

# The Great War



The Great War:  
Localities and Regional Identities

Edited by

Nick Mansfield and Craig Horner

**CAMBRIDGE**  
**SCHOLARS**  

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

The Great War: Localities and Regional Identities,  
Edited by Nick Mansfield and Craig Horner

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Robin Barlow** works as a higher education advisor at Aberystwyth University. Following his doctoral research on Carmarthenshire and the First World War, he has published a number of articles on various aspects of the war. He is currently working on a book on Wales and the Great War.

**Paul Burnham** studied briefly at the University of East Anglia in 1974, was a shop floor engineering worker for twenty-five years, and has been a housing officer since 2004. He has history degrees from London Metropolitan University and Birkbeck College. His concern with the formation of working-class consciousness in the epoch of the two world wars has informed both his article, the “Squatters of 1946”, published in *Socialist History*, 25 (2004), and the present study of the Great War and its aftermath.

**Paul Fantom** read economics at the University of Manchester, followed by a BA and a further MA in history at the Open University. He is currently a part-time research student supervised by Professor Carl Chinn at the University of Birmingham, and it is anticipated that his doctoral thesis “Community, Patriotism and the Working Class in the First World War: The Home Front in Wednesbury, 1914–1918” will be submitted in 2014.

**Keith Grieves** teaches history and education at Kingston University and held a fellowship at the Museum of English Rural Life, Reading University, in 2011–12. He is undertaking a project on *Open Spaces after the Great War: Reafforestation, Remembrance and Recreation* and has recently given papers on this theme at the Imperial War Museum and the National Memorial Arboretum.

**Craig Horner** has published on Edwardian motoring and society. He is co-editor of the *Manchester Region History Review* and book reviews editor of the *Journal of Transport History*. From 2015 he will take on the editorship of *Aspects of Motoring History*, the journal of the Society of Automotive Historians of Britain.

**Nick Mansfield** spent over thirty years working in museums including twenty-one as director of the People's History Museum in Manchester. He is the author of *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism, 1900–1930* (2001), *Buildings of the Labour Movement* (2013) and over forty journal articles. He is Senior Research Fellow in History at the University of Central Lancashire and currently writing a book on work, class, politics and the nineteenth-century British military.

**Martin Purdy** is a former newspaper editor who spent a number of years working as a freelance First World War advisor for the BBC's *Who Do You Think You Are?* magazine. In 2008 he wrote a book for the BBC (republished in 2013) on how to research servicemen and women of the Great War, and is the co-author of *Doing Our Bit* (Moonraker, 2008) and *The Gallipoli Oak* (Moonraker, 2013). Martin has published academic papers on Spanish tourism under Franco, Gallipoli and the East Lancashire legacy, and the role of Roman Catholic military chaplains in the Great War. He is presently completing AHRC-funded doctoral research work with Lancaster University.

**David Swift** read history at Girton College, Cambridge before completing an MRes at the University of York. He is now completing his PhD at the University of Central Lancashire, supervised by Nicholas Mansfield, exploring aspects of patriotic labour.

**Bonnie White** is a lecturer in the Department of History at St. Francis Xavier University, Canada. She has published several articles on Britain in the First World War. Her current work, a monograph on the women's land army in First World War Britain, seeks to recontextualize the organization within the broader context of British agriculture between 1890 and 1919.



## INTRODUCTION

NICHOLAS MANSFIELD

The Menin Gate, Ypres, August 1964. As a small boy I am there with my father and my uncle Charlie, a former Tommy who had married a French woman and had just retired after forty years' working life as a gardener with the War Graves Commission. Two men in dirty blue overalls (firemen, I later learnt) rode up on their bikes through the drizzle. They dismounted, drew out bugles from saddlebags and played a sad lament to us – the only people present – which reverberated in the vast structure. The two veterans of two successive world wars stiffened; “The Last Post”, whispered my father. Revisiting the same site in 2003 was a complete contrast, with hundreds of tourists and coach parties of British schoolchildren and a well orchestrated but moving performance; part of a Flanders experience, which could easily tip over into a rather obsessive and unhealthy heritage industry. As the conflict now slips beyond living memory, both popular and professional historians can become misty-eyed and sometimes incapable of rational debate when the Great War is mentioned. As the public history jamboree triggered by the conflict's centenary explodes in 2014, this book is published to seek to understand how the conflict moulded local and regional identities in Britain.

