s priest displayed equal reticence given his nationality and personal loss. Throughout September and October 1914 he delivered a series of Sunday afternoon lectures on the histories of the nations at war. The content of the lectures is not known, although the events were ‘well attended by all denominations and crowded on each occasion.’¹⁶¹ Was the Roman Catholic representation within the parish’s earliest volunteers attributable to Father D’Heurter influence? No direct correlation has been established. However, he is known to have been interested in the spiritual welfare of Wesham’s Roman Catholic volunteers, as the family of William Cartmell recall, Father D’Heurter gave each of them a set of Rosary beads as they left for their military service.¹⁶²

The most contentious debate regarding volunteer levels in the early months of the Great War is the extent to which patriotism or unemployment influenced men to enlist. Winter, in his *The Great War and the British People*, suggests that, ‘there can be little doubt that popular sentiment rather than pecuniary considerations’ influenced volunteering.¹⁶³ He compared the wage structure of several industries that provided significant numbers of recruits, to that available in the military. He found that miners and those employed in manufacturing were financially worse off by enlisting.¹⁶⁴ In contrast, while Gregory acknowledges other contributory factors, he stresses economic distress prior to and at the outset of the war, was one of the more powerful reasons for enlistment. In some major industrial areas manufacturing shut down immediately or at best worked short time. In these locations up to 50% of those who enlisted had been unemployed. He also suggests that, many married waited until the rate of separation allowances

¹⁵⁹ *Preston Guardian*, 31st October 1914, p. 10.

¹⁶⁰ M. Purdy, ‘Roman Catholic Army Chaplains During The First World War – Roles, Experiences and Dilemmas’ unpublished MA by Research, University of Central Lancashire, 2011, p. 13.

¹⁶¹ *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 16th October, 1914.

¹⁶² Interview with the family of William Cartmell, November 2011. The family are still in possession of the Rosary beads.

¹⁶³ Winter, *Great War and British People*, p. 33.

¹⁶⁴ Winter, *Great War and British People*, pp. 29 – 39.

had been established, and only then, confident that their families would be financially provided for, volunteered.¹⁶⁵

The irregular working patterns, and periods of temporary unemployment, referred to by Gregory, occurred in Lancashire's textile industry. The minute book of the Preston and District Power-Loom Weavers, Winders and Warpers' Association recorded that payments 'for stoppages due to bad trade' had increased significantly since the war began.¹⁶⁶ This happened in Wesham where irregular working patterns were common between August and December 1914. It was reported, on the 8th August, 'mills are closed on account of the war.' By the 26th September this altered to 'prospects in the cotton trade have improved.'¹⁶⁷ This was a temporary reprieve as on the 3rd October it was reported that, 'Bowdler Mill shut, others running at half time. Outdoor employment is brisk.'¹⁶⁸ The following month it was reported that, 'weaving improved ... spinning remains stopped.'¹⁶⁹ At the August meeting of the Lancashire Farmers Association Wesham farmer, Richard Parkinson, reported that, 'within half an hour one day he had several applications for employment from mill hands.'¹⁷⁰ This implies that the mill workers were seeking alternative forms of employment, of which military service would have provided another option to farm work. A minor consolation of the mills closures, if it could be considered that, was Wesham's working children benefited from additional education. Throughout August and September 1914 it was noted in St Joseph's School log book, 'The half timers have made full time attendance as the mills are closed.'¹⁷¹

Having outlined possible motivations for volunteering, consideration will now be given to the number of recruits. How big was Wesham's 'rush?' In October 1914 the first edition the *Kirkham and Wesham Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, contained a list of volunteers from the district, including 56 Wesham men.¹⁷² By March 1915, when the second edition was published,

¹⁶⁵ Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 30 -33.

¹⁶⁶ DDX1089 1/7 Minutes of the Preston and District Power-Loom Weavers, Winders and Warpers' Association (LRO).

¹⁶⁷ *Preston Guardian* 8th August, p. 10 and 26th September 1914, p. 10.

¹⁶⁸ *Preston Guardian* 3rd October 1914, p.10.

¹⁶⁹ *Preston Guardian*, 7th November 1914, p.10.

¹⁷⁰ *Preston Guardian*, 22nd August 1914, p. 4.

¹⁷¹ SMWM1/1 Wesham, St Joseph's RC Log Book (LRO).

¹⁷² *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, October 1914.

the total of those serving had risen to 85.¹⁷³ These figures have been used to establish enlistment levels within the parish. However, the document itself highlights a significant issue; it only includes those who were accepted for military service and not those who had tried to enlist and were prevented, through age or on medical grounds. Many local men were rejected due to ‘defective eyesight,’ although their names are not listed.¹⁷⁴

Winter used the *General Annual Report of the British Army 1913 – 1919* to establish that 24.2% of men, aged between 15 and 49 years, listed on the 1911 census, volunteered for military service between 1914- 1918.¹⁷⁵ The time span does not provide a direct comparison for the number who had volunteered from Wesham by March 1915. However, using the same age range, 363 men were eligible to volunteer. Therefore, the total of 85 volunteers represents 23.4% of those eligible.¹⁷⁶ This suggests that numerically the number of volunteers from the parish was within 1% of the national total, within eight months. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, this figure increased prior to the introduction of conscription. To contextualise the significance of the total number of early volunteers, Gregory’s research provides comparison to other industrial and manufacturing districts. He states that, of those eligible, the proportion of those who had volunteered by March 30th 1915 were; 18.5% in Newcastle and Nottingham, 10.5% in Swansea, 7.6% in Wakefield, 7.1% in Hull, 6.7% in Sheffield and Leeds, 5.2% in Derby, 4.1% in Bradford, 4% in Oldham and 2.6% in Leicester.¹⁷⁷ Mansfield’s noted the perception that the rural areas did not provide as many volunteers as urban areas. He suggests that this was, in some part, due to the ease of access to recruiting offices and need to complete the harvest. Despite this, at the end of the conflict, the comparative rates of voluntary enlistment from rural and urban areas were very similar.¹⁷⁸

A further consideration of this initial recruitment phase is offered by DeGroot, who suggests that depicting the ‘rush’ as a sustained phenomenon is a misconception. He established that after the 9th September 1914, recruitment slowed as regular working patterns were re-established.

Volunteer numbers never again reached those attained in the last week in August and the first

¹⁷³ *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, March 1915.

¹⁷⁴ *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, October 1914.

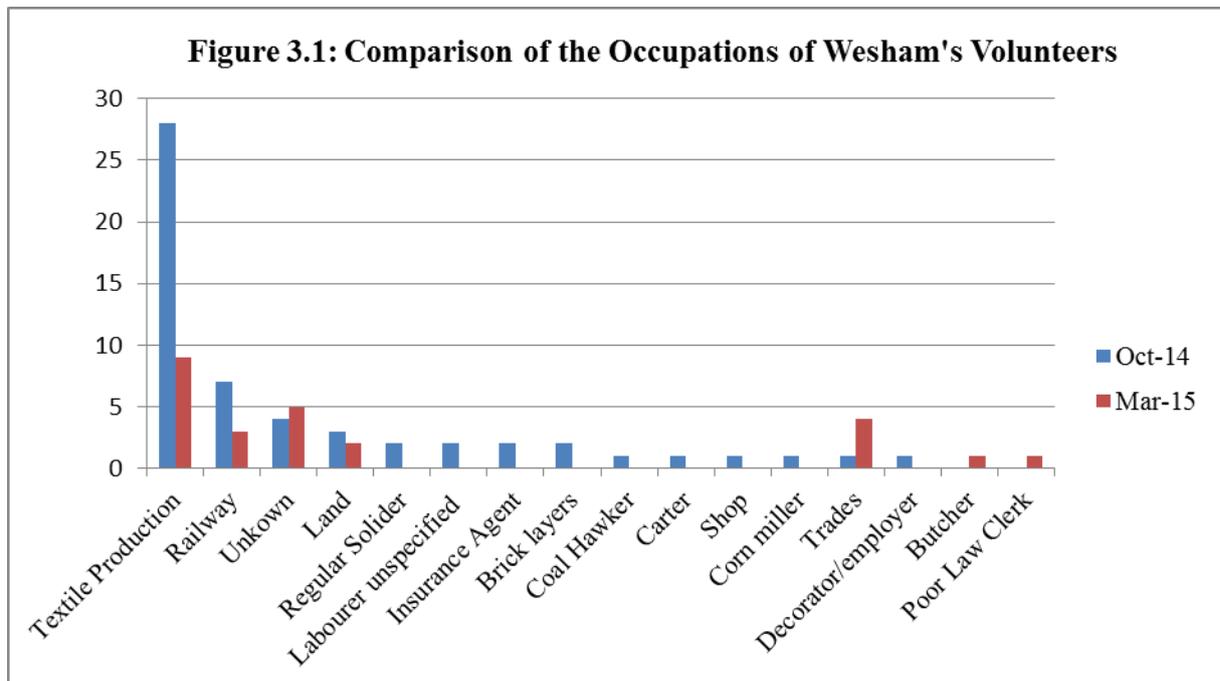
¹⁷⁵ Winter, *Great War and British People*, pp. 27 - 28.

¹⁷⁶ The figure has been revised slightly from the total listed on the 1911 census to account for those known to have died, emigrated and moved within the United Kingdom.

¹⁷⁷ Gregory, *Last Great War*, p 88.

¹⁷⁸ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, pp. 88 -111.

week of September.¹⁷⁹ In Wesham, the difference in the number of volunteers between October 1914 and March 1915 equates to a 51.7% increase. Figure 3.1: Comparison of the Occupations of Wesham's Volunteers, demonstrates that amongst the proportionately high number of volunteers, there was a marked difference in the willingness to enlist between the parish's different employment sectors.¹⁸⁰



Winter's correlations between occupation and enlistment rates demonstrate those in professional and clerical employment volunteered readily.¹⁸¹ As demonstrated in Chapter 2, within Wesham, these occupations represented a small percentage of the parish's population, therefore it is expected that they represent a small number volunteers on Figure 3.1. Those who had previously been employed on the railway comprised 12.3% of Wesham's total. This is slightly higher than the 10% national average, although railway companies dissuaded their employees from volunteering, mindful of the government's need to maintain the transport networks.¹⁸² The highest number of Wesham's volunteers came from the largest employment sector, the textile industry, and represents nearly 46% of the total. Within the parish there would have been few other employment opportunities, as family labour predominated on farms. It is therefore probable that Gregory's connexion between unemployment levels and volunteering rates, could

¹⁷⁹ DeGroot, *Blighty*, pp. 43 - 46.

¹⁸⁰ The occupation structure of those listed on the *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, has been created from newspaper reports and where possible remaining service records. If either of these sources were unavailable the 1911 Census has been used.

¹⁸¹ Winter, *Great War and British People*, pp. 33 - 37.

¹⁸² Winter, *Great War and British People*, p. 36.

apply in Wesham. The largest discrepancy between number in an occupation and volunteering level is found within Wesham’s agricultural sector. This sector provided only 6% of the total volunteers, and further scrutiny of the total suggests that Wesham’s agricultural families could be perceived as being unpatriotic. Figure 3.2: Wesham’s Agricultural Workers as Volunteers, compares the number of those eligible to volunteer with the total of those who enlisted.¹⁸³

Figure 3.2: Wesham’s Agricultural Workers as Volunteers		
Designation	Number aged 15 – 49 years on the 1911 census	Number known to have enlisted by March 1915
Tenant farmers	5	0
Farmers’ sons living on the farm	16	0
Farmers’ sons living in Wesham	2	0
‘Live in’ agricultural workers	22	1
Live out agricultural workers	13	4

Mansfield’s study of the rural Marches identified that farm workers, after they completed the harvesting, volunteered willingly. This was despite, in some cases, recruits having to walk fifteen miles to enlist.¹⁸⁴ These endeavours must have been similarly undertaken across the country, as Winter’s research found that nationally, by February 1915 15.6% of the agricultural workforce had enlisted.¹⁸⁵ Yet within Wesham the total was only 8.6%. By the end of August 1914 the term ‘shirker’ began to be used across the country to describe tenant farmers and their sons who, as an entity, were perceived to be avoiding volunteering.¹⁸⁶ As Figure 3.2 shows, it would be difficult to argue against this perception in Wesham. All those who volunteered from this sector were non-family members, and only one lived at their place of employment.

¹⁸³ The occupation structure of those listed on the *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, has been created from newspaper reports and where possible remaining service records. If either of these sources were unavailable the 1911 Census has been used.

¹⁸⁴ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, pp. 88 - 89.

¹⁸⁵ Winter, *Great War and British People*, p. 34.

¹⁸⁶ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, p. 113.

In summary, the total of textile workers included with Wesham's volunteers suggests that unemployment significantly influenced enlistment levels. However, even Gregory, recognised that, 'the number of men out of work massively outnumbered those who volunteered.'¹⁸⁷ Therefore, unemployment alone is too simplistic an explanation. Reasons considered in this chapter will, to a greater and lesser extent, have influenced individual decisions. It is determined that Wesham's textile workers present themselves as a composite of Winter's patriots and Gregory's unemployed; the patriotic unemployed. Whatever their motivations, the men of the parish responded to Kitchener's call swiftly and in number. Yet, it is evident from the occupation structure of those who had enlisted the call was not borne equally among all sections of the community.

Business as usual

This section will assess the response to the conflict by the community as a whole, considering the extent to which this conformed to the established gender expectations and social hierarchies of the pre-war parish. The first eight months of the conflict were typified by the government's reluctance to interfere with everyday life, as the slogan 'business as usual' resonated across the country. The extent to which life continued as usual in Wesham will be established.

'Business as Usual' was the government's indication to the business sector that, as a speedy outcome to the conflict was anticipated, pre-war economic policies would remain unchanged.¹⁸⁸ Wesham's Parish Council also appears to have maintained normality. The first council meeting following the declaration of war did not take place until the 12th November 1914, with the main business being securing a loan to erect a new fire station.¹⁸⁹ In neighbouring Kirkham, a special meeting of the Kirkham Urban District Council (UDC) was held on 20th August to discuss the National Relief Fund. This did not appear to warrant immediate action, as it was resolved to consider this at the next meeting.¹⁹⁰ Following an invitation from Kirkham UDC, Wesham councillors joined with Kirkham to establish the district's War Relief Sub-committee. This comprised clerics and members of the minority social elite. While three women were included,

¹⁸⁷ Gregory, *Last Great War*, p 32.

¹⁸⁸ DeGroot, *Blighty*, pp. 55 - 59.

¹⁸⁹ Wesham Parish Council Minute Book, 12th November 1914.

¹⁹⁰ UDKi/1/6 Kirkham UDC Minute Book 20th August 1914 (LRO).

the wives of doctors and clerics could not be considered representative of women in the community as a whole.¹⁹¹

The speed emergency legislation was enacted, the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) was introduced on the 8th August 1914, initially appears to be a contradiction to the government's non-interventionist approach. However, Marwick suggests that this was primarily connected with national self-defence, with little concern for the basic needs of the wider public.¹⁹²

Therefore, one of the first government initiatives introduced through DORA, the Alien Restrictions Act 1914, permitted the monitoring of those who could be perceived as aiding the enemy. Whilst any threat of spying or sabotage was greatly exaggerated, the legislation served a purpose, vilifying Germany and aiding national solidarity.¹⁹³ Anti-German sentiment swept across the country. In the rural Fylde on the 9th October, Kirkham UDC deprecated the action of the Governors of Kirkham Grammar School in retaining a German, Mr Schweikher, as Science Master. The school was written to asking that he be removed. A reply was received on the 4th November, stating that the teacher had tendered his resignation.¹⁹⁴

Community support for the war effort was demonstrated in many guises. As previously noted, a large crowd attended a public recruiting meeting at the end of August 1914, subsequently women and children cheered enthusiastically as those willing to enlist marched to Preston. The government considered the endorsement of a loved one's military service was the most vital task a woman could do to support the war effort.¹⁹⁵ In contrast to the outward displays of excitement reported in the newspaper, privately many mothers and wives may have had conflicting sentiments. When recalling the reaction he received on his return from enlisting, Ossie stated, 'when my mother found out she played hell.'¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ UDKi/1/6 Kirkham UDC Minute Book 27th August 1914 (LRO).