Every family was affected by the Great War and being large, mine certainly was. As a child I heard about the uncle who enlisted at fifteen, the only brother of three who survived the battle of the Somme, the improbable coincidental meetings of brothers in the middle of France, and the conscripted uncle who ate soap in an unsuccessful attempt to fail his army medical, only to be killed in the last weeks of the conflict. All it needed to complete this cinematic script was the bible stopping the proverbial bullet. But it was not all about fighting. I also heard about the mother who still did the daily washing for her three sons when they were billeted in the Corn Exchange of their home town for the first three months of their service. A carpenter grandfather turned down by the army with a heart condition spent the war building huts on Salisbury Plain, where his helpers, German PoWs, made a great fuss of the little boy who was to become my father. One of my mother's early memories was being met

from school by her soldier brother on his home leave before going to France and an early death. I knew intimately the memorial shrine constructed in a little used front room by bereaved female relations and the Labour Club built by unemployed returning soldiers. Though our French relatives were unique in our close knit neighbourhood, the fiftieth anniversary and in particular the screening of the influential BBC TV series *The Great War* seemed to rekindle interest. All the old men in the street – former Tommies to a man – were avid viewers and it helped the Great War emerge from the shadow of the “good war” of 1939–1945, which had a more positive image with its worldwide defeat of fascism, followed by the establishment of the NHS, the welfare state and full employment. The contributions to this book grapple with many of these community issues that I encountered in childhood.

I came across the Great War again in the early 1980s, doing an oral history project on the farmworkers’ union in East Anglia. I visited old activists expecting to talk about the union but they wanted to talk about the war. They viewed the conflict as a key part of their lives and saw no incongruity in being socialist activists whilst volunteering for the armed forces. Later while researching farmworkers in the Welsh Marches, in this same period, I found a more intense local patriotism mixed with ancient ethnic suspicion of the Welsh but also allied with trade unionism and briefly even socialism, before new conservative rural cultural institutions became consolidated. These developments were analyzed in my *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism, 1900–1930* (2001). But both parts of the country evidenced a widespread feeling that something positive needed to emerge from the “blood sacrifice” and comradeship of the trenches and the factory floor. Some of these themes are pursued in the chapters presented here. Sometimes this was through significant political changes such as those described by Paul Fantom with his chapter on labour and patriotism in the Black Country. Elsewhere these demands were varied, incoherent and transient as outlined in Paul Burnham’s account of the local and national activities of the huge but now largely forgotten radical ex-service organizations.

The Great War was one of the prime motors of social change in modern British history. The growing impact of the state on production, employment and welfare soon came to affect most aspects of the lives of United Kingdom citizens. Indeed 1918 saw for the first time the adoption of mass democracy with the enfranchisement of women and working-class men, which triggered massive changes in political allegiances in the following decades. Culture and technology at all levels were transformed and maps redrawn with Irish independence signposting the future decline

of empire. But how did these fundamental changes vary from locality to locality? Taken together did they drastically alter the long-established importance of regional variations and identities within British society in the twentieth century? Was there a common national response to these unprecedented events or did strong local and regional forces cause significant variations? Was it “Never the Same again” or “Business as usual”?

This was the objective of the conference “The Great War: Localities and Regional Identities” held at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) in June 2012 and organized by the editors of this book, Craig Horner and Nick Mansfield. It was held under the auspices of the Manchester Centre for Regional History at MMU, and the Institute for Local and Family History at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) in Preston and was supported by the Imperial War Museum North and the Western Front Association. Over one hundred delegates consisting of both professional and amateur historians listened to twenty excellent papers from established academics and post-graduate students describing how the conflict impacted on various parts of the United Kingdom. Seven are published in this volume and a further eight – all concerned with north-west England – will appear in a special Great War number, volume 24 – of the *Manchester Region History Review*.

The chapters presented here detail how communities coped with the war’s outbreak, its upheavals, its unprecedented mass mobilization on all fronts and its unforeseen longevity. The questions considered include: “Was class conflict exacerbated by war or did shared hardships and united patriotic goals bring formerly opposing classes together?”; “Did recruiting in different parts of the country show the development of distinctive regional voluntary patriotisms?”; “After the introduction of conscription was there any room for regional divergencies?”; “Did women find their own distinctive voice in the workplace or was their role as homemakers reinforced?”; “Did the pioneering local working-class movements, active from the middle of war, feed on protest or on patriotic conformity?”; “Did working-class people achieve lasting new structures in co-operatives, local constituency Labour parties and trade unions, or did post-war depression deaden striving for a better world in favour of peace, quiet and an easy life?”; “In post-war politics did the patriotism of most of the labour movement make the Labour Party electable locally, or did it prefigure the National Government, Stanley Baldwin and a generation-long Conservative hegemony?”; “How did municipalities react to government intervention on an unprecedented scale?”; “Did they support intervention, acquiesce or protest?”; and “Afterwards did they want to commemorate publically, mourn privately or just forget the horror with renewed spirituality?”

Robin Barlow's chapter "Military Tribunals in Carmarthenshire, 1916–1917" is based on his University of Aberystwyth doctorate and examines recent publications about the heretofore little studied but vitally important conscription apparatus. He concludes that attempts by central government to impose national standards on how to deal with those seeking to avoid compulsory military service, including the minority conscientious objectors, were largely circumvented by the local tribunals. In particular the ethnically based radical and nonconformist traditions of west Wales were continued and indeed strengthened by the war, resulting in a comparatively high success rate for appellants and a significantly lower percentage of Carmarthenshire men serving in the latter half of the war.

Paul Burnham's section, "The Radical Ex-Servicemen of 1918" is a crucial contribution to the growing literature on ex-servicemen. The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors was an avowedly grass-roots campaigning organization. Former officers were excluded unless they had risen through the ranks and it saw itself in direct opposition to the officer-led and Conservative Party-influenced comrades of the Great War. Both organizations though were active in every part of the United Kingdom and both claimed memberships in the hundreds of thousands. Burnham demonstrates that the very federal structure of the Federation led to considerable local variations in policies and politics. In some places the Federation regarded itself as part of the labour movement, where elsewhere right-wing, anti-Bolshevik elements predominated. Its often confused and contradictory policies, and its lack of funding led the Federation into the umbrella British Legion in 1921. Here, once basic pension reforms were implemented and buoyed up by the profits of the wartime canteens, centralized conservatism prevailed.

Both Burnham's and Paul Fantom's inputs help reveal the truly forgotten and often localized role of working-class people – especially through the labour movement – in the conflict. In 1914 the labour movement had largely supported the war effort. Appeals by trade union leaders to oppose German aggression led to over 250,000 of its members to enlist by Christmas 1914, with 25 percent of miners volunteering before the introduction of conscription. Typical was "Colonel" John Ward, the leader of the Navvies' Union and MP for Stoke on Trent. To "fight Prussianism", he raised three pioneer battalions from his members and led them to battle in France, Italy and Russia. The Labour Party entered Lloyd George's coalition government with leader Arthur Henderson becoming a member of the war cabinet. Trade unions at home grew enormously during the conflict, especially amongst unskilled and women workers. By the end one in three of the workforce was organized. Whilst previously regarded

as anathema in polite circles, having proved their patriotism, unions, post-war, were accorded a significant role in society.

Paul Fantom's chapter "Industry, Labour and Patriotism in the Black Country: Wednesbury at War, 1914–1918" is based on research for a University of Birmingham PhD. In it he traces the significance of the conflict on local trade unions and the Labour Party and indicates that its patriotic war record in industry, local government and on the battlefield was crucial to making the party electable in the post-war period. The chapter is a major contribution to the debate on modern politics and the growing allegiance of working-class people, and how they identified with Labour to achieve an increasingly large twentieth-century hegemony.

Professor Keith Grieves is a distinguished Great War historian whose books and biographies on politics, manpower and the role of government have made a notable contribution to the historiography. More recently he has worked on commemoration, loss of memory and the interwar countryside. His chapter, "Commemorating the Fallen in Surrey's Open Spaces after the Great War" focuses on a county which, though adjoining the largest metropolis, retained a rural distinctiveness in the face of growing suburbia and newly empowered day-trippers. The use of open spaces as war memorials enabled the region to fulfil its emotional and practical needs in the difficult post-war period. In addition the involvement of local regiments strengthened the very identity of the county against the various threats of modernity.

The continuance of local government and the provision of basic services like housing during the war had received no attention at all from historians. The chapter from Dr Bonnie White, of St Xavier University, "Wigwams and Resort Towns: the Housing Crisis in First World War Devon", is groundbreaking in every way. Service industries, such as the building trade, virtually ceased with the outbreak of war with workers either enlisting or becoming unemployed. The holiday trade, on which both rural and seaside suburban Devon depended, was also drastically curtailed. Belgian refugees were quickly accommodated in the West Country, but being dependent on charity, landlords were reluctant to let their properties. White discusses this critical Home Front problem for the first time and analyzes the sharp conflict involving class, ethnicity and localism.

Martin Purdy's "Roman Catholic Army Chaplains and Claims of a Working-Class 'Advantage' in the Great War" challenges a widespread view that Roman Catholic padres had a closer relationship to ordinary soldiers than those of other denominations and were seen more frequently on the front line. Other writers have claimed that this was because RC

priests were more likely to have working-class, or at least Northern or industrial, origins. In a skilful analysis of the class and regional backgrounds of Catholic priests and Anglican vicars of various localities attached to the armed services, Purdy argues that the established argument is merely a stereotype.

David Swift's chapter, "Labour Patriotism in Lancashire and London, 1914–18" is a further contribution to the lost story of labour patriotism and is mainly derived from his current doctoral research at UCLan. He compares and contrasts two vastly different regions which exhibited diverse fortunes for the pre-war labour movement. But both areas of the labour movement demonstrated overwhelming support for the war effort, with trades unions particularly active in recruiting and sustaining their members in the forces. Swift argues that both in Lancashire and London the war united the left and provided a patriotic and pragmatic socialism which successfully recruited supporters and voters. After the major expansion of the electorate in 1918 this made the Labour Party electable on a regional and then national basis.

2014 will see extraordinary and unprecedented attention given to the First World War. In the United Kingdom this fascination is reflected in the enormous growth of often unfocussed amateur histories meeting a demand for this war which seems to have no counterpart amongst other European countries, even with the former protagonists. The current misty-eyed fixation on its military aspects threatens to devalue the vast consequences of the struggle which still matter in British society a century later. This context therefore emphasizes the importance of the present volume in examining how the struggle shaped Britain's regions in diverse ways.