¹⁹² Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 42 - 43.

¹⁹³ DeGroot, *Blighty*, pp. 157 - 160.

¹⁹⁴ UDKi/1/6 Kirkham UDC Minute Book (LRO).

¹⁹⁵ Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, pp. 10 – 22 and Marwick, *Women at War*, pp. 27 – 36.

¹⁹⁶ *The Lancashire Evening Post*, 5th November, 1988.

Many demonstrations of female support for the war effort were practical, as ‘needlework mania’ swept across the county.¹⁹⁷ The women of Kirkham and Wesham actively participated in this producing a ‘very fine assortment of attire essential for soldiers comfort.’¹⁹⁸ Charity fund raising events occurred on an almost weekly basis.¹⁹⁹ This spread to such an extent that Kirkham UDC were forced to issue reminders regarding registration under the War Charities Act and that street collections could only be undertaken by those over 16 years.²⁰⁰ Whilst this alludes to patriotic spirit, it was organised by a small group of middle class women. Noakes, in her study ‘Women’s Military Service in the First World War,’ acknowledged the value of these tasks, but suggests they conformed to and reinforced gender stereotypes. Women were seen to be most useful participating in compassionate projects which could be organised from, and undertaken predominantly within, a home environment.²⁰¹

A further practical suggestion was made by Miss Hoffman, who wrote to the Kirkham UDC, ‘asking the Council to renew classes in Ambulance and Sick Nursing.’ Seemingly impressed with the idea, in November 1914, the council allocated £10 for this training.²⁰² Within six months, over 160 men and women of Kirkham and Wesham obtained First Aid Certificates and, a Kirkham Division of the St John Ambulance Brigade was established. Wesham Doctor William Smith was appointed the Honorary Surgeon. Despite the initial request for training coming from a woman, as demonstrated in Illustration 10: Kirkham Division of the St John Ambulance Brigade, the division was exclusively male.²⁰³

¹⁹⁷ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 68.

¹⁹⁸ *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, March 1915.

¹⁹⁹ *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, March 1915.

²⁰⁰ UDKi/1/6 Kirkham UDC Minute Book, (LPO).

²⁰¹ L. Noakes, ‘Women’s Military Service in the First World War,’ *War, Women and Society 1914 – 1918*, <<http://tlemea.com/Noakes.asp>> [accessed October 1912]

²⁰² UDKi/1/6 Kirkham UDC Minute Book, 2nd September 1914 – 4th November 1914 (LPO).

²⁰³ *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, March 1915. Dr Smith is seated on the middle row and is wearing an overcoat, also included in the photograph are at least two other men from Wesham.

Illustration 10: Kirkham Division of the St John Ambulance Brigade



Opportunities for women to utilise their first aid training developed as the war progressed. A pre-existing war casualty management plan assumed that by requisitioning 23 public buildings, to supplement the existing military hospitals, all expected casualties could be accommodated. This plan was quickly proved inadequate. Overwhelmed, the government was forced into commandeering more buildings. The Children's Cottage Home, Kirkham and Wesham Council School and part of the Fylde Union Workhouse Infirmary were requisitioned.²⁰⁴ Illustration 11: Wesham Military Hospital and Nellie Porter, shows Kirkham resident Nellie enlisted in the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD).²⁰⁵ While women from Kirkham and the neighbouring parish of Wrea Green enlisted as VADs, there is no evidence that any of Wesham's women undertook a similar role. This may in part be due to the expense incurred in becoming a VAD, purchasing your own uniform may have prohibitive to Wesham's working class women. Additionally, as

²⁰⁴ *Preston Guardian*, 20th March 1915 p. 10 and CC/EXKL 3/1 Kirkham and Wesham Council School Minutes (LRO).

²⁰⁵ Provided by the family of Nellie Porter. After the war Nellie married Wesham newsagent Joseph Hodgson.

Marwick suggested, the VAD recruitment process was deliberately bias towards selecting middle and upper class women.²⁰⁶

Illustration 11: Wesham Military Hospital and Nellie Porter



There is evidence that the location of the military hospitals did cause some disruption in the district. The children of Kirkham and Wesham Council School were forced to vacate their building. As demonstrated in the school minute book, the initial suggestion that the children should be distributed among the others schools in the area was not approved of by the school managers. In the interests of the children they believed that it was ‘essential that the school should not be broken up.’ Their opinion was respected and the children were moved into temporary accommodation in the Congregational Sunday School in Kirkham. The use of a less than ideal building continued until almost a year after the Armistice. The children did not return to their own school until the 27th October 1919.²⁰⁷ Wesham’s military hospitals were comparatively small. The largest of the three, the Fylde Union Workhouse Infirmary, could accommodate 60 casualties. Evidence indicates that the facility functioned as a convalescent site, not a major surgical or trauma unit. Those that died there were not as a result of a war

²⁰⁶ A. Marwick, *Women at War 1914 – 1918* (Glasgow: Fontana in association with The Imperial War Museum, 1977), p. 84

²⁰⁷ CC/EXKL 3/1 Kirkham and Wesham Council School Minutes, 3rd January 1918 – 21st June 1920 (LRO).

related injury, but probably due to the aggravation of pre-existing medical conditions or from illnesses which during the period were commonly fatal.²⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the location of these hospitals must have negatively impacted upon morale in the parish.

Active encouragement of the war effort also took place within some local churches, as the Church of England vicar delivered 'recruiting sermons' throughout 1915.²⁰⁹ The role of clerics in urging their parishioners to risk their own life, or take another, is an apparent contradiction to their theological beliefs. Wilson explores how the vicar of the small rural community of Great Leighs in Essex, struggled with this predicament and how he reconciled this by likening the deaths in combat of his parishioners, to the sacrifice made by Christ.²¹⁰ In addition to using his church to endorse recruiting, the vicar of St Michael's wrote an open letter imploring Kirkham's and Wesham's volunteers to, 'become good rifle shots (and) learn how to use the bayonet.'²¹¹

Throughout the rural Fylde, many advocates of military service were, themselves, excluded on age or medical grounds. However, they found opportunities to demonstrate their commitment to the national cause. Several Church of England clerics and textile mill owners, including Mr Bowdler of Wesham Mill Company, joined those who had been medically unable to enlist, in the Kirkham Volunteer Training Corps, others were sworn in as Special Constables.²¹² However, very evident, in the structure of these organisations, was the extent to which the prevailing social hierarchy was maintained. Either a mill owner or cleric assumed the role of Commandant or Section Commander.²¹³

While very limited, opportunities beyond the norm for the socially elite women of the district were created. In contrast, for the majority of Wesham's women, the onset of the conflict brought

²⁰⁸ Private Arthur Simpson died while serving with the Royal Army Medical Corp and stationed at the Fylde Union Infirmary Military Hospital. He had never served abroad. He is buried in the cemetery of Christ Church, Wesham. <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/373039/SIMPSON,%20ARTHUR> Private Benjamin Curwen died of pneumonia at the Fylde Union Infirmary Military Hospital. He had never served abroad and is buried in Pilling. <http://roll-of-honour.selvi.co.uk/Lancashire/Pilling.html>

²⁰⁹ Reports of sermons delivered in St Michael's Church, Kirkham from the *Preston Guardian* begin in May 1915 and continue throughout the year.

²¹⁰ Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, pp. 178 - 181.

²¹¹ *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, October 1914.

²¹² *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, March 1915.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

considerable upheaval. As identified in Chapter 2, the textile trade dominated female employment, which was, initially, adversely affected. Thom's study established that nationally during the first five months female employment decreased by 43% in textile production.²¹⁴ Given the known disruption to this industry in Wesham, this trend would have been replicated, with few if any, alternative employment opportunities available. The family labour that dominated on the farms remained in-situ and no new industry developed in the parish.

Financial anxiety was experienced in households where the primary wage earner had enlisted for military service. Amid fears that this could hinder further enlistment the government introduced separation allowances. These were payable directly to the woman, despite some protestations that this threatened the position of the man as the head of the household.²¹⁵ A more pressing concern, however, for families was the delay in receiving the payments.²¹⁶ As at least 28 of Wesham's first volunteers were married, it was deemed necessary to establish a Kirkham and Wesham committee, including Mr Hale, solely to assist those who were attempting to access this allowance. Whilst Mr Hale, Lord Derby's agent, may have been concerned with alleviating any distress in the district, it is more likely that his inclusion on the committee was to remove any perceived barriers to enlisting, in support of his employer's role in the recruiting campaign.

Throughout this period, the government persisted in adopting a non-interventionist approach, failing to comprehend the circumstances in which intervention would have been beneficial.²¹⁷ Failing to restricting the increase in food prices was one such mistake. By the spring of 1915, food hoarding and price rises led to newspaper articles such as 'Food for War-Time Health.' These gave ideas on food economies but admitted that diets would contain less meat and more pulses. However, significantly the articles suggested that a weekly cost of 17s 6d was necessary to provide a nutritious diet for a family of five.²¹⁸ The figure was equivalent to the weekly separation allowance that Sarah Boulton, the wife of one of Wesham's first volunteers, received for her family.²¹⁹ It is also worth noting, that while rising food prices would place financial

²¹⁴ Thom, 'Women and Work,' para. 3.

²¹⁵ Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, pp. 22 – 23.

²¹⁶ Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 43.

²¹⁷ Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 42 - 43.

²¹⁸ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 25th June 1915.

²¹⁹ Alfred Boulton's military service record accessed via ancestry.co.uk

<http://search.ancestry.co.uk/Browse/view.aspx?dbid=1219&path=B.Bo.Bou.3592&sid=&gskw=Alfred+Boulton>

strain on household income, it was also a concern to the Fylde Union Workhouse. In 1915, it was reported that, there was ‘unusual interest attached to the tenders submitted to the Fylde Guardians.’ The cost of meat, flour and coal had increased since the previous contracts had been awarded and suppliers were indicating that, if the ‘prevailing circumstances’ continued, prices would rise further.²²⁰

To summarise, Wesham’s community did much to support the war effort. Clerics encouraged their parishioners to volunteer, those ineligible for military service participated in the local defence corps, and numerous fund raising and benevolent initiatives were undertaken. Despite outward unity, these activities largely reinforced social hierarchies and gender stereotypes. Disruption to the textile trade, proportionately the largest female employer, would have caused financial distress. As the parish council went about their normal duties, central government’s lack of intervention was already adversely impacting upon the working class. With unemployment, high food prices and casualties arriving in the parish’s military hospitals, it was far from business as usual in Wesham.

Conclusion

This chapter has documented the impact of the Great War to Wesham during the first years of the conflict. The textile trade, proportionately the largest employment sector in the parish, experienced immediate disruption. The high levels of voluntary enlistment are a combination of patriotism and economic factors. Most damningly, it has been clearly demonstrated, that those who were unlikely to experience pecuniary constraints, the farmers and their sons, felt no desire to express their patriotism by enlisting. Examination of the contribution of the civilian population established that patriotism was displayed, but that entrenched social hierarchies and gender differentiation remained. The absence of government intervention in the food supply chain, and the resulting price increases, suggests business was unusual.

²²⁰ *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 17th September 1915.

Chapter 4

Laissez Faire Abandoned

Prior to the Great War, almost half of the Britain's food was imported.²²¹ The country was equally dependant on imported animal feed and fertilizer to maintain home production.²²² When war was declared, Prime Minister Asquith was persuaded that there was little threat of disruption to imports and, therefore, no need for the government to intervene in Britain's food supply.²²³ Prevailing conditions at home and abroad challenged this misplaced confidence and forced the government to change policy; the quantity of home produced foodstuffs had to be increased. Dewey suggested that, labour shortages and the scarcity of industrial inputs were potential threats to implementing this objective.²²⁴ This chapter will consider how the government's change of policy impacted on agricultural practice within Wesham, considering how the dairy farmers responded to the government's requirement to increase the quantity of arable land.

The military's requirement for more men coincided with a decrease in the number of those willing to enlist. Simultaneously, the labour requirements of war industries and agriculture increased. This chapter will explore the government's attempts to revive voluntary military service, assessing how the men of the Wesham responded. The failure to encourage sufficient volunteers made conscription unavoidable, although many sought to evade this. An arbitration system was established to decide who could be exempted from military service. The Military Service Tribunal (MST), caused resentment in many communities.²²⁵ This chapter will consider the extent to which this occurred in Wesham.

From 'official neglect' to an 'avalanche of orders' - Maintaining the Food Supply

Prior to the conflict, 'successive governments had little influence on the structure of British Agriculture' and, initially, central government saw no need to alter this policy.²²⁶ Instead, the

²²¹Twinch, *Women on the Land*, p. 2.

²²² DDX 1795/5/1/29 *Journal of the Royal Lancashire Agricultural Society* 1915 (LPO).

²²³ Twinch, *Women on the Land*, p. 2.

²²⁴ Dewey, 'Problems in Production,' pp. 241 – 254.

²²⁵ McDermott, *British Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 2-3.

²²⁶ E. H. Whetham, J. Thirsk and H.P.R. Finberg (eds.) *The Agrarian History of England and Wales. Volume 8: 1914-39* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 69.

government chose to disseminate and gather information via the formal and informal networks that existed between the Board of Agriculture, county councils and county level tenant farmer associations. Fylde farmers chose to have their interests represented by the Lancashire Farmers' Association (LFA). Whilst the executive committee of the LFA comprised almost entirely of socially elite farmers, the organisation of the local branches was beginning to be undertaken by tenant farmers, such as, Richard Parkinson of Pasture Barn, Wesham.

The LFA meeting of 1914 began with the Chairman urging members to assist the country during the present crisis. This was followed by a discussion regarding the levels of agricultural labours available for the forthcoming harvest. Officers from the Preston Labour Bureau suggested they could co-ordinate supplying recently unemployed men to rural districts, although, farmers were adamant that any unskilled agriculturalists would only be suitable for certain tasks.²²⁷ In some areas of Lancashire, farmers circumvented hiring replacement men. By September 1914, it was reported that, in the south-west of the county, boys were harvesting the potato crop.²²⁸ As the conflict continued, in the textile districts of Lancashire, where children twelve years and over were already employed in the mills, younger children were removed from schools for 'a few weeks to assist farmers in getting in their potatoes.'²²⁹ Some contemporary reporters referred to this practice as the 'exploitation of childhood.'²³⁰ Aside from this concern some, within the labour movement, feared workforce manipulation by farmers; employing cheap labour, when other labour was available, albeit at a higher wage rate.²³¹ The earliest recorded use of child labour on Wesham's farms occurred in August 1918, when two boys from St Joseph's School, were 'absent all week, (and) will be for the next three weeks for work on the land.'²³² Given the known retention of family labour on Wesham's farms, during the early stages of the conflict, this is not unexpected. It must be acknowledged, however, that this may disguise daily absence from school of farmers' children. Armstrong noted in Kent, 'unauthorised absence was never subjected to close official monitoring.'²³³

²²⁷ *Preston Guardian*, 22nd August 1914.