The centenary commemorations risk becoming mired in a tired litany of Mons, Somme, Jutland and Passchendaele, just as the British Expeditionary Force did in the mud of Flanders. There is a danger of over-concentration on the military history with the large national commemorations and in the programme of community-based projects to be funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is important that the obsessive fixation on its military aspects does not devalue the huge social, economic, political and cultural consequences of the struggle which still reverberate a century on. In the face of the raw and numbing effect of the vast scale of the public history of the war, which can only get more powerful as the centenary engages, this book celebrates the local and regional identities and nuances that still matter a century on.

*Manchester, December 2013*

# MILITARY TRIBUNALS IN CARMARTHENSHIRE, 1916-1917

ROBIN BARLOW

Most historians of Wales – and Welsh historians – have followed the lead set by K. O. Morgan, who declared that the people of Wales wholeheartedly supported Britain’s participation in the First World War.<sup>1</sup> Phrases such as “jingoistic fervour” and “patriotic frenzy” are frequently found in the literature, generally based on erroneous figures purporting to show that proportionately more Welshmen volunteered for service than either Englishmen or Scotsmen.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the opposite was true. Taking enlistment as a percentage of estimated male population in July 1914, England’s contribution was 24.02 percent, Scotland’s 23.71 percent, and Wales’s 21.52 percent. When the figures for voluntary enlistment are examined, a similar picture emerges: 6.61 percent of Scotland’s estimated population in July 1914 voluntarily enlisted, compared to 6.04 percent for England, and 5.83 percent for Wales.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the response to the war by the people of Wales cannot be given blanket treatment; there were differences, for example, between north and south Wales, rural and urban areas and Welsh-speaking and non-Welsh-speaking areas. Other ways must therefore be found to try and assess local attitudes to the war.

This paper argues that the workings of the military tribunals of Carmarthenshire offer an interesting way of gauging local attitudes towards the war, in terms of the decisions handed down by the tribunals, in the way the tribunals were perceived by the local communities and, most

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales 1880–1980: Rebirth of a Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 159–63.

<sup>2</sup> J. Graham Jones, *The History of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), 135; Philip Jenkins, *The History of Modern Wales, 1536–1990* (London: Longman, 1992), 343; David Ross, *Wales: History of a Nation* (New Lanark: Geddes & Grosset, 2005), 222.

<sup>3</sup> *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War* (London: HMSO, 1922), 364.

importantly, in the way in which the applicants were regarded by the populace.

In 1914, Carmarthenshire was a county of contrasts and diversity: to the south and east were anthracite coalfields, industry and growing urbanization centred on towns such as Llanelli, Ammanford and Carmarthen; to the north and west, agriculture, and especially dairy farming, was the dominant economic activity. The county became known as the “cows’ capital” of Wales, “prosperously lactic”. Carmarthenshire was – and is – a predominantly Welsh-speaking area and a staunchly nonconformist one. In 1914, the Liberal Party dominated local politics.

Little has been published on the work of military tribunals, largely because most tribunal papers were destroyed after the war. However, the papers of W. R. James, clerk to the Kidwelly Municipal Borough (MB) tribunal, have been deposited at the Pembrokeshire Record Office (although Kidwelly is in Carmarthenshire) and also the Cardiganshire appeal tribunal papers have been deposited in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.<sup>4</sup> The greatest source of information on the work of the tribunals is from the local press and never have Gustave Flaubert’s words been more accurate, that “writing history is like drinking an ocean and pissing a cupful”. This paper is largely based on reports published in the *Carmarthen Journal*, *Llanelli Mercury* and the *Amman Valley Chronicle*; all three papers carried a significant number of column-inches reporting the work of the tribunals, especially in 1916.

In October 1915 Lord Derby had been appointed director-general of recruiting in a final effort to retain the system of voluntary enlistment for the armed forces. The resulting Derby scheme temporarily did so, but once it had failed, the argument against conscription became unsustainable. The heavy casualties at the battle of Loos and the need for reinforcements in time for the spring campaign on the Western Front pushed the Asquith government to introduce conscription for the first time in British history. The Military Service Act of January 1916 brought conscription for single men aged between eighteen and forty-one, extended in May 1916 to include married men.<sup>5</sup>

The Military Service Act necessitated a system for dealing with those men who wished to obtain exemption, whatever the reasons. The Derby scheme had introduced a system of tribunals and whether for reasons of

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<sup>4</sup> Pembrokeshire Record Office (PKRO), ref: D/LJ/945; National Library of Wales, ref. CTB2.

<sup>5</sup> For background on the introduction to conscription see John Rae, *Conscience and Politics: The British Government and the Conscientious Objector to Military Service, 1916–1919* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 1–67.



expediency, efficiency or convenience, this machinery was adopted for the purposes of the Military Service Act. Local tribunals were to be appointed by the local registration authorities, and in practice these were the same tribunals as under the Derby scheme, with an increased membership from an average of five members to perhaps ten or more. In Carmarthenshire, the tribunals corresponded to the urban and rural districts of the county. Throughout England and Wales, 1,805 tribunals were set up, and in most cases councillors formed the majority group on the tribunals. It was also intended that local citizens with legal experience and representatives of organized labour would be included. The town clerk or council clerk usually became the tribunal clerk. In addition, a military representative was appointed to each tribunal, who was often a retired or serving military officer, but this was not always the case. His purpose was simply to obtain as many men as possible for the armed forces and his official position gave him the right to question applicants and to appeal against any decisions of the tribunal. Sixty-eight appeal tribunals were also set up, largely corresponding to the administrative counties, hence the Carmarthenshire appeal tribunal. Finally, there was a central tribunal, to hear appeals referred to it by the individual appeal tribunals.<sup>6</sup>

In February 1916, the Local Government Board (LGB) had issued instructions for the guidance of tribunals when dealing with applications for exemption. There were four main grounds for such a ruling: firstly, that it was in the national interests to retain the man concerned in civilian employment; secondly, serious hardship would ensue if the man were called up; thirdly, ill-health or infirmity; and fourthly, on grounds of conscientious objection.

Despite the lack of documentary evidence, tribunals continue to be perceived as bodies which co-operated with the military authorities, in order to maintain a supply of men for the army, and which were largely unsympathetic to the local population. As Grieves has noted, the “historical record has remained highly coloured by assessments which were produced by arch-opponents of the tribunal system”.<sup>7</sup> For example, Beatrice Webb criticized the tribunals at an early stage in their history: “The most biased judge on the bench could not have equalled, in malicious bias, the old gentlemen who are now sitting on the claims for exemption”.<sup>8</sup> John Graham, a Quaker chaplain and chairman of the Friends’ Peace

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<sup>6</sup> *Forty-fifth Annual Report of the Local Government Board, 1915–1916*, PP 1916, XII, Cd 8331, 22–4.

<sup>7</sup> K. R. Grieves, “Military Tribunal Papers: The Case of Leek Local Tribunal in the First World War”, *Archives*, 16, no. 70 (1983), 149.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Grieves, “Leek tribunal”, 149n.

Committee during the war, wrote that tribunals were “groping about with a lack of evidence” and consequently “fell back on their prejudices”. When the result was in doubt, “the verdict of the Tribunals generally went against the applicant [...]. Whilst success was impossible, they need not have failed as badly as they did. In few cases did they obtain the confidence of those whose destiny they decided”.<sup>9</sup>

K. O. Morgan has written dismissively that “tribunals were loaded in favour of privilege and position, with not a labourer or working man in sight on the bench”.<sup>10</sup> The reality was often quite different. If the Kidwelly MB tribunal is examined, we find that two members were both named as “labour representatives”: Edmund Cole, a colliery carpenter, and David Rowlands, a tinsmith worker. The chairman was Thomas Reynolds, mayor and an alderman of the borough, who was an overseer at the munitions factory at Pembrey. The other members were: David Anthony, a farmer and an alderman of the borough; Thomas Griffiths, a doctor and also the medical officer of health for the borough; John Morgan, another farmer and a councillor; and David Thomas, a schoolmaster and councillor. As one would expect, all seven members of the tribunal were resident in the town of Kidwelly and their ages varied from forty-four to sixty-two. The picture sometimes drawn of applicants pleading their case before a battery of elderly colonels had little basis in fact. As Rae has commented, “the gulf between the applicants and the tribunal members was essentially one of age”.<sup>11</sup> The average age of the Kidwelly tribunal was fifty, which was slightly younger than the average age of two other tribunals of which studies have been made: the Leeds tribunal was fifty-five, and the York tribunal fifty-two.<sup>12</sup>

The LGB did not have the opportunity to exert any significant influence on the selection of tribunal members, or the way they carried out their duties. It was essential that tribunals should retain discretionary powers both in the way they organized themselves, and to decide each individual case on its merits.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, it was impractical and undesirable to impose any real uniformity on the tribunals. In Carmarthenshire,

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<sup>9</sup> John Graham, *Conscription and Conscience: A History 1916–1919* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922), 68.

<sup>10</sup> Morgan, *Wales 1880–1980*, 164.

<sup>11</sup> Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 55.

<sup>12</sup> A. R. Mack, “Conscription and Conscientious Objection in Leeds and Yorkshire in the First World War” (MPhil diss., University of York, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> For a useful and detailed examination of the situation in Northamptonshire, see James McDermott, *British Military Service Tribunals, 1916–1918: “A very much abused Body of Men”* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

the period February to May 1916 was marked by the tribunals trying to establish a *modus operandi*, whilst being overwhelmed by the number of cases to be heard.