²²⁸ *Preston Guardian*, 19th September 1914 p. 5.

²²⁹ CC/WAM 1 Minute Book Lancashire War Agriculture Committee (LRO).

²³⁰ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, p. 124.

²³¹ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, pp. 123-124.

²³² SMWM 1 /2 St Joseph's School Log Book (LRO).

²³³ Armstrong, 'Kentish Rural Society,' p. 117.

Labour shortages may have been a concern to farmers, but the wider community was agitated by rising price of basic food stuffs. Blame for this, was directed towards farmers. There were, in the local press, articles that accused farmers' of profiteering and claiming that the 'poor were being exploited.'²³⁴ As Crowe noted, 'there was a widespread assumption that, 'famers' were doing well.'²³⁵ The response of the LFA was that these opinions were 'unfair and inaccurate.'²³⁶ Regardless of who was at fault, by June 1915, the Management Committee of the General Federation of Trades Unions stated that rising food prices had the potential to cause industrial unrest in Lancashire. The Committee urged the government to intervene.²³⁷

Amidst these concerns, in June 1915, the government ordered an enquiry into food production and supply. The resulting Milner Report identified that increasing home production would create many challenges for the farming community. Established rotational systems would have to be modified and existing pasture land ploughed, creating a dilemma for some farmers as to how to feed their livestock. Changes within agriculture would inevitably incur a degree of financial jeopardy and was, to an extent, subject to seasonal constraints. It was perhaps unsurprising that these changes were met with inertia, and as recompense farmers expected guaranteed returns for their investment in the form of favourable prices and a long term share of the market.²³⁸ The Milner Report was largely ignored by the Government.

Probably as a conciliatory measure County War Agriculture Committees (CWAC) were introduced in October 1915, their function, to support and guide farmers.²³⁹ At the inaugural meeting of the Lancashire War Agricultural Committee (LWAC) Mr Windham Hale, Wesham resident and Lord Derby's land agent, was elected Chairman. Lancashire was divided into 16 sub-districts, with Wesham included in the Preston and District sub-district. Following a reorganisation, in December 1916, the parish was transferred to the Poulton and District sub-district.²⁴⁰ One of the first duties of CWACTs was to assess the impact of the conflict on agriculture in their county and identify potential risks to production. Within Lancashire the

²³⁴ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 3rd November 1916.

²³⁵ Crowe, 'Profitable Ploughing?' p. 206.

²³⁶ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 3rd November 1916.

²³⁷ *Manchester Courier*, 5th June 1915. p.1.

²³⁸ Perren *Agriculture in Depression*, p. 31, Whetham, Thirsk and Finberg (eds.) *Agrarian History*, pp. 75 – 76 and Twinch, *Women on the Land*, pp. 2- 6.

²³⁹ DDX 1795/5/2/4 'War Agricultural Committees, Their Function and Duties' (LRO)

²⁴⁰ CC/WAM 1 Minute Book Lancashire War Agriculture Committee, 4th November 1915 (LRO).

Preston and District farmers had not identified any acute labour shortages, but anticipated that the removal of skilled labour would lead to this. They were also adamant that they did not consider it practicable to increase the proportion of arable land.²⁴¹ However, in the arable sub-districts farmers suggested that the factors Dewey referred to as ‘industrial inputs,’ particularly fertilisers and machinery, were in short supply and could hinder future production.²⁴² The majority thought it would be difficult to attract women to work on the land, due to the high wages and indoor working conditions offered in Lancashire’s manufacturing industries.²⁴³

Twinch’s assessment of CWACs was, that they were ‘largely ineffective’ until Lloyd George became Prime Minister.²⁴⁴ CWACs had no means of enforcing their will and their guidance was often ignored by individual tenant farmers. This lack of compulsion is synonymous with the shift in power in the relationship between landlord and tenant farmer. As Windham Hale himself noted in 1915, when referring to the Derby estate’s south-west Lancashire tenants, ‘I have consulted the farmers in Speke, (they) as a rule tell you one thing and fully agree with what you propose, but follow their own ideas at the end.’²⁴⁵

This change in the balance of power in the landlord and tenant relationship began prior to the conflict, as death duties and increased taxes had forced large estates to sell land to their tenants. During the conflict this was exacerbated, as farmers’ profits rose while rents remained static. Selling-off of Derby Estate land began in 1916. Mr Hale held a meeting in Burscough to enquire if tenant farmers wanted to purchase their tenancies.²⁴⁶ By default, owner occupiers could and would, act more autonomously than tenants. As the conflict ended the relative prosperity of farmers and the weakened position of the large estates was evident in the million acres purchased by tenant farmers in 1919.²⁴⁷

²⁴¹ CC/WAM 1 Minute Book Lancashire War Agriculture Committee, 31st January 1916 (LRO).

²⁴² Dewey, ‘Problems in Production,’ p. 252.

²⁴³ CC/WAM 1 Minute Book Lancashire War Agriculture Committee, 31st January 1916 (LRO).

²⁴⁴ Twinch, *Women on the Land*, p. 4.

²⁴⁵ Mutch, *Rural life in South-West Lancashire*, p. 57.

²⁴⁶ *Liverpool Echo*, 12th August 1916. p.3.

²⁴⁷ Marwick, *Deluge*, pp. 300 - 301. This figure has recently promoted much debate, with some suggestion it is too high whilst others think it is accurate. See M. Thompson, ‘The Land Market, 1880 – 1925: A reappraisal reappraised,’ *Agricultural History Review*, Vol. 55, part 2, (2007), pp. 289 – 300.

Lloyd George's installation as Prime Minister, at the end of 1916, coupled with the effective German submarine campaign, signalled a change in the management of the food supply. Prior to this, Dewey suggests that the government's attitude towards agricultural production was one of 'official neglect.'²⁴⁸ However, under repeated additions to DORA, the level of government control caused Wesham farmer, Richard Parkinson, to state farmers were now subject to an 'avalanche of orders.'²⁴⁹ The earlier Milner Report was given due consideration, and a Food Production Department was formed in December 1916, to ensure that, 'at the earliest possible moment, the United Kingdom be made self-sustaining in the matter of food stuffs.'²⁵⁰ To achieve this 3,000,000 additional acres of arable land in England and Wales had to be found.²⁵¹ The Corn Production Act of 1917, guaranteed farmers minimum prices for crops grown until 1922 and provided them with the financial security to offset the changes to production that would be required. County War Agricultural Executive Committees (CWAEC) with new enforcement powers were established to implement the new food production policy.²⁵²

Lancashire was asked to identify 60,000 acres to convert to arable land, equating to around 10% of the county's grazing land.²⁵³ This caused apprehension amongst the dairy farming community of the Fylde, as demonstrated by this protest:-

'... the county is being asked to do too much ... Lancashire being largely comprised of manufacturing and more thickly populated places, has to have a large area of milk producing land close at hand.'²⁵⁴

Fylde farmers' perception was that they were being disproportionately penalised. In south-west Lancashire, which was already predominantly arable, there was little need to alter the existing farming methods. In contrast, in the Fylde, where there was 'much ploughing to be done,' approximately 25-30% of the grassland was assigned for cultivation.²⁵⁵ Farmers stated they were being asked to 'plough land that has not been cultivated in more than a generation.'²⁵⁶

²⁴⁸ Dewey, 'Problems in Production,' p. 241.

²⁴⁹ *Preston Guardian*, 22nd December 1917, p. 10.

²⁵⁰ CC/WEM 2 Minute Book Lancashire War Agriculture Executive Committee (LRO).

²⁵¹ *Preston Guardian*, 19th May 1917, p. 10.

²⁵² Whetham, Thirsk and Finberg (eds.) *Agrarian History*, p. 97.

²⁵³ *Preston Guardian*, 19th May 1917, p. 10.

²⁵⁴ CC/WEM 2 Minute Book Lancashire War Agriculture Executive Committee (LRO).

²⁵⁵ *Preston Guardian*, 9th June 1917, p. 7.

²⁵⁶ *Preston Guardian*, 9th June 1917, p. 7.

This may explain why ‘for patriotic and educational motives’ Richard Parkinson and Mr Hale organised manual and horse-drawn ploughing demonstrations in the Fylde.²⁵⁷

Nationally, many farmers appealed to have the acreage they were required to plough reduced, although, this was rarely successful. Others ploughed only a proportion of the acreage they had been allocated, resulting in the prosecution of 254 farmers.²⁵⁸ CWAEC were instructed to grade each farm into one of three categories, ‘well farmed, those where output could be rapidly increased, and those in need of drastic reform.’²⁵⁹ This drastic reform took the form of removing ineffective farmers and replacing them with CWAEC approved tenants. Twinch stated 27,287 acres changed occupancy in this manner during 1917 and 1918.²⁶⁰ The Lancashire War Agricultural Executive Committee (LWAEC) minute book indicates several Fylde farmers were issued with ploughing notices and others removed from their farms. Yet, no actions were recorded against Wesham’s farmers.²⁶¹ By contrast, following disagreement between Kirkham and Wesham councillors regarding locating allotments on a Wesham farm, an LWAEC officer inspected the site and reported, ‘the field is about six acres, it is part of a dairy farm, is exceedingly well pastured, and in my opinion should not be taken for allotments.’²⁶²

From the onset of the conflict the LWAC minute book demonstrates farmers repeatedly bemoaned a lack of labour, which, following conscription, they claimed was exacerbated by the need to increase food production. They succeeded in ensuring the LWAEC raised their concerns with the government.²⁶³ However, Dewey suggests, despite farmers protestations, there was no acute shortage of agricultural labourers. He states that, despite the Military Service Act, the ‘starring system’ ensured many skilled agriculturalists were exempted from military service and, for most part, family labour managed to remain in-situ. Dewey determined that at the conclusion of the conflict the agricultural workforce was only 10% lower than the 1914 level.²⁶⁴ The LWAEC minute book demonstrates that alternative forms of agricultural labour available in the county included refugees, workers from Ireland, prisoners of war, Danish nationals and retired

²⁵⁷ *Preston Guardian*, 15th December 1917, p. 7.

²⁵⁸ Twinch, *Women on the Land*, p. 18.

²⁵⁹ Whetham, Thirsk and Finberg (eds.) *Agrarian History*, p. 97.

²⁶⁰ Twinch, *Women on the Land*, p. 18.

²⁶¹ CC/WEM 2 Minute Book Lancashire War Agriculture Executive Committee (LRO).

²⁶² CC/WEM 2 Minute Book Lancashire War Agriculture Executive Committee (LRO).

²⁶³ CC/WEM 2 Minute Book Lancashire War Agriculture Executive Committee (LRO).

²⁶⁴ Dewey, ‘Problems in Production,’ p. 243.

farm workers. In February 1917, Lancashire was also allocated two soldier agricultural companies, one stationed at Kirkham.²⁶⁵

Illustration 12: Fylde Soldier Agricultural Company²⁶⁶



Some of the soldiers in agricultural companies, such as those deployed to threshing gangs, were skilled agriculturalists. Others had little or no farming experience and were considered intellectually or medically unfit for combat service. Fylde farmer, Mr Bradley, was dismissive of the agricultural company stating, ‘I have seen some of the work the soldiers have done and I for one would have them for nothing.’²⁶⁷ His comment may have been motivated by his wish to retain his own agricultural labourers.

An additional source of available labour was women. However, Lancashire farmers were myopic in thinking that women were fit to do little agriculturally other than the defined gender specific roles, such as indoor dairy work. LWAEC delegated responsibility of training women for agricultural work to Miss Knowles, who provided ploughing training at Hutton. While she does

²⁶⁵ CC/WEM 2 Minute Book Lancashire War Agriculture Executive Committee (LRO).

²⁶⁶ A. Clayton, *Forgotten Fylde Album*, (St Michael’s on Wyre: Wyre Publishing, 1995), p. 39.

²⁶⁷ *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 12th May 1916.

report to the LWAEC that women had been successfully employed in the south-Lancashire area, there is no similar evidence for women agriculturalists in the rural Fylde.²⁶⁸

Dewey sub-divided 'industrial inputs,' into four categories, animal feeds, fertilizers, mechanical implements and horsepower.²⁶⁹ The lack of these production factors differed dependent upon the farming practice. Within the Fylde, the supply of animal feeds concerned farmers the most. The reason for this was two-fold, price increases and competition from the military for the feed available. As early as spring 1915 farmers were urged to grow succulent roots for animal fodder.²⁷⁰ In a local press article entitled 'Why Milk is Dear,' farmers stressed that consumers had to pay more for their milk due to the increase in the price of animal feed.²⁷¹ The supply was exacerbated in June 1916 due to the army being allowed to control the lifting and selling of hay and straw. Before this product could be sold on the open market, the army could requisition what they required and fix their price. Wesham farmer Mr Hall, of Bradkirk Farm, was so incensed by this that, in September 1917, he wrote directly to the LWAEC expressing his dissatisfaction with the arrangements.²⁷² Additionally, as the quantity of arable land in the parish increased during 1917 and 1918, there was even less meadow hay. The hay harvest report of 1918 was described as a 'fair crop, but rather less than last year owing to some meadows being ploughed up.'²⁷³

Maintaining the food supply comprised two distinct strands of government intervention. Having considered how altering farming, impacted upon Wesham, the second strand, food control measures, will be discussed.²⁷⁴ To address increasing food prices, Food Control Committees (FCC) were introduced to establish maximum prices in each district.²⁷⁵ Within the Fylde, committee members agreed they would also 'secure the purity, cleanliness and wholesomeness of milk' and maintain supplies, when threatened.²⁷⁶ To the annoyance of Fylde dairy farmers these powers were very soon enacted. By November 1917 there was disparity in the retail price of milk across the Fylde, with prices ranging from 5d to 6d per pint. Fylde farmers all wanted to receive 6d, which was being charged in St Anne's. However, for Kirkham, Wesham and

²⁶⁸ CC/WEM 2 Minute Book Lancashire War Agriculture Executive Committee (LRO).

²⁶⁹ Dewey, 'Problems in Production,' pp. 246-249.

²⁷⁰ DDX 1795/5/1/29 *Journal of The Royal Lancashire Agricultural Society* 1915 (LRO).

²⁷¹ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 11th August 1916.

²⁷² CC/WEM 2 Minute Book Lancashire War Agriculture Executive Committee (LRO).

²⁷³ *Preston Guardian*, 16th November 1918, p.7.

²⁷⁴ Dewey, 'Food Production and Policy,' pp. 71-72.

²⁷⁵ Marwick, *Women at War*, p. 141.

²⁷⁶ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 14th September 1917, p.7.

Blackpool the price was fixed at 5½d per pint.²⁷⁷ Some Fylde farmers went on strike in December, stating they would only resume delivery if they received the 6d. The FCC took control of the supplies, and widely publicised that they had made £11 profit on the day. Bluff called, the farmers resumed delivery the following day.²⁷⁸ Mr James Sanderson, dairy farmer and Chairman of Wesham Parish Council, chose to ignore the decision of the FCC. In December the quality of his milk was below the accepted standard. When tested it was found to contain ‘8 parts cow dung in 100,000.’ He was fined 12s and the cost of the analyst’s fee.²⁷⁹ He also pleaded guilty in January 1918 to selling milk at 6d a pint, above the price set by the Food Control Committee and was fined 10s.²⁸⁰ The action of the FCC illustrates how farmers’ attitudes changed during the conflict. From the August 1914 meeting of the LFA, where the commitment to supporting the war effort was evident, to peevishly withholding milk and charging more than agreed for sub-standard products.

Food control also encompassed educational initiatives. In 1917 St Joseph’s School log book records that ‘Food Economy’ cooking classes were being delivered for girls during the school day and, offered for adults in the evening. It was stated that the evening classes were so successful that they were repeated.²⁸¹ The government also considered that the encouragement of self-sufficiency would be beneficial to the country. Interest in allotments developed significantly and became a ‘characteristic feature’ of the conflict.²⁸² Wesham Parish Council were asked, by Lancashire County Council, to provide allotments. Their reply was that, ‘terms asked by the owners of land’ made acquisition of suitable plots difficult. However, by April 1917, the parish council had secured land for 32 allotments and offered them at a rent of 3s per annum.²⁸³ In addition to his LWAEC duties, Mr Hale took a personal interest in encouraging community agriculturalists. He stated that those too old for military service ‘could be better occupied’ than pursuing leisure activities. In April 1917, he ordered the bowling green be

²⁷⁷ *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 23rd November 1917, p. 2.

²⁷⁸ *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 21st December 1917, p. 3.

²⁷⁹ *Preston Guardian*, 22nd December 1917, p.10

²⁸⁰ *Preston Guardian*, 5th January 1918, p.10

²⁸¹ SMWM1/1 Log book, mixed department (LRO).

²⁸² Marwick, *Deluge*, pp. 248 - 249.

²⁸³ Wesham Parish Council Minute Book, 28th March 1916 and 20th April 1917.

ploughed and sown with potatoes. Magnanimously, he also allowed his tennis court to be cultivated.²⁸⁴

The final process that maintained food supply also came under the remit of the FCC, namely rationing. There is no evidence of how this applied to Wesham's population, although, when rationing was extended to animal feeds, several residents failed to comply with the requirements. In May 1918, seven Wesham defendants were brought before the Kirkham Petty Sessions for not recording the quantity of feedstuffs purchased and consumed as required by the Horse Rationing Order. Two cases were dismissed, but farmer, Richard Parkinson, and four others were fined 6s for their poor accounting.²⁸⁵

In summation, when considering the national perspective, Dewey concluded that the government interventions ensured gross farm output was only 7% lower in 1918 than it had been in 1914.²⁸⁶ This total does, however, disguise a change in foodstuffs produced. Whilst cereal and potato crops significantly increased, dairy yields decreased.²⁸⁷ Food supply for both the home and military fronts was maintained. While there was an increase in costs incurred by farmers this was offset by the government's guarantee of crop prices until 1922. This suggests it was, 'really impossible to lose money at farming' during this period.²⁸⁸

Regionally despite farmers' initial apprehension, Lancashire's target to plough 60,000 acres of grazing land in 1917 was surpassed by the 72,000 acres ploughed by June 1918.²⁸⁹ Considering Wesham's farmers, one, Mr Sanderson, was proved to have attempted profiteering, selling milk for more than the cost set by the Fylde FCC. However, for the most part they fulfilled the directives issued by the LWAEC during 1917 and 1918. Mr Hale's residency in the parish probably contributed to their willingness to comply. In assessing if Wesham farmers prospered during the conflict, it has not been possible to establish if land in the parish was included in the million acres that were sold in 1919.²⁹⁰ However, newspaper reports indicate changes to

²⁸⁴ *Preston Guardian*, 14th April 1917, p. 6.

²⁸⁵ *Preston Guardian*, 25th May 1918, p. 5.

²⁸⁶ Dewey, 'Problems in Production,' p. 252.

²⁸⁷ Dewey, 'Problems in Production,' p. 254.

²⁸⁸ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 88.

²⁸⁹ *Preston Guardian*, 27th July 1918, p. 5.

²⁹⁰ Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 300.

agricultural production were successful enough to be referred to as, ‘bumper crops on newly broken land.’²⁹¹ The 1917 Weeton Cattle Fair was described as, a ‘large show of cattle, all changed hands, (and) not for many years has there been so much business done,’ compared to the 1913 event where there was a, ‘good attendance but slow trade.’²⁹² Similarly, the champion cows at the 1918 Poulton Christmas Cattle Show sold for ‘huge prices.’²⁹³ The condition of Fylde farming at the end of the conflict was pronounced as reaching ‘its zenith.’²⁹⁴ Subsequent trade directories demonstrate that the farming families remained in-situ throughout the 1920s. It has been determined that Wesham’s family-operated farms emerged from the conflict no worse off than in 1914.

Conscription, Controversy and Community

By January 1915, the recruitment campaign had secured 1,342,647 volunteers. Nonetheless, this was below the requirement for future planned offensives.²⁹⁵ Further attempts to bolster volunteer numbers failed, resulting in conscription. Yet, while the military required additional men, the industries that supplied the war effort also required more labour. This coincided with need to increase home-grown food production and claims by farmers that it was necessary to retain their workers. To reconcile the divergent manpower requirements, the government introduced the National Register and the Derby Scheme. Whilst these were controversial, the Military Service Tribunal (MST) introduced following conscription, polarised communities. This section will assess why enlistment rates in Wesham slowed, before considering how the outcomes reached by the MST were received.

As DeGroot noted, volunteer numbers declined to such an extent that, by February 1915 the national weekly recruitment rate fell to that of the daily rate of September 1914.²⁹⁶ There is little to refute Gregory’s suggestion that the ‘most obvious reason for not volunteering was a disinclination to be killed or maimed.’²⁹⁷ In February 1915, many communities, including Wesham, had not yet experienced one of their members becoming a fatality. Notwithstanding

²⁹¹ *Preston Guardian*, 16th November 1918, p.7.

²⁹² *Preston Guardian*, 9th June 1917, p. 10 and *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 23rd May 1913, p. 5.

²⁹³ *Preston Guardian*, 15th December 1918, p. 7.

²⁹⁴ *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 2nd March 1917, p. 4.

²⁹⁵ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 92.

²⁹⁶ DeGroot, *Blighty*, pp. 92-93.

²⁹⁷ Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 91.

this, Wilson suggests that relative rural isolation could not shield communities from events on the continent.²⁹⁸ Personal correspondence to Wesham residents, published in the local press, ensured extensive awareness of the increasing human cost of the conflict. William Green's letter to his father graphically describes the death of his friend;

‘...he was about 10 yards from me...he was on the ground unconscious, with his head in a pool of blood. He had been hit with a sniper's bullet...splitting his head open two inches. He lingered but never regained consciousness.’²⁹⁹

Many letters to Father D'Heurter were published, including one from Edward Butler written while he was recovering in a military hospital, ‘I think we were lucky not to have more killed...a specialist from London came to take out the shell.’ Later Father D'Heurter received a letter from Duchess of Bedford who was nursing Edward, ‘blood poisoning has set in, but we hope to save his life.’³⁰⁰ By April 1915, Wesham's first fatality, Michael McCaffrey, was killed at the Gallipoli landing.³⁰¹ Further casualties quickly followed and Wesham's first letters of condolence were published in the local press in the summer of 1915.³⁰² Additionally, as suggested in Chapter 3, Wesham residents would also have been cognisant of the increasing number of casualties arriving in the military hospitals.

Coinciding with increased casualty numbers, Marwick noted that, by February 1915, disruptions to traditional employment patterns, faced during the initial months of the conflict, abated. From the spring of 1915, workers experienced constant employment, longer hours, higher wages and, were afforded greater financial stability than prior to the conflict.³⁰³ Additionally, workers in specific industries that supplied military contracts, such as Northampton's boot manufacturers, prospered.³⁰⁴ Dupree stated, in her study of the textile industry of Lancashire ‘Foreign Competition and the Interwar Period,’ that by spring 1915 employment in the sector returned to the levels of July 1914. She also noted that fulfilling military contracts enabled the sector to expand. In contrast to the disruption to employment in late 1914, there was a labour shortage in

²⁹⁸ Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, p. 181.

²⁹⁹ *Preston Herald*, 1st May 1915.

³⁰⁰ *Preston Guardian*, 5th June 1915.

³⁰¹ <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/717883/McCAFFREY,%20MICHAEL>

³⁰² John Smith was killed in June 1915 and the letter received by Ellen Smith was published in the *Preston Guardian*, 16th July 1915.

³⁰³ Marwick, *Deluge*, pp. 124-125.

³⁰⁴ Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 88 and McDermott's *British Military Service Tribunals*, pp. 64-94 regional study of Northampton's boot and shoe industry.

some textile trades by the summer of 1915.³⁰⁵ Any further mention in the local press or school documents of mill shut downs in the parish suggest that stability returned to Wesham's largest employment sector. The potency of unemployment as a stimulus for enlistment, as discussed in Chapter 2, no longer applied.

Initially, differences in the volunteer rates between rural and urban areas were observed, due to the need to complete the harvest.³⁰⁶ Also, the recruitment rallies and poster campaigns, so frequent and obvious in urban districts, were far less visible in the countryside. However, in some rural areas, reluctance to enlist was contributable to agricultural workers stating, they were 'waiting for the farmers' sons of the district to show them the example.'³⁰⁷ The low volunteer level amongst Wesham's agricultural workers, tenant farmers and their families, demonstrated in Chapter 3, allude to a similar sentiment existing in the parish.

Additionally, Gregory noted country wide discrepancy in the efforts undertaken to sustain recruitment. He suggests a localised lack of leadership contributed to a level of passivity within communities, which contributed to a widespread acceptance that men 'would go when called.'³⁰⁸ Whilst recruitment in Wesham slowed, the evidence suggests that it was not due to the endeavours of the local establishment. Local solicitor, Arthur Dickson, was granted a commission as a recruiting officer. His Kirkham office acted as the recruiting depot for the district.³⁰⁹ The sons of the mill owning families, although no longer Wesham residents (having moved to Lytham and Wrea Green), were amongst the first volunteers. Older relatives of the mill owning families led the Kirkham Volunteer Defence Corps. The Kirkham UDC also supported requests to assist with the west Lancashire recruitment campaign, during the summer of 1915.³¹⁰

Since March 1915, the number of recruits caused divergent dilemmas for central government. More volunteers were needed for the military, although, in some essential war industries, the

³⁰⁵ Dupree, 'Foreign Competition,' pp. 265-275.

³⁰⁶ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, pp. 88 - 89.

³⁰⁷ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, p. 113.

³⁰⁸ Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 89.

³⁰⁹ *Preston Guardian*, 9th October 1915. p.10.

³¹⁰ UDKi/1/6 Kirkham UDC Minute Book, 5th May 1915 (LPO).

number of volunteers had resulted in a shortage of skilled workers.³¹¹ Within agricultural districts, there were concerns that the shortage of skilled labourers was beginning to hinder production. Montgomery suggests Recruiting Officers were instructed to dissuade specific classes of agricultural workers, including horsemen and head stockmen, from volunteering.³¹² These divergent labour needs contributed to the introduction of the National Registration Act in July 1915.³¹³

The National Register, in effect a workforce audit, required all women and un-enlisted men, aged between 15 and 65 to record their occupation. Those considered to be directly supporting the war effort would be ‘starred.’ There were concerns that this was a move towards compelling men to join the military.³¹⁴ Lancashire farmers claimed that, Irish labourers who had come to assist in harvesting the potato crop, returned to Ireland, suspicious that the National Register was ‘not unconnected with some scheme of compulsory service.’³¹⁵ While the motivation for completing the National Register is debatable, when compiled, it highlighted there were around 5,000,000 men, of military age, not in military service. Of those, 1.5 million were ‘theoretically available’ for military service.³¹⁶ However, as conscription was still viewed distastefully by many, Lord Derby was appointed Director General of Recruiting and charged with reinvigorating voluntary recruitment. The Derby Scheme was introduced in October 1915.

Winter suggested that the scheme coerced a significant number of married men into attesting. Each man aged between 18 and 40 years, who attested under the scheme, was in essence agreeing that they could be called for military service, when required. They were allocated into one of 46 groups, dependent upon their age and marital status, before being transferred to the army reserve. It was expected that young single men would be called up before older married men.³¹⁷ Following attestation, the Derby scheme allowed the opportunity to defer a call-up date by appealing to their locally established Derby Tribunal. Appeals lodged by Wesham residents were managed by the Rural Fylde Tribunal, whilst Kirkham held their own hearings.

³¹¹ See DeGroot, *Blighty*, pp. 72-76 & Marwick, *Deluge*, pp. 59 -62.

³¹² Montgomery, *Maintenance of the Agricultural Labour*, pp. 3 -5.

³¹³ Montgomery, *Maintenance of the Agricultural Labour*, p .5.

³¹⁴ Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 61.

³¹⁵ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 13th August 1915, p. 4.

³¹⁶ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 93.

³¹⁷ Winter, *Great War and British People*, pp. 38 -39.

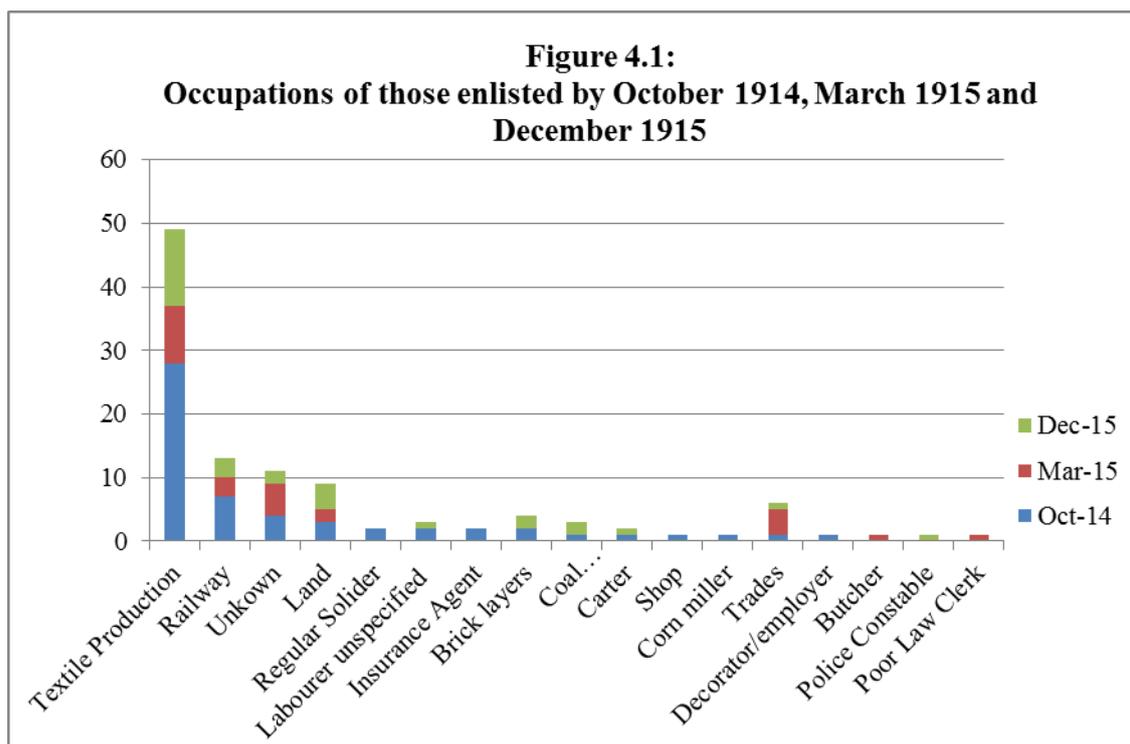
When the Derby Scheme attestation period ended in December 1915, of the 1.5 million men, theoretically available, less than 25% of those were willing to enlist. Therefore, the scheme's failure, successfully demonstrated conscription was unavoidable.³¹⁸ In Wesham, the scheme did have limited success, as in December 1915 it was reported that there was a 'remarkable rush of recruits under Lord Derby's scheme, with the recruiting office in Kirkham busy.'³¹⁹ Included within the 'rush,' were 19 men of Wesham, seven of which were married. By December 1915, 110 men of the parish were serving, or willing to serve, in the military. This equated to 30% of those eligible from the 1911 Census.³²⁰ This total is almost 6% higher than the national volunteer rate, calculated by Winter to be 24.2%.³²¹ Whilst this suggests Wesham's commitment to the war effort surpassed many other areas, it disguises two issues. Firstly, from March 1915 to the end of the Derby Scheme, the volunteer rate in Wesham had only increased by 7%. Therefore, if recruitment had not been as prolific in the parish during the first months of the conflict, Wesham's volunteering rate may have been more closely aligned to the national total. Secondly, there was growing disparity in the occupations of those who volunteered, as illustrated in Figure 4.1: Occupations of those enlisted by December 1915.