## **The Work and Decisions of Tribunals**

The workload of the tribunals was heavy and there is little doubt that they worked extremely hard. For example, by February 23, 1916 it was reported that Carmarthen Rural District (RD) tribunal already had over 500 cases to deal with. One applicant from St Clears said, “everyone in his parish was appealing and he thought he would follow suit”.<sup>14</sup> Llandovery RD tribunal dealt with eighty-eight cases at its meeting on March 2, 1916,<sup>15</sup> and Llanelli MB tribunal, dealt with over 150 cases on the same date.<sup>16</sup> By September 28, 1916, the workload had increased to such an extent that the Llanelli tribunal had to be split in to two to hear over 200 appeals simultaneously; each tribunal sat with only four members and a clerk.<sup>17</sup> On October 5, 1916, the same tribunal was again split to hear over 300 cases.<sup>18</sup> The Cardiganshire appeal tribunal met weekly or sometimes twice-weekly from March 15, 1916 until September 24, 1918. It criss-crossed the county, sitting in Aberystwyth, Lampeter, Newcastle Emlyn, Cardigan and Aberaeron. The papers of the tribunal are littered with claims for overnight accommodation and travelling expenses for the members. It must be remembered that members of the appeal tribunal would also have been members of their local tribunal (and probably chairman), their local district council and also Cardiganshire county council.

David Davies, a local landowner and farmer, living near the village of Myddfai, five miles south of Llandovery, provides another good example of the time-consuming nature of tribunal work. He was chairman of the Llandovery RD tribunal and also a member of Llandovery RD Council and Carmarthenshire County Council. To reach the county town he would ride a pony and trap to Llandovery station and then take a train to Carmarthen.<sup>19</sup> The meeting of Llandovery RD tribunal on January 2, 1917, chaired by Davies, lasted for seven hours and heard thirty-eight cases. The *Llanelly Mercury* commented on the local tribunal that “their work is an

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<sup>14</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Feb. 25, 1916.

<sup>15</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Mar. 10, 1916.

<sup>16</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Mar. 9, 1916.

<sup>17</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Oct. 5, 1916.

<sup>18</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Oct. 12, 1916.

<sup>19</sup> Personal testimony of David Williams to the author.

arduous one and they are not to be envied for undertaking it. They deserve the sympathy of the public more than their rebuke".<sup>20</sup> One member of Carmarthen RD tribunal wrote, "I have been sentenced to twelve months hard labour at the tribunal".<sup>21</sup>

The atmosphere at individual tribunal hearings is very revealing, giving a good indication of the prevailing local attitudes towards the war. The hearings generated great public interest and considering they were held during the working day, attracted large crowds. For example, the meeting of Llandovery RD tribunal on March 2, 1916 aroused, it was reported, "considerable interest", with the cases "being keenly followed by the large number present".<sup>22</sup> When the Carmarthenshire appeal tribunal met on June 1, 1916, one case evoked "loud cheers from the crowd at the back of the hall". The chairman demanded that they "must really have no such expressions of feeling in court".<sup>23</sup> The council chamber at Burry Port, it was reported, became "quite inadequate for the crowd interesting themselves in this important work"; when the tribunal met on June 20, 1916, every chair was occupied, and "a large number failed to enter".<sup>24</sup>

The conservative-leaning *Carmarthen Journal* commented:

Viewed in the light of the crying scarcity of labour, the crowds of young men who come in from the country to listen to the appeals before the Carmarthen Rural District Tribunal provide a curious commentary on the question of exemptions. At each sitting the room is crowded with lusty young agriculturalists, many of whom have no business there apart from the fact that they have come to hear the appeals, yet they have all had temporary, if not absolute exemption on the ground that they are "indispensable" on the farms, which – they say – could not be carried on without them.<sup>25</sup>

On March 9, 1916, the Llanelli MB tribunal heard the case of J. O. Thomas, who was appealing for exemption on the grounds of conscientious objection. Thomas was employed as a baker's vanman and he was asked by alderman Nathan Griffiths, a member of the tribunal, whether it was "consistent to deliver bread to soldiers". He replied, "I am not killing the soldiers by giving them bread". This brought "laughter and loud applause" from those present, prompting the chairman to say, "If

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<sup>20</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Mar. 16, 1916.

<sup>21</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Feb. 18, 1916.

<sup>22</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Mar. 10, 1916.

<sup>23</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, June 9, 1916.

<sup>24</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Mar. 16, 1916; June 22, 1916.

<sup>25</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Apr. 7, 1916.

there is any demonstration again, the court will be cleared, and it will not be open to the public. We are not going to allow any section to applaud in that way". After further questioning, alderman Griffiths said, "It's no use arguing with this man", which brought "laughter" from the public, one of whom called out, "because he is a better man than you", prompting "more laughter".<sup>26</sup> What does this tell us about the attitude of those from the locality about the war? One might have expected them to have seen the applicants as shirkers who should have been sent off to the war, but the opposite was the case. Sympathy lay with the applicant, not the tribunal.