³¹⁸ Winter, *Great War and British People*, p. 39.

³¹⁹ *Preston Guardian*, 8th December 1915 p. 8.

³²⁰ The December 1915 total has been established from collating several primary sources, including the *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, articles in local newspapers and family archives. Military service and pension records, and medal index cards have been accessed via <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/> It is therefore accepted that men will have been omitted from this total, and the subsequent analysis flawed.

³²¹ Winter, *Great War and British People*, p. 28.



Chapter 3 identified that, by March 1915, those employed in agriculture comprised 6% of the total number of Wesham's volunteers. Figure 3.1 demonstrates that, this had risen to 8.1%, by December 1915, but still remained comparatively low.³²² Whilst those whose occupation could not be firmly established may have been employed in agriculture, they could equally have been engaged in the other employment within the parish. However, the available sources demonstrate that none of Wesham's tenant farmers, or any of their sons, had volunteered for military service by the end of December 1915.

The Military Service Act came into force in January 1916. Conscription assumed single men or widowers without children and not in a starred occupation had enlisted, thus allocating them to groups in the Army Reserve. In May 1916, this extended to married men. However, the act protected an individual's right to appeal. This led McDermott to refer to conscription, as a 'decisive step taken tentatively.'³²³ Derby Tribunals were replaced with MSTs. These MSTs included representatives from the military and the industries that were specific to a particular locality. Both the Rural Fylde and Kirkham MSTs incorporated textile workers to represent 'labour.'³²⁴ Their role altered, from one of deferring the service of attested men, into one of

³²² Winter, *Great War and British People*, p. 34.

³²³ McDermott, *British Military Service Tribunals*, p. 2.

³²⁴ UDKi/1/6 Kirkham UDC Minute Book 10th February 1916 (LRO).

deciding who could be conditionally exempted from compulsory military service. Following an application to a local MST the appellant or military representative, if dissatisfied with the outcome, could request an additional judgment at the County Appeal Tribunal (CAT). Lancashire was separated into four divisions, with contested appeals concerning the Rural Fylde receiving hearings in the Preston Division.³²⁵

Central government's reluctance at having to compel men to engage in military service is indicated in the way they continued to encourage voluntary enlistment. The Derby Scheme was temporarily reinstated in January 1916 and local councils were asked to encourage attestation in February.³²⁶ Alfred Higginson was one of five single brothers living on the family farm in Pilling, north Fylde. He provides a personal insight into the operation of a tribunal:-

‘The first start to becoming a soldier was I and my brother, Joseph, going to Fleetwood where we attested under the Derby Scheme. On the 30th day of January 1916 we were medically examined, and then sworn in ... We were told our group numbers and when our group would be called up for service. We then proceeded home, and the next step was whether we could get any grace before joining the army. My father then sent our appeals in to Garstang – I got till May 17th so as to help with the seeding. Joseph getting exemption through being a cowman till a certain date and then he had to appeal again. I received my calling papers up papers from Garstang a few weeks previous to report at the Town Hall, Garstang on 17th May 1916.’³²⁷

Arthur's recollections demonstrate how MSTs differentiated between agricultural occupations. It also shows his willingness to accept their decision, but belies the controversy that conscription generated. While the Military Service Act retained a right for individuals to refuse to undertake a combative role, conscientious objectors were publically castigated, by some sections of society. 16,000 men nationally claimed exemption under this clause, although, around 10,000 of these were directed to non-combative roles.³²⁸ Gregory implies that MSTs had difficulty in appreciating the rationale of the absolutists, who refused to support the war effort in any guise.³²⁹ The Preston MST dealt with many appeals from sole proprietors and a small number of

³²⁵ TA/1 Military Service Tribunal circulars (LRO).

³²⁶ UDKi/1/6 Kirkham UDC Minute Book 2nd February 1916 (LRO).

³²⁷ Unpublished memoir of Alfred Thomas Higginson, *My experiences as a soldier*, retained by the Higginson family.

³²⁸ Marwick, *Deluge*, pp. 80 - 84.

³²⁹ Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 105.

conscientious objectors.³³⁰ Conversely, newspaper reports record that the majority of appeals received by the Rural Fylde MST, related to agricultural workers. While there is no mention of an individual applying for exemption of the grounds of conscious, appeals could have been lodged. However, given the controversy such appeals generated, it would be exceptional if this were not recorded in the local press.

Throughout the spring of 1916, the Rural Fylde MST was predominantly occupied with appeals for exemption of single, unattested, farmers' sons. This appears to have been replicated in other agricultural districts. In the rural Marches, the Chairman of a Shropshire MST feared the district could become 'the laughing stock of the country,' due to the number of appeals brought by farmers claiming exemption for their sons.³³¹ There is also evidence to indicate that the Rural Fylde MST were aware that the decisions they made, were being perceived by the wider community as being inequitable. Chairman, Mr Bradley, repeatedly reminded the meeting that crowds were waiting outside to hear decisions of appeals. He also felt compelled to reiterate that, although a farmer, he acted impartially and refuted allegations that exemptions were granted too readily.³³² The newspaper reports of the proceedings show exemptions were granted more frequently than denied, similar to the headline '19 exemptions in 23 cases.'³³³ By May 1916, the number of exemptions granted, led the military representative on the MST to refer outcomes to the Preston Appeal Tribunal.³³⁴ The comments from some members allude to this being taken as a personal affront. They asserted that they were more aware of the agricultural needs of the rural Fylde than Preston.

Whilst objection from the military representative would have been anticipated, newspaper reports demonstrate that others on the Rural Fylde MST were becoming increasingly perplexed by the outcomes of appeals. Mr Moon, Wesham Councillor and 'labour' representative, was particularly vociferous in his dissatisfaction, suggesting 'farmers should sacrifice a little.'³³⁵ His comments gained personal gravitas following the calling up of his only son, a textile worker, in

³³⁰ Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 105 - 107.

³³¹ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, p. 113.

³³² *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 10th March, 1916.

³³³ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 2th May, 1916.

³³⁴ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 2th May, 1916.

³³⁵ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 10th March, 1916.

May 1916.³³⁶ It would have felt to him at least a little un-just, or even discriminatory, when a member of the tribunal, Mr Atkinson, appealed and gained indemnity for his own workmen in the same month.³³⁷ Throughout the conflict, Mr Atkinson continued to apply for exemptions for his workforce. As late as March 1918, he was asked by other MST members to withdraw an appeal, it being suggested that he ‘should set an example.’ However, he refused, and the application was heard, but this time the MST did not approve of the exemption.³³⁸

The farmers’ assessment of their work demonstrates the disparity between their perception of their commitment to the war effort, and that of the wider community. When granting an exemption to a 19 year old, single, agricultural worker the Rural Fylde MST justified their decision by referring to the ‘good work’ he was completing.³³⁹ These sentiments Gregory noted, were expressed nationally by the wider farming community, who considered their role to be of national importance.³⁴⁰ This appears to be borne out by the farmers themselves in appeals submitted to the Rural Fylde MST throughout 1917 and 1918. Following the directive to increase the food production, there was a requirement for around 25% of the Fylde’s grazing land to be converted to arable cultivation. The appeals subsequently refer to the acres that had been required to be ploughed, as justification for applying for exemption.

Whilst accepting that increasing food production was essential to pursuing the war effort, increasingly the conduct of the Rural Fylde MST validates perceptions, that farmers behaved unpatriotically, or protected their own personal interests.³⁴¹ The Rural Fylde MST often referred to a labour shortage to validate granting exemptions, yet, their discussions confirm they were aware that alternate labour was available, but preferred not to utilise this. It also seems inexplicable, that the clerk, felt compelled to remind the MST, that people were annoyed at seeing ‘able-bodied men in milk floats kitting milk, work that women and boys can do.’³⁴²

³³⁶ *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 26th May, 1916.

³³⁷ *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 12th May, 1916.

³³⁸ *Preston Guardian* 2nd March 1918. p.5.

³³⁹ *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 26th May, 1916.

³⁴⁰ Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 122.

³⁴¹ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, pp. 113 - 114.

³⁴² *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 10th March, 1916.

Within the rural Fylde, appeals were submitted to the MST from ‘new’ farmers. In March 1916, a farmer, who had occupied his 30 acre farm that month, appealed for exemption for himself and his brother. The appeal for the brother was dismissed, as the Chairman stated the brother had been employed on the farm for the ‘specific purpose of being starved.’³⁴³ In March 1917, the legal representative of a 29 year old market gardener, previously employed in the textile trade, appealed for his client’s exemption. The solicitor stressed this was not an attempt to evade military service, but that he had a nervous breakdown in his previous employment. A conditional exemption was granted.³⁴⁴ On other occasions, some farmers engaged solicitors to write directly to the LWAEC, requesting that representation be made to the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries for the release of their sons from military service. In these instances, the LWAEC resolved that they should not express an opinion.³⁴⁵ These examples indicate a degree of desperation, although they also highlight the extent to which, those with available funds and influence, would attempt to circumvent military service.

While the MST process proved disagreeable to the community, McDermott noted that, MSTs themselves were aware of the anguish their decisions could inflict. They would on occasion take action which was more aligned to the ‘mainstream of local sentiment’ than central government policy.³⁴⁶ Events in Kirkham in the autumn of 1916, demonstrate that the Kirkham MST was perturbed by decisions they were forced to reach. Following the extension of the Military Service Act in May 1916, married men were now eligible for conscription. Duly their appeals were heard and dismissed by Kirkham MST. However, in October 1916, the Kirkham MST were incensed that Lancashire Constabulary had stationed two young, single police constables (PC) in the district while they were ‘sending men with children to the army.’ They adjourned all appeals throughout October and November 1916. The MST wrote to Lancashire Constabulary to demand the withdrawal of the PCs. There is no evidence to indicate if the MST achieved their aim and they recommenced their duty in December 1916.³⁴⁷

Amidst this controversy, there was often disagreement between the MSTs and other organisations. The Rural Fylde MST found itself embroiled in a disagreement with Wesham

³⁴³ *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 3rd March, 1916.

³⁴⁴ *Preston Guardian* 4th March 1917. p.3.

³⁴⁵ CC/WEM 1 Minute Book Lancashire War Agriculture Executive Committee (LRO).

³⁴⁶ McDermott, *British Military Service Tribunals*, p.5.

³⁴⁷ *Lytham St Anne’s Express*, 13th October 1916 & 3rd November 1916.

Parish Council regarding the military service of one of their employees, Mr Hudson, the Scavenger. An initial appeal, on Mr Hudson's behalf, was granted conditional exemption. Then in January 1917, the parish clerk reported that, 'considerable effort was being made to force the scavenger into the army.'³⁴⁸ Further appeals proved futile, as Mr Hudson was required to serve in the army. In March 1917, the council resolved that, 'Owing to the enlistment of Dr William Smith and the Parish having no medical man in residence it was recommended that steps be taken to present a petition asking for the return of Dr Smith.'³⁴⁹ This had little impact as Dr Smith was killed, less than three months later, on the 3rd June 1917.³⁵⁰ Contrastingly, Kirkham UDC had mixed outcomes in retaining their employees. While the council's horseman did undertake military service, following an appeal to the CAT, the Sanitary Inspector gained exemption.³⁵¹

In summation, whilst the Military Service Act of 1916 was introduced amidst opposition from some within the coalition government and wider society, conscription was only introduced after attempts to reinvigorate voluntary enlistment had failed. Conscription, when introduced, should be viewed as a process which allowed individuals to appeal against compulsory military service. While the MSTs were a government vehicle to ensure conscription was equally applied, as demonstrated by the action of Kirkham MST, they were willing to oppose government policy. The Rural Fylde MST was sympathetic to farmers. Their decisions caused division within the membership of MST and, between the MST and the Preston CAT.

However, farmers were proactive in ensuring their voice was heard. During the conflict they lobbied, via CWAECs, to ensure that their concerns regarding labour supply were brought to the attention of central government. Guidance regarding the exemption of agricultural workers was repeatedly revised.³⁵² This did, largely, protect the agricultural community from having to undertake military service. Whilst there was nothing illegal in the farmers' actions, occurring as they did during a period of national crisis, they could be considered unpatriotic. However, the MST system, by differentiating between men in such a way was, by implication, placing a higher

³⁴⁸ Wesham Parish Council Minute Book, 18th May 1916, 18th January 1917, 15th March 1917 & 26th March 1917.

³⁴⁹ Wesham Parish Council Minute Book, 26th March 1917.

³⁵⁰ *Preston Herald*, 9th June 1917.

³⁵¹ UDKi/1/6 Kirkham UDC Minute Book, 11th July 1916 (LRO).

³⁵² TA/1 Military Service Tribunal circulars (LRO).

social value on some men and, even if administered completely impartially, was in essence divisive.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the conditions which prompted the government to abandon the non-interventionist approach. The success of the German submarine campaign stifled imports and food prices soared, amidst concerns that farmers were benefiting from the hardship of the working class. Home food production needed to increase. The establishment of CWAECs with extensive powers enforced the government's food policy. Arable land increased by 3,000,000 million acres, of which 72,000 of those were in Lancashire. Within Wesham, pasture land was converted to arable. Under instruction from the chairman of LWAEC and Wesham resident, Mr Hale, community cultivation was encouraged as amenities, such as the bowling green, were sown with potatoes.

The government faced a dilemma in reconciling the manpower requirements of industry, agriculture and the military. The National Register highlighted men could be spared from their occupation to serve in the military, yet, all initiatives to encourage these men to enlist voluntarily, failed. Having exhausted other options, conscription was enforced from January 1916. However, even this compulsion retained the option for individuals to appeal for exemption. The process to manage these appeals, the MST, was controversial. The decisions reached, as demonstrated by Kirkham, saw an MST stand against government policy. In the Rural Fylde, the granting of exemptions was rarely unanimous and caused tensions between members of the MST. A perception arose that rural tribunals were bias in favour of farmers and their sons. It is hard to refute that claim in Wesham.

Chapter 5

Women, Ex-servicemen and the Working Class

Agency of Change?

Despite the national unity demonstrated during the initial months of the conflict, the failure to achieve a swift and successful outcome led to a sense of ‘war weariness.’³⁵³ Working class restlessness developed into industrial unrest and the usual middle-class jingoism wavered as the increasing costs and taxes eroded their savings.³⁵⁴ Suffrage organisations were eager that the female commitment to the war effort should be recognised and rewarded by enfranchisement.³⁵⁵ A rising number of medically discharged military personnel returned to civilian life. Unable to return to their previous employment, either due to their injuries or their employer finding cheaper labour, some became politically active.³⁵⁶ For activists of all persuasions and the wider public, ‘war was only acceptable if it held out the prospect of a better world and a better life for its survivors.’³⁵⁷ In response to the spreading disquiet, the coalition government’s 1918 general election campaign promised to deliver a ‘land fit for heroes to live in.’³⁵⁸ This chapter will consider the role of Wesham’s women and assess if they achieved any improvement in their working conditions or political advancement. It will assess how medically discharged ex-servicemen fared on their return to Wesham. Finally, it will examine the extent to which political allegiances altered in the Fylde and consider reasons for this.