This is also confirmed by the actual decisions of the tribunals where applicants were treated with a fair degree of leniency and exemptions were the rule rather than the exception. Of the first seventy cases dealt with by the Kidwelly MB tribunal only three applicants were refused exemption: a carpenter's labourer and two herdsman. Those who were successful included a shopkeeper, a bricklayer's labourer, a flannel merchant, a postman, a blacksmith and a hotel proprietor. On December 8, 1916, the Kidwelly tribunal dealt with thirty-seven cases and all were granted conditional or temporary exemptions. It was deemed "expedient and in the national interests" that instead of being employed in military service, men should remain employed as a chauffeur/groom, painter/decorator, boot-dealer and draper, saddler, jobbing builder and plasterer, fisherman and bill-poster/glazier/rural postman.<sup>27</sup> When applicants sought exemptions, they frequently did so on numerous grounds to give themselves the best chance of success. David Phillips, a twenty-eight-year-old master-butcher applied for exemption in April, 1916. He claimed to have the largest and oldest butchery business in Kidwelly and his widowed mother and three sisters were dependent on the business. Phillips claimed he was also a slaughterman and buyer and a sole-trader. In addition, he had the care of two horses, a brother serving in the Somerset light infantry and he farmed some land which he owned. He concluded his case by arguing that it was "in the national interests that the food supply of the civil population should be looked after". He was granted a temporary exemption.<sup>28</sup>

The Llanelli MB tribunal met for the first time on February 24, 1916 and heard fifty-nine cases; of the twenty-one which were reported, only five men were refused an exemption from military service. All had applied for exemptions on grounds of the economic distress which would result if they lost their employment as variously a shop manager, oilman, gaslight employee, fruit-shop employee, carter and brewery worker. The next

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<sup>26</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Mar. 16, 1916.

<sup>27</sup> PKRO, D/LJ/935.

<sup>28</sup> PKRO, D/LJ/941.

meeting of the tribunal heard 150 cases, although the details of only thirty-one were reported; of these, four were refused exemption, yet a cycle agent, a chemist's assistant and a pianist were all amongst those granted an exemption. The longest temporary exemption granted to any applicant was that to the estate manager at Stradey castle, of six months.

Llandovery RD tribunal met on March 15, 1916 and dealt with thirty-five cases, granting exemptions in thirty-two of them. The vast majority were agriculturalists and of those refused one was a timber haulier, one a farmer's son with three brothers working on the 450-acre farm, and one was an unemployed collier.<sup>29</sup> On April 14, 1916 there were five cases and four exemptions, and on May 26, 1916 twenty-six cases and twenty-four exemptions.<sup>30</sup> On June 27, 1916, eighty-two cases were heard, and in only one case was an exemption not granted.<sup>31</sup> On September 26, 1916 a further seventeen farmers, farmers' sons and farm servants were all granted exemptions and in other cases, a bootmaker from Llanddeusant (an isolated village of approximately thirty inhabitants), and a gardener from Gwynfe, were granted exemptions, with the chairman commenting, "gardeners are scarce in that district".<sup>32</sup> On October 13, 1916, all seventeen applicants were granted exemptions including men in varied occupations such as postman, mason, timber haulier, wheelwright, motor driver and gardener.<sup>33</sup> The one divergence from this pattern of exemptions occurred on October 27, 1916, when sixty-eight cases were heard, and nine were dismissed, including three farmers, a wheelwright from Llansadwrn, a tailor from Caio, a timber-feller from Llangadog, and a grocer from the same village.<sup>34</sup> On November 7, 1916, there were twenty-seven cases heard from agriculturalists, and all were granted conditional or temporary exemptions.<sup>35</sup>

## Military Representatives

A military representative was appointed by the War Office to appear at every tribunal hearing throughout the country. This work was carried out voluntarily at local tribunals, but was a paid appointment at appeal tribunals. Its role was quite simply to obtain as many men as possible for

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<sup>29</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Mar. 24, 1916.

<sup>30</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Apr. 21, 1916; June 2, 1916.

<sup>31</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, June 2, 1916.

<sup>32</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Sept. 29, 1916.

<sup>33</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Oct. 20, 1916.

<sup>34</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Nov. 3, 1916.

<sup>35</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Nov. 10, 1916.

the army, and it was only on rare occasions that objections were not raised to an exemption from service. John Rae has written that military representatives believed, “almost to the point of obsession, that if they did not take a tough line on claims for exemption, the army would be cheated of the recruits it needed”.<sup>36</sup>

Criticisms of the status and influence of the military representatives by contemporary critics of the tribunal system have often coloured the historical record. In Carmarthenshire, despite the blunt and often rude approach of many military representatives, tribunal chairman – and solicitors appearing on behalf of applicants – generally managed to protect the rights of the individual. A good example of the attitude of one tribunal chairman is provided by W. B. Jones of the Llanelli RD tribunal, who was a councillor and justice of the peace. At the tribunal meeting on October 16, 1916, a commercial traveller named Joshua Williams appealed for exemption and the following exchange was reported between chairman Jones, and the military representative, Captain Morton Evans:

Chairman: There are two million soldiers rotting in the country today.

Capt Evans: I don't think that is a fair remark to make.

Chairman: Why not? What I say is quite true.

Capt Evans: You don't know whether you are right or wrong.

Chairman: [...] Some men who joined the Army at the commencement of the war are still in this country, and there are some who have not been outside a certain Fort, drawing handsome salaries while they are doing nothing. (This remark drew much applause from the public present).<sup>37</sup>

Views such as this, publicly stated, indicate that it would be a challenge to obtain the numbers of men required by the War Office.