Women

This section will stress the normality of women’s factory work in Wesham as typical of Lancashire cotton town. It will assess the extent to which the Great War impacted on the established female employment pattern both during and after the conflict. The contribution of women to the war effort has been acknowledged as affording them social and political advancement. The level to which this occurred in Wesham will be established.

³⁵³ See Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, p. 128 – 130 for the effects of war weariness in the countryside and Marwick, *Deluge*, pp. 203 – 217 for urban areas.

³⁵⁴ See Gregory, *Last Great War*, for ‘The potential revolt of the middle classes.’ pp. 208 – 212.

³⁵⁵ de Vries ‘Women’s Voluntary Organisations,’ para.5.

³⁵⁶ N. Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy: British Veterans, Politics and Society, 1921- 1939* (Westport USA: Praeger Publishers, 2005), Chapter 1 ‘The Veterans revolution?’ provides national context and for a regional perspective N. Mansfield, ‘The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Soldiers and Sailors, 1917 – 1921: A View From The Marches,’ *Family and Community History*, Vol. 7/1, (2004), pp. 19-31.

³⁵⁷ Burnett, *History of Housing*, p. 220.

³⁵⁸ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 301.

As more men were required for military service, the government urged women to, 'Do your Bit, Replace a Man for the Front.' This proposal however, was not universally welcomed.³⁵⁹ Thom suggests there were concerns that some industrial work could impact on a women's fertility.³⁶⁰ In Lancashire, an area where female factory work was common, Fowler noted textile trades unions feared the established wage differentiation between men and women would be eroded.³⁶¹ Despite these concerns, as the conflict wore on, women were employed in previously male dominated occupations. The munitions manufacturing sector saw the largest increase of female employees. In contrast, female employment in the traditional roles such as domestic service and textile production declined.³⁶²

There is no evidence to indicate that specific war industries developed in Wesham, or that employment opportunities for women expanded. Prior to and during the conflict, Wesham's women were employed either in textile production or the family business. The significantly improved working conditions enjoyed by women employed in government operated munitions factories did not permeate to private companies.³⁶³ Hence, Wesham's female textile workers gained little advantage. While government female employees could benefit from onsite childcare, in contrast, the St Joseph's School logbook records two requests in 1917 for two year old children to be allowed to attend school.³⁶⁴ No other details are recorded, but it has been surmised that some mothers needed to seek employment to improve their family's financial situation, possibly due to the death of a husband.

For some of Wesham's war widows, bereavement necessitated a return to employment in the parish's textile mills. After completing compulsory schooling, Edith Benson gained employment as a winder in the textile mill. She married William McCord Harris in 1906. In 1911, Edith and William lived their two daughters, aged three and one, in Billington Street. William was

³⁵⁹ Thom, 'Women and Work,' para. 10.

³⁶⁰ Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 206.

³⁶¹ Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives*, pp. 83 -84.

³⁶² See Marwick, *Women at War*, Table 3 p. 166 and Table 4 p.167 for comparative data of female employment by occupation sector and, Thom, 'Women and Work,' Appendix 2.

³⁶³ Thom, 'Women and Work,' para.14 &15.

³⁶⁴ SMWM1/1 St Joseph's School Log Book (LRO).

employed as a railway worker and Edith's occupation was described as 'at home.'³⁶⁵ After William's death and now with four children, Edith worked at Phoenix Mill. When old enough, her daughter joined her.³⁶⁶ Theresa Gillett had four children, the youngest six months old, when her husband Joseph was killed. The effect of his death was recounted by Joseph's youngest child, when she was in her 90s.

'I never knew my dad. Everybody said he was a good man. Lots of children I knew at school didn't know their dads ...all those children in a little place like this. My mum didn't like it on her own, she could hear men at night being noisy coming home from the pub. We all moved back to live to with her sister and she went to work in the mill. I did when I left school.'³⁶⁷

Nationally, women's experiences of war time employment varied considerably dependent upon age, marital and social status and type of work undertaken. Whilst some wanted to remain in the employment at the end of the conflict, others felt the pull of domesticity and were happy to return to the home. Many women, irrespective of their ability, were required to relinquish their employment in favour of a man as demobilization occurred. Thom concluded, few women benefited from increased employment opportunities following the conclusion of the Great War.³⁶⁸

There is little to indicate after the Great War the traditional employment patterns in the parish altered. When George Crompton's widow, Lizzie, re-married her husband was very proud that 'he could afford for her to stay at home.'³⁶⁹ Lizzie's husband's comment indicates gratification that he was able to do something that was exceptional in Wesham. Unlike Lizzie, many of Wesham's widows did not remarry and for them, their daughters and most women of the parish, there were few options other than mill work. This is clearly evident in Illustration 13: Phoenix Mill.³⁷⁰ The photograph was taken in the 1920s. The gender composition of the mill workforce, dominated by women, is comparable to Illustration 5, taken almost twenty years earlier.

³⁶⁵ 1901 as a teenager Edith was employed in the textile mill as a winder. 1901 and 1911 Census of population accessed via ancestry.co.uk

³⁶⁶ 1275 Collection relating to Jenny Aspin, Greater Manchester Records Office.

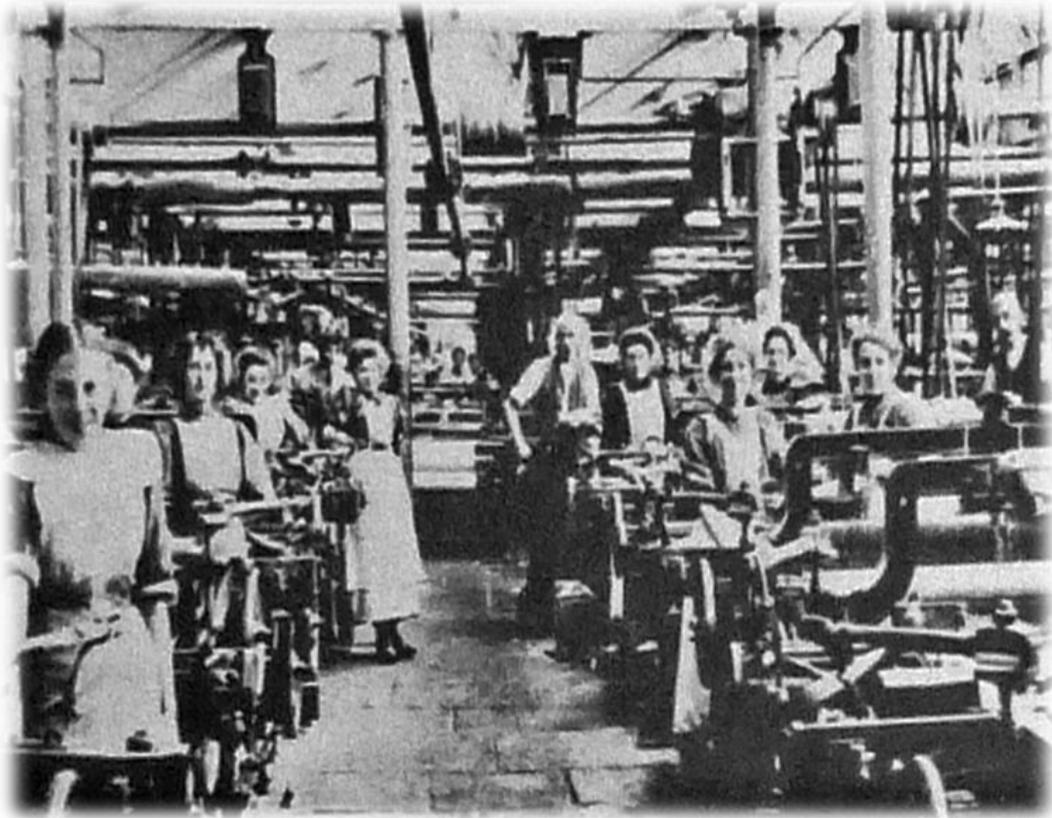
³⁶⁷ Interview with AS November 2010.

³⁶⁸ Thom, 'Women and Work,' para.14 &15.

³⁶⁹ Information provided by the Harrison Family.

³⁷⁰ C. Rothwell, *Kirkham, Weeton and Treales in Times Past*, (Chorley: Countryside Publications Ltd., 1988), p.14.

Illustration 13: Phoenix Mill



As suggested in Chapter 3, the middle class women did undertake varied voluntary roles, although this conformed to gender stereotypes. Whilst it is difficult to counter this perception, Gullace suggests that women were not ingenuous in engaging in such activities. Many were aware they were conforming to a traditional female role, but immersed themselves in such activities to escape their insular domestic situation.³⁷¹ In 1918, the Honorary Secretary of the Kirkham Red Cross Working Party, Mrs Riding, expressed regret at leaving her position. She stated that, ‘the hours given to the organisation had been the happiest of her life.’³⁷² Notwithstanding the hyperbole, this comment demonstrates that the conflict created opportunities for previously unrepresented women to gain confidence and comradeship from undertaking worthwhile tasks.

³⁷¹ Gullace, ‘Female Patriotism,’ para. 2.

³⁷² *Preston Guardian* 19th October 1918, p.8.

When war was declared Millicent Fawcett, president of the NUWSS, urged women to, ‘show ourselves worthy of citizenship.’³⁷³ As the Great War drew to a close, leaders of the suffrage movement held the belief that by dint of their contribution to the war effort, either paid or voluntary, they had indeed proved themselves worthy.³⁷⁴ The 1917 Representation of the People Bill, increased the number of females eligible to vote in a general election from none to 8.4 million, equivalent to 40% of a broadened electorate. However, women eligible to vote in the 1918 general election were those over 30 years old, rate payers or married to a rate payer. They were not therefore, the young women who had laboured in munitions factories or other essential war industries. While this limited female enfranchisement was a success for the suffrage movement, to many politicians it was nothing more than they would have conceded had the Great War not occurred.³⁷⁵

In the absence of an electoral roll for the Fylde Parliamentary Division, it has not been possible to establish how many Wesham women were enfranchised in 1918. However, at a localised level, the minute book of Wesham Parish Council indicates the level of female participation in political events in the parish. There is no record in the minute books that a woman ever asked a question in a parish council meeting throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Furthermore, it was not until after World War Two that a woman stood for election as a parish councillor.³⁷⁶

In summation, the conflict had little effect on the position of women in the parish. The districts’ socially elite did have opportunities to add purpose to their lives away from household management. Yet, at the culmination of the conflict, their absence from local politics indicates, either willingly or begrudgingly, they returned to the traditional position of deference to their husbands. While the return to domesticity for the minority middle class may have been at their own volition, Wesham’s working class women do not appear to have been afforded such a choice. Before, during and after the Great War the majority of Wesham’s women worked in the parish’s textile mills.

³⁷³ Mayhall, ‘Suffrage and Political Activity,’ papa. 3.

³⁷⁴ Gullace, ‘Female Patriotism,’ para. 12

³⁷⁵ Mayhall, ‘Suffrage and Political Activity,’ para. 9.

³⁷⁶ Wesham Parish Council Minute Book 1918 - 1960.

Ex-servicemen

As the conflict continued, increasing numbers of men were discharged from the military, having been medically examined and deemed to be ‘no longer physically fit for war service.’³⁷⁷ To ensure that those medically discharged were not accused of shirking they were provided with a Silver War Badge to wear in public. This included at least ten of Wesham’s men, those listed on Figure 5.1: Wesham’s Silver War Badge Recipients.³⁷⁸

Figure 5.1: Wesham’s Silver War Badge Recipients			
Name	Date of enlistment	Date of discharge	Reason for discharge
Richard Balshaw	8.9.1914	11.6.1917	Wounds
William Benson	9.11.1914	23.1.1918	Wounds (amputee – both legs)
Edward Butler	23.7.1909	17.4.1916	Wounds
William Coady	8.9.1914	27.5.1918	Wounds
William McCord Harris	28.12.1914	11.3.1919	Heart condition aggravated by military service died 20.3.1919
William Hogarth	14.11.1911	12.9.1917	Wounds
Robert Kirby	2.9.1914	22.10.1917	Wounds (amputee - one leg)
Walter Leigh	1.9.1914	4.3.1919	Wounds
Timothy Rossall	26.5.1915	25.3.1918	Disease died 23.8.1921
Edward Whiteside	19.4.1915	19.6.1916	Pre-existing illness aggravated by military service died 13.10.1917

Recipients of the Silver War Badge were entitled to a war pension, with the total amount payable dependent upon the level of disability. The War Injury Pensions Committee 1916 set the level of a full disablement pension at 25s per week, lower than the wages of skilled workers. Around 1,187,450 men, qualified for some level of war pension, with approximately 40,000 eligible for

³⁷⁷ King’s Regulation 392 contained 28 clauses, which listed the different reasons why a man could be discharged from the army. Future reference to Wesham’s discharged men refers to those released from the army under Clause XVI ‘No longer physically fit for war service’ and Clause XVIa ‘Surplus to military requirements (having suffered impairment since entry into the service).’

³⁷⁸ This has been compiled from military service records and silver war badge records accessed via ancestry.co.uk and newspaper reports.

the full entitlement.³⁷⁹ Of Wesham's Silver War Badge recipients, only William Benson, who lost both his legs above the knee, would have received the 25s per week pension.

Many medically discharged servicemen and latterly demobilized servicemen, disenchanted by what they perceived to be the government's lack of gratitude for their service, campaigned for improvements. Organisations were formed, such as the National Association of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors (NADSS), with the aim of securing 'better pensions and greater understanding of the problems of discharged men.'³⁸⁰ The NADSS had a St Anne's branch with a sub-section established in Kirkham by July 1917. In the Fylde the NADSS stressed they were 'entirely non-political and non-sectarian.'³⁸¹ A second, country wide organisation was the more radical National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Soldiers and Sailors (NFDDSS). It had closer ties to the labour movement and political aims that directly challenged the establishment.³⁸² The presence of the NFDDSS in the Fylde has not been established. The Comrades of the Great War, an organisation with wealthy benefactors and closely linked to the Conservative Party, established a Fylde branch in September 1917. Colonel Wilfred Ashley, MP for the Blackpool Parliamentary Division, spoke at the inaugural meeting and acted as Chairman of the National Executive Committee.³⁸³

In some rural areas the NFDDSS worked in conjunction with agricultural workers' unions to agitate for improved wages and occasionally took direct action, such as, forcibly preventing the eviction of a widow from her tied cottage.³⁸⁴ As yet, there is no evidence to indicate any similar action occurred in the rural Fylde. In contrast, responses in the parish appear much more benign. The Kirkham sub-section of the NADSS organised fund raising events and also sent a floral tribute to the funeral of Wesham's Edward Whiteside, who died at home as a result of his military service aggravating an existing medical condition.³⁸⁵

³⁷⁹ See DeGroot, *Blighty*, pp. 257 – 258 for several examples of pension awards dependent upon level of disablement .

³⁸⁰ Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy*, p. 10.

³⁸¹ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 6th July 1917.

³⁸² Mansfield, 'The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Soldiers and Sailors,' p. 23.

³⁸³ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 28th September 1917.

³⁸⁴ Mansfield, 'The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Soldiers and Sailors,' p. 23.

³⁸⁵ *Preston Guardian*, 20th October 1917.

In the years immediately following the Great War, the NFDDSS disappeared 'into obscurity.' This was largely due to lack of financial support and ideas which were too radical for the majority of ex-servicemen.³⁸⁶ After 1918, there was no further reporting of activities of the NADSS Kirkham sub-section. In contrast, the Comrades of the Great War retained a visible presence in the Fylde. The Poulton and Blackpool branches of the organisation held boxing and football competitions with the Preston branch and the Blackpool branch expanded to such an extent that it required bigger premises. In July 1919, a larger building was purchased and refurbished in the November to create 'a lounge and bar and billiard room, Secretary's Office and Committee Room with two rooms to spare for whatever use we might care to make of them.' The site was formally opened by Lord Derby in January 1920.³⁸⁷ Given the known political allegiance of the Fylde and the lack of any militant trades union action in the district, it is unsurprising that the only one of the ex-servicemen's organisations that endured, was the one with the closest ties to the Conservative Party.

While the lack of government concern for wounded men compelled some of them to protest vociferously, one of Wesham's medically discharged soldiers, William Harris, chose a very creative path to displaying his feeling of disenchantment. Prior to the conflict William was employed as a railway shunter. Before the end of 1914 he had volunteered for the army and saw active service on the western front, with the Royal Engineers. He died in 1919, as a result of a heart condition which had been aggravated by his war service. William was well known locally for writing verses and singing at charity events. On occasions, he would wear a kilt and perform a satire of a popular Harry Lauder song. Harry's song was about a woman who referred to a man she met as a 'baby doll.' William's version shows a Wesham man was as disenchanted as ex-servicemen in the national organisations, but organised protest did not occur in the parish;

'A lady spoke to me the other day; She told me I was looking bright and gay;

Why ar'nt you in Karki or Navy Blue; Fighting for your country as other men do.

I turned around and answered with a smile; My dear young lady you don't understand;

I once took my chance. My right arm's in France; I'm one of England's broken dolls.'³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ Mansfield, 'The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Soldiers and Sailors,' p. 29 -31.

³⁸⁷ <http://blackpoolsubmariners.weebly.com/comrades-club.html>

³⁸⁸ 1275/19 Collection relating to Jenny Aspin, Greater Manchester Records Office

Initially, the government was not swift or generous enough to provide adequate pensions. As DeGroot stated, the government believed that the disabled should rely in part on charity.³⁸⁹ This was widely deplored, with many ex-servicemen wanting ‘Justice not Charity.’³⁹⁰ However, whether for necessity or just to show support towards their own townsfolk, Wesham’s community rallied to the aid of the families of those most severely injured. The local press reported several fund raising events held at the Wesham Social Club. Examples include money raised for the wife and children of Robert Kirby. Robert, a spinner before the war, enlisted in September 1914 along with the other 150 men of the district who marched to Preston to join Kitchener’s Army. In January 1916, he was badly wounded ‘necessitating the amputation of one leg and an operation on the other.’³⁹¹ Weaver William Benson, another of the parish’s earliest volunteers, was wounded in January 1917. A fundraising event was organised for his family in April 1917. William required both legs to be amputated and was not discharged from hospital for over a year.³⁹² Following the Great War both men remained in Wesham. A resident recalled that when he was a child in the 1940s he had been intrigued by the sight of William propelling himself around Kirkham and Wesham in a wheelchair.³⁹³ Robert, seen on Illustration 14: Before and After, lived on Garstang Road North with his wife and children. He died in 1966, aged 81.³⁹⁴

In spite of several national organisations being formed to protest at the inadequate government provision made for wounded soldiers, the lack of protest by Fylde ex-servicemen supports DeGroot’s assumption that many ex-servicemen simply wanted to return to a ‘quiet life.’³⁹⁵ The government’s assumption that disabled men would be partly supported by charitable donations was realised in the response of the Wesham’s community to those most severely injured.

³⁸⁹ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 270.

³⁹⁰ Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy*, p. 12.

³⁹¹ *Preston Guardian*, 6th January 1916.

³⁹² Military service record accessed via ancestry.co.uk

³⁹³ There is a film recorded of the unveiling of Kirkham War Memorial in 1926 retained by the North West Film Achieve reference - Film no: 98, Producer: Co-operative Picture House, Kirkham. In the film Lieutenant General Sir Richard Butler is seen asking a soldier was he receiving his pension. After displaying the film at events in Wesham it has now been established that the soldier is William Benson. Interview with David Parkinson, January 2011.

³⁹⁴ Provided by Linda Singleton, Robert’s great niece.

³⁹⁵ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 270.

Illustration 14: Before and After



The Working Class

This section will consider industrial relations in the parish during the Great War. It will also chart the establishment of the Labour Party in the district and assess the efficacy of the rival political parties' campaigns in the 1918 General Election in the Fylde. Finally, it will establish if the Great War altered political allegiances, both from the perspective of the Fylde Parliamentary Division and Wesham Parish Council.

Prior to the conflict, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) was the junior partner in a Lib-Lab coalition government. The ILP comprised many affiliates including trades unions and socialist groups. Nationally, it was not in a position to directly challenge either the Conservative or the Liberal Parties. It was widely accepted in 1914, that the Liberal Party and not the ILP was best placed to deliver a reform agenda.³⁹⁶ In the Fylde, all Poor Law Guardians and Magistrates were

³⁹⁶ Adelman, *Rise of the Labour Party*, pp. 19 - 44.

aligned to either the Conservative or Liberal Parties. Labour representation in the district did not extend beyond a few local councillors.³⁹⁷

The protracted nature of the conflict led to a widespread feeling of war weariness. The unity displayed at the beginning of the conflict was tested. Increasingly, industrial unrest occurred throughout the country. However, the unrest was not aimed at undermining Britain's war effort, but primarily concerned with alleviating working class hardships.³⁹⁸ Labour activist John Clynes declared that, 'every class has felt the nearness of the nation's struggle....the working class has had an unfair share of the heavy burden'³⁹⁹ The government did undertake a series of 'Commissions of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest,' during June 1917. As many of the concerns could not be addressed while pursuing the war, the government adopted a strategy of implied promises, epitomised in the election slogan of creating 'a land fit for heroes to live in.'

It is noticeable that the industrial unrest that affected other areas did not materialise in Wesham. The Stoppage Book of the Preston and District Power-Loom Weavers, Winders and Warpings' Association demonstrates that repeatedly workers from mills in Preston received payments throughout 1917 and 1918. In contrast, the stoppage payments paid to Wesham workers during the initial months of the conflict are the only payments they received.⁴⁰⁰ Similarly, the St Joseph's School Log Book and local newspapers that reported mill closures during 1914 and early 1915, do not record such events again. The only reference to industrial action impacting upon the parish occurs in the summer of 1918. It is recorded that a teacher arrived at school late, due to a train strike.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁷ In 1916 Henry Boudler, Wesham Mill Company, stated there was 'no liberal magistrate resident in the town, when Kirkham and Wesham have a population of 6,000,' *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 22nd December 1916. During the 1918 General Election campaign the Labour Party candidate, Mr Tout stated that he 'could not believe there was no Labour magistrate resident in the division,' *Preston Guardian*, 30th November 1918. p.2.

³⁹⁸ Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 202 & DeGroot, *Blighty*, pp. 118-120.

³⁹⁹ R. Taylor, "John Robert Clynes and the making of Labour Socialism", in M. Worley (ed), *The Foundations of the British Labour Party Identities, Cultures and Perspectives 1900 – 1939* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 14.

⁴⁰⁰ DDX 1089/11/3 Stoppage Book of the Preston and District Power-Loom Weavers, Winders and Warpings' Association (LRO).

⁴⁰¹ SMWM1/1 St Joseph's School Log Book (LRO).

This lack of militancy may be attributable to more women than men being employed in Wesham's mills. The textile mills which already had a majority of women workers prior to the Great War, became even more female dominated during the conflict. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the mills provided the highest number of military recruits. Thom suggests that employers generally found women to be more conciliatory employees than their male counterparts and less willing to engage in industrial action.⁴⁰² Other businesses in the parish relied on family labour.

An underlying cause of unrest was the poor quality of homes available for the working class, in both urban and rural areas.⁴⁰³ This intensified during the conflict as the private property investor, the bastion of pre-war housing construction, had been dissuaded from building homes due to raw material and labour shortages.⁴⁰⁴ The government chose to adopt an approach described by Gregory as, 'domestic appeasement' and agreed that housing programmes would be a feature of the peace time reconstruction plan.⁴⁰⁵

Planning the implementation of the government's housing aim began in the rural Fylde in the late summer of 1917. A Local Government Board circular requested that councils report on the state of housing in their areas and devise a plan to include providing council housing. The Kirkham Urban District Council (UDC) met in August 1917 to discuss the issue and instructed the council surveyor to assess housing in the district. He reported that over 20 inhabited dwellings should be considered unfit for use. However, for over a year council meetings repeatedly adjourned any further discussion on the subject. On the 17th October 1918 the Local Government Board Inspector attended a council meeting to discuss loans available to enable council housing to be constructed. Kirkham UDC decided unanimously that it was 'inopportune to construct council housing due to the expense of labour and materials.' The council was confident that if additional housing was required, private enterprise would meet the need.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰² Thom, 'Women and Work,' Para. 15.

⁴⁰³ Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 205. See also Gauldie, *Cruel Habitations*, pp. 58-69 which describes the poor quality of tied agricultural workers homes and Joy, 'War and Unemployment,' pp. 60 – 65 which indicates that in industrialised towns and cities existing poor housing was made worse by large numbers of workers coming to work in war related industries.

⁴⁰⁴ Burnett, *History of Housing*, p. 221.

⁴⁰⁵ Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 204.

⁴⁰⁶ UDKi/1/6 Kirkham UDC Minute Book 1st August 1917, 5th September 1917, 3rd October 1917, 17th October 1918 & 4th December 1918 (LRO).

This attitude demonstrates that there had been no change from the pre-war approach to construction in the district; private construction or no construction.

The comparatively late development of Wesham afforded residents more than adequate, if not model housing. As discussed in Chapter 2, the majority of housing in the parish was less than fifty years old at the beginning of the conflict and complied with minimum construction standards. Therefore, unlike areas where housing conditions roused working class animosity, Wesham was unaffected. In the years following the conflict, Wesham Parish Council continued to pursue improvements begun prior to the conflict. Existing gas street lighting was improved and the new fire station was erected. The provision of council housing for the parish does not appear to have been discussed until 1944.⁴⁰⁷

As the conclusion of the war drew near, Prime Minister, Lloyd George, was eager for coalition candidates to stand in the general election on a manifesto of reform and extraction of reparation from Germany. The Labour Party declined this opportunity as they wanted to emphasise they were markedly different from the other political parties. However, as electioneering in the Fylde proved, the Labour Party was ill-prepared to fight the election.

In July 1917, it was decided that the boundaries of the Blackpool Parliamentary Division would be re-drawn. Blackpool and the coastal resorts would remain as one constituency, as it was deemed that the area would have common interests. The rural areas of the Fylde would be combined with rural districts to the south and north east of Preston. It was indicated that the Fylde Division would be a combination of agricultural and rural manufacturing areas.⁴⁰⁸ Fylde farmers were keen to ensure that their interests were known to candidates for the Fylde Parliamentary Division. At the Lancashire Farmers' Association (LFA) meeting in March 1918, it was proposed and agreed that a committee would be formed to produce a 'programme with regard to agriculture in the Fylde.' The intention of this proposal was that the programme should be presented to the parliamentary candidates for the division. The candidate most likely to agree

⁴⁰⁷ Minute Book of Wesham Parish Council 1918 – 1945.

⁴⁰⁸ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 6th July 1917. p. 8.

to implement the farmers' vision would 'get considerable support from the agriculturalists in the district.'⁴⁰⁹

The new Fylde Parliamentary Division was contested by two candidates, Coalition Conservative W.W. Ashley and W. J. Tout representing the Labour Party. The selection of Ashley as the Conservative candidate was expeditious, being the MP for the Blackpool Parliamentary Division since 1906. Before the Labour Party candidate had even been agreed, canvassing and car hire had been organised by the Conservative Party.⁴¹⁰ Tout, Secretary of the Todmorden Weavers Association, had a convoluted selection process to obtaining his nomination, indicating the more fragile position of the Labour Party. At a meeting in Kirkham in August 1918, Trades Council representatives met to discuss the formation of a Fylde Divisional Labour Party. Three potential candidates, including Tout, came forward but all withdrew their names. The former two due to a lack of clarity regarding who would fund the campaign expenses and Tout because he anticipated standing in the Rochdale Division. Following Rochdale's selection of an alternative Labour candidate and the securing of funding, Tout's candidature was belatedly agreed on November 21st, 1918.⁴¹¹

When election campaigning began, Tout was not received rapturously in Kirkham. During a meeting he was required to 'quash the rumour that he had no money behind him,' and explain that the Textile Workers Federation would fund his campaign and salary if elected.⁴¹² In comparison, his support of nationalised railways and equal adult suffrage was appreciated at the Lostock Hall clubroom of the National Union of Railwaymen.⁴¹³ Ashley received support in the Fylde agricultural townships, where he indicated DORA should be withdrawn to permit farmers 'the individual liberty they possessed in 1914.'⁴¹⁴ This may indicate that he was aware of the vision expressed by Fylde farmers in March 1918 and was making concessions in order to win their votes.

⁴⁰⁹ *Lytham St Anne's Express*, 1st March 1918.

⁴¹⁰ DDX 1202/1/9 Fylde Conservative and Constitutional Association Agent Records (LRO).

⁴¹¹ DDX 1102/1/4 Minutes of Committee for formation of a Divisional Labour Party in the Fylde (LRO).

⁴¹² *Preston Guardian*, 30th November 1918. p.2.

⁴¹³ *Preston Guardian*, 7th December 1918. p.10.

⁴¹⁴ *Preston Guardian*, 14th December 1918. p.6.

In the 1918 General Election, the NFDDSS did field ten candidates and in other districts worked with the Labour Party.⁴¹⁵ As this did not occur in the Fylde, both candidates sought to appeal to ex-military personnel, many of whom had the vote for the first time. Reference to Ashley in newspaper articles changed from Mr Ashley, to Colonel (Rtd.) Ashley, emphasising his previous military service and his retention of an honorary role within the Territorial Force. His understanding of the predicament of ex-servicemen was further implied by referring to his position within the Comrades of the Great War organisation.⁴¹⁶ In Todmorden, Tout's work in war relief committees implied his commitment to ex-servicemen, although, the anti-war stance adopted by some factions of the Labour Party may have hindered his campaign. Tout was compelled to state, 'I don't agree with the attitude of pacifists in regard to the war. I have got two lads there.'⁴¹⁷ In contrast, Ashley never appears to have been questioned regarding his view on Britain's participation in the conflict.

Despite active campaigns, polling day in the Fylde was described as, 'very quiet.'⁴¹⁸ Though nationally the turnout was an unremarkable 64%, with 59%, the Fylde's was even lower. This implies political disinterest within the parliamentary division. The election result was a convincing victory for Ashley, polling a 64.9% share of the votes, compared to Tout's 35.1% share.⁴¹⁹ The Fylde of 1914 was 'unshakably Tory' and the election result confirms the Great War had no immediate effect on political allegiances within the district.⁴²⁰ Fowler suggests scathingly that, although the Textile Federation financially supported ten candidates in the election, it was 'poor judgement' on their part to support Tout, in this resolutely conservative constituency.⁴²¹ Tout's subsequent election as the MP for Oldham in 1922, reinforces he was a good Labour candidate in 1918, but was campaigning in an area he was very unlikely to win.

The list of candidates for the Wesham Parish Council immediately after the Great War does demonstrate a departure from the established tradition. This was the first time a mill owner did not seek to be elected. Whilst the Bowdler family still retained ownership of Wesham Mill, the Great War had impacted on their family. The two younger Bowdler brothers, William and

⁴¹⁵ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, p. 150.

⁴¹⁶ *Preston Guardian*, 23rd November 1918. p. 5.

⁴¹⁷ *Preston Guardian*, 23rd November 1918. p. 5.

⁴¹⁸ *Preston Guardian*, 21st December 1918. p. 9.

⁴¹⁹ Craig, *British Election Results 1918–1949*, p. 396.

⁴²⁰ Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 130.

⁴²¹ Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operative*, p. 124.

Arthur, were injured while serving on the western front. Arthur died in 1919 and is commemorated on Kirkham War Memorial.⁴²² William recovered from his wounds and continued serving in India. On his return, he pursued politics on a national level. He was elected Liberal MP for the Holderness Division in 1922.⁴²³ Eldest brother Richard, who had previously been a Wesham Parish Councillor, moved to Lytham and served as a Justice of Peace.⁴²⁴

As demonstrated on Figure 5.2: Wesham Parish Council 1920, small scale entrepreneurs constituted the largest faction on the council. Worker representation remained; railwayman William Potter and spinner, William Moon. The community appears to have borne no animosity towards profiteering farmer, James Sanderson, who retained his position as Chairman, as did farmer Richard Parkinson. Five of the seven 1913 councillors, highlighted in blue on Figure 5.2, remained after the conflict. In terms of the number of votes cast, that increased from 388 votes in 1911, to 501 in the 1920 election.⁴²⁵ Ultimately, if the conflict had any political impact in Wesham, it encouraged more people to vote for the same thing.

Figure 5.2: Wesham Parish Council 1920			
Councillor	Occupation	Wesham Resident	Known Political Allegiance
William Edmondson	Coal merchant	Lived in Kirkham - operated coal businesses in Kirkham & Wesham	
William Moon	Spinner	Yes	Labour
Robert Kent	Grocer	Yes	
Edward Bolshaw	Draper	Yes	
William Potter	Railway signalman	Yes	
Richard Parkinson	Farmer	Yes	
James Sanderson	Farmer	Yes	

⁴²² *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, October 1914. The official programme of the unveiling of Kirkham War Memorial in 1926, provided by David Parkinson, Medal Index Cards accessed via ancestry.co.uk

⁴²³ <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw66323/William-Audley-Bowdler?LinkID=mp63350&role=sit&rNo=0>

⁴²⁴ <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw172486/Richard-Hope-Bowdler>

⁴²⁵ Minute Book of Wesham Parish Council

This section has established that, largely due to the compliant female workforce in the textile mills, industrial relations in the parish remained settled. It has identified that although a Labour Party candidate did stand in the 1918 general election, the protracted nomination procedure caused a delayed start to the campaign. The more experienced and better funded Conservative Party however, had longer to prepare and to organise their campaign. Notwithstanding the political acumen of Labour's candidate, Tout, political allegiances in the Fylde remained entrenched in Conservatism. In contrast, the composition of the Parish Council changed in that for the first time since its inception, there was no mill owner representation. This was significant in that this was the only change to the balance of power in the parish for over twenty years.

Conclusion

This chapter has established that Wesham's working class women gained none of the advancements in working conditions or increase in choice of occupation that was temporarily offered in other parts of the country. During and after the war, the vast majority of women and children remained employed in Wesham's textile mills. For a few women, the wives of clerics and doctors, the Great War provided a brief opportunity to find a fulfilling voluntary role. Yet, freely or reluctantly, they returned to their domestic role at the conclusion of the conflict. Wesham's women did not make political progress until after the Second World War. Radical activity by ex-servicemen's organisations did not occur in the rural Fylde. In stark contrast it was the pro-establishment Comrades of the Great War that endured.

After the conflict, there were three national political parties, though as demonstrated in the Fylde, the Labour Party was unprepared to contest the general election of 1918. In contrast, the Conservative Party, already firmly established in the district, was well funded and organised. Fylde farmers ensured their agenda was brought to the fore and it is probable they all voted for the Conservative Party candidate, Ashley, as he appeared to show most sympathy to their interests. The social status of the enfranchised women, around 40% of the electorate in the Fylde, favoured the Conservative Party. Even if the Labour Party had been more ordered, Marwick suggests that in 1918, many workers viewed the party with the 'utmost suspicion.'⁴²⁶

⁴²⁶ Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 312.

The Conservative Party, traditional and pro-establishment, were the largest party in the 1918 Coalition Government. However, the Labour Party consolidated in the years immediately after the conflict and the foundation for the subsequent class-based voting behaviour was established. From this basis, the Labour Party was able to form a government in 1924. Yet, still there was no progress for the Labour Party in the Fylde. In 1922, Lord Derby's son was elected as the Conservative candidate without an opposition candidate of any party standing. In 1923, the Labour candidate polled 11% of a 76.1% turnout. Statistics demonstrate that, support for the Labour Party in a general election, as low as it was in 1918, was not exceeded after the Second World War, with the 1945 candidate receiving only 25.5%, a 10% decrease on Tout's 1918 result.⁴²⁷ Wesham's community remained traditional and Conservative. As DeGroot concluded the Great War 'confirmed the un-revolutionary character of the British worker.'⁴²⁸ This adage aptly describes Wesham's workers.

⁴²⁷ Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results*, p. 396.

⁴²⁸ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 109.

Conclusion

The parish of Wesham contributed significantly to Britain's Great War effort. Under the leadership of a minority of middle class women, this working class community willingly gave their time and money. Christ Church Mothers' Union was formed at the beginning of the conflict to produce garments for soldiers.⁴²⁹ The community donated to local and national charities. From the first weeks of the conflict St Joseph's school agreed to forward 3s 9d a month to the National War Relief Fund.⁴³⁰ On an almost monthly basis there were collections for causes as diverse as Belgian refugees and wounded horses. Even when food prices were rising, the parish still managed to collect £31 11s 8d for YMCA Hut Week in April 1917.⁴³¹ The community showed compassion to its own townsfolk, holding benefit events for the families of the most severely injured. St Joseph's School allowed a teacher to be absent from school for four days to be with her husband while he was on furlough.⁴³² Working class recreational activities were curtailed. Kirkham Football Club abandoned their season in August 1914 and the ground was used for drill practice for the Kirkham Volunteer Force.⁴³³ In 1917, Wesham's bowling green was ploughed to grow potatoes. Mill closures may have benefited children's education in 1914, but by 1918 it was being disrupted as coal shortages forced the school to close on three occasions.⁴³⁴

The parish's most significant contribution to the conflict was provided by those men who engaged in military service. At the end of the conflict, either voluntarily or through conscription, at least 174 men from Wesham had served in the military.⁴³⁵ Having established in Chapter 3, that 363 men of the parish were eligible to serve, the 174 total represents 49% of Wesham's

⁴²⁹ *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette*, October 1914.

⁴³⁰ *Lytham St Anne's Gazette*, 16th October 1914.

⁴³¹ Minute Book of Wesham Parish Council.

⁴³² SMWM1/1 Wesham, St Joseph's RC Log Book (LRO).

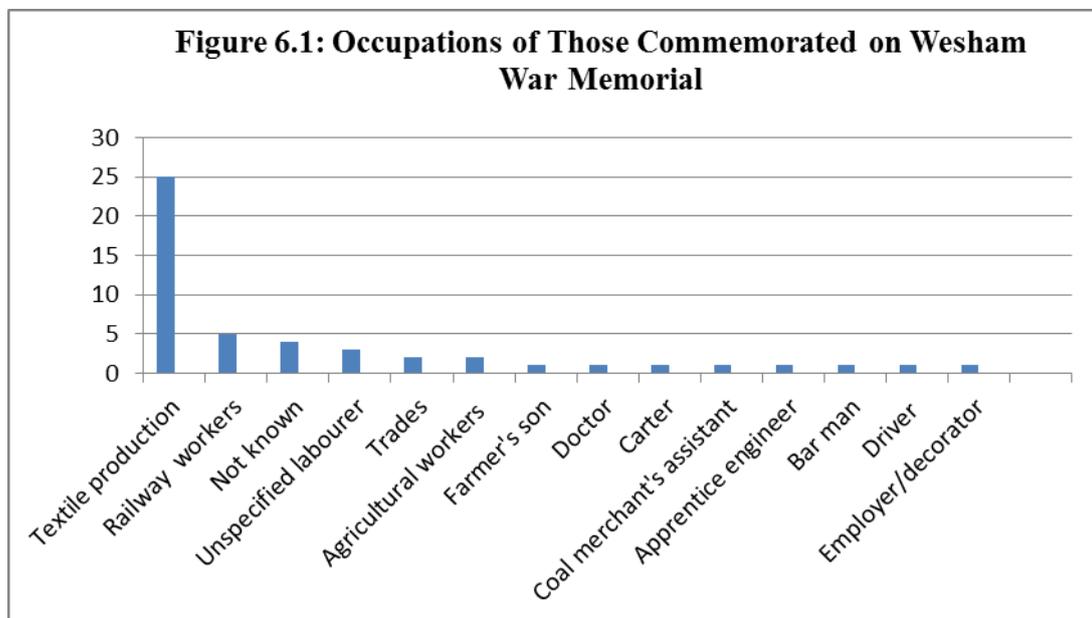
⁴³³ *Lytham St Anne's Gazette*, 11th September 1914

⁴³⁴ SMWM1/1 Wesham, St Joseph's RC Log Book (LRO).

⁴³⁵ The 1918 Absent Voters List for the Fylde Constituency cannot be located. Archivists at LRO and Blackpool Community History Library suggest many electoral documents were lost in a town hall fire in 1926. The 174 total has been ascertained from Military Service Records, Pension Records, Medal Index Cards, Silver War Badge List and Distinguished Conduct Medal Citations accessed via ancestry.co.uk. Local newspapers and the *Soldiers and Sailors Gazette* provided articles on some of those who served. All those listed on the Wesham War Memorial and those in the churches have been identified, with Wesham residents distinguished from those listed. Information has been supplied by relatives of those who served. Despite these efforts the 174 total is acknowledged to be a flawed total, though it is under and not over representative.

male population aged between 14 and 49 in 1911. This was higher than the national average of 46.3%.⁴³⁶

However, throughout the conflict there continued to be a significant gap between the military service undertaken by Wesham’s textile and agricultural workers. The patriotism of Wesham’s ‘fighting families’ is best demonstrated by the five Sanderson, three Whiteside and seven Hodgson brothers. The youngest of whom, Samuel Hodgson, volunteered in August 1918, the day after his eighteenth birthday.⁴³⁷ Together, these 15 men comprised nearly 9% of Wesham’s military contribution to the conflict. This is in contrast to the number of farmers and their sons. Of the 23 eligible for military service only one is known to have served. Of the 174 men who left Wesham, 49 are listed on Wesham War Memorial.⁴³⁸ Figure 6.1: Occupations of Those Commemorated on Wesham War Memorial, highlights the large number of non-agricultural workers killed. In contrast, the religious composition of 1914 Wesham is proportionately reflected on the memorial. 28% of those killed were Catholic, 53% Church of England and 18% Non –conformist. Nationally the number of war deaths led to the conviction that Britain had lost a generation.⁴³⁹ This belief is borne out in Wesham’s statistics where 61% of those who died were aged 25 years and under.



⁴³⁶ Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, p. 28.

⁴³⁷ Naval Service Record purchased from National Archive
<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI/Details?uri=D6894156>

⁴³⁸ It has been established that at least one soldier is not listed on the memorial <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/373040/STIRZAKER,%20J%20W>

⁴³⁹ Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, pp. 65- 83.

Statistics do not tell the whole story. Exploring individual circumstances emphasises the human cost of the Great War. Wesham's 49 men left families; 18 widows and 36 children.⁴⁴⁰ The youngest of these was John Moxam. John was his father's only child and was born nine days before his father was killed. This story was recounted by the widow of a Wesham soldier to her grandchild and shows the desperation and naivety of a grieving young widow. Her family assume, that as she did not speak of the event until very late in her life, she was still hurt and embarrassed by the incident: -

‘... a man claiming to be a former comrade of ... said he was not dead but badly wounded and in hospital. It was arranged they would go to seek out ... When they arrived, the man entered the hospital on the pretext of discovering whether ... was able to be visited, waited outside and, the man (having “taken care” of most of her money) failed to return.’⁴⁴¹

John Gillett's widow died in 1920. Her family refer to her as ‘poor Lilly’, stating she never recovered from the news of John's death.⁴⁴² Six widows are known to have remarried and, without exception, these were the youngest women with the fewest children. For those older women there was no option other than to return to work in the textile mills. In addition to those men killed, seven are known to have lived with injuries for which they received a war pension. At least twenty others received physical wounds during the conflict that required medical treatment, although were not extensive enough to warrant a pension. Several of the children of those who served have recounted that their fathers had chest complaints that they attributed to being gassed.

Assessment of the effect of the Great War on British society often considers the ‘opportunity costs.’⁴⁴³ Was the cost worth what was gained? Gregory suggests that it could be argued that Britain lost much and gained very little.⁴⁴⁴ This certainly appertains to the situation in Wesham. Prior to the conflict, there was no evidence of disunity within the community. Throughout the conflict they compliantly supported the war effort with no evidence of social or political advancement for the working class. The very limited opportunities provided to a minority of

⁴⁴⁰ Derived from marriage and birth records accessed via <http://www.lancashirebmd.org.uk/> It is therefore acknowledged that this figure could be higher.

⁴⁴¹ This was supplied by the family, but all names have been deliberately removed.

⁴⁴² Information forwarded by Joseph's great niece.

⁴⁴³ Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁴ Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 2 -3.

women disappeared post 1918. The basis of the 1914 economy remained almost the same in 1918. All the textile mills and farmers remained in-situ, while there were some very limited changes to the small commercial enterprises. Listings in *Kelly's Directory* for 1918 do not provide any indication that the parish was richer or poorer after the Great War.⁴⁴⁵ The only business that ceased to trade as a direct consequence of the conflict was the case of decorator Alfred Boulton, who died while serving on the western front.

In January 1917, Wesham Parish Council inaugurated the 'Wesham's Hero Fund'.⁴⁴⁶ Community generosity enabled the Wesham War Memorial to be unveiled in March 1921. The *Preston Guardian* reported that, a huge crowd had gathered to witness the event.⁴⁴⁷ Today, almost a hundred years since the Great War began huge crowds still attend the Remembrance Sunday Service. Wesham residents consider the memorial to be the focal point of their parish's heritage. This project began in response their request to examine more closely the contribution made by the parish's former residents to the Great War. Presenting this research to the community has challenged long held assumptions regarding the reasons why men volunteered. It has also highlighted that a section of the community, farming families, could be perceived to have behaved unpatriotically. However, it has increased interest in researching and sharing information regarding individual soldiers, wives and children. This contributes to a more meaningful and comprehensive interpretation of the impact of the Great War on Wesham. It has illustrated that the experiences of a single parish with such a mixed economy, does not necessarily conform to the generalised county or national experience and is therefore a valid contribution to the interpretation of Britain's Great War.

⁴⁴⁵ There was a net loss of four businesses in the parish comparing *Kelly's Directory* of 1913 to that of 1918.

⁴⁴⁶ *Preston Herald*, 27th January 1917.

⁴⁴⁷ *Preston Guardian*, 5th March 1921

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