At Cwmamman Urban District (UD) tribunal, the military representative certainly did not always get his own way. On June 5, 1916, the following exchange took place:

Clerk: Don't you talk to me like that.

Capt Edwards: I am asking questions and you interrupt me.

Clerk: You ask me civilly. I won't take it from you or anybody else (applause from the crowd).

Capt Edwards: Please yourself.

Clerk: (To the Chairman) I ask you to protect me against the Military Representative.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 66.

<sup>37</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Oct. 19, 1916.

<sup>38</sup> *Amman Valley Chronicle*, June 8, 1916.

On July 6, a solicitor appearing for an appellant objected to the military representative putting a question. Captain Edwards responded, “Don’t interfere; sit down, you will hear your case called later on”. The solicitor replied: “I object to these insulting remarks. I ask for your protection as Chairman of the tribunal”. The chairman sided with the solicitor, commenting, “I will protect you”.<sup>39</sup> When the Cwmamman tribunal met on June 5, 1916, every applicant was granted an exemption, leading Captain Edwards to complain that he had sat for two-and-a-half hours and not got a single recruit. Evans Davies, a member of the tribunal asked ironically “Do you think we have done anything wrong?”<sup>40</sup>

S. O. Davies, writing in March 1916, had little doubt about what he saw as the insidious influence of the military representatives:

At present, the members of the Tribunals willingly connive at the domination of the military representative. This individual is almost invariably the dominant personality, whose opinion or recommendation becomes absolute law. He is allowed to badger, bluster and sneer at the applicant. Generally the military representative is a man of some educational attainment who very rarely fails to score at the expense of the uneducated and unaided applicant.<sup>41</sup>

John Graham asserted that military representatives, “often in khaki”, were “a standing counsel against every application” who “dominated weak Tribunals” and “were treated with a deference not granted to their opponents”, often using their position to “browbeat and intimidate applicants”.<sup>42</sup> W. Llewelyn Williams MP had complained of “the insolence of military representatives”.<sup>43</sup>

There is a great deal of evidence of the hectoring and rude approach of military representatives, but little evidence that it had any positive effect on the decisions of tribunals. At the meeting of Carmarthen RD tribunal on March 22, 1916, Captain Margrave appeared as military representative. A Trelech farmer, who had a medical certificate showing he was unfit for work, applied for exemption for his farm servant. Captain Margrave commented, “I think a little hard work would do you good . . . you look very well”. The farm servant was granted a temporary exemption of eight months. A Rhydargaeau farmer who similarly applied for exemption for his farm servant was told by Captain Margrave to “get out of that armchair

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<sup>39</sup> *Amman Valley Chronicle*, July 8, 1916.

<sup>40</sup> *Amman Valley Chronicle*, June 15, 1916.

<sup>41</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Mar. 9, 1916.

<sup>42</sup> Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, 66.

<sup>43</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Mar. 23, 1916.



in the chimney-piece and do something on the farm". He was also granted a temporary exemption of eight months. A Llanpumpsaint farmer who produced a medical certificate for his son was told, "I don't believe in these certificates. They are only waste paper to me". The applicant was granted an absolute exemption.<sup>44</sup> In all three cases, Captain Margrave had objected to any exemption being granted, yet the decision of the tribunal was to ignore this. On August 5, 1916, John Griffiths from Abernant appealed for exemption for his twenty-year-old son, due to his own ill health and inability to work his forty-eight-acre farm. When he produced a medical certificate to the Carmarthen RD tribunal, Captain Margrave asked, "How much did you pay for it?" and then continued, "I suppose it all depends whether you get exemption or not what you pay for it". Griffiths' son was granted an absolute exemption.<sup>45</sup>

Military representatives were also aided by advisory committees, which were set up by the War Office in all areas, originally under the Derby scheme, to investigate the background to all cases for exemption. Army Council Instruction No. 1930, sent to military representatives, stated:

It is of the utmost importance to secure the assistance of Advisory Committees in preparing contested cases coming on for hearing before Tribunals, by the investigation of grounds for exemption set out by applicants. In most cases, it is hoped that members of Advisory Committees will [...] be able to render valuable assistance in securing the necessary particulars. Further assistance can, if necessary, be obtained from the staff of recruiting offices, and School Attendance Officers are usually able and willing to render useful service in this connection.<sup>46</sup>

The information provided was thus useful to the military representatives. For example, when a Whitland farmer appealed to Carmarthen RD Tribunal on March 22, 1916, for exemption for his farm servant, the military representative stated: "This farmer owns his farm and can afford to pay for labour, and I think he should sacrifice some money in a national emergency like this".<sup>47</sup> The appeal was refused.

The military representatives treated most applicants with condescension and only a perfunctory interest in each individual circumstance. As they saw it, the successful prosecution of the war depended on finding the men to fight and the process began in the military tribunals of districts

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<sup>44</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Mar. 24, 1916.

<sup>45</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Aug. 11, 1916.

<sup>46</sup> PKRO D/LJ/939, Army Council Instruction No. 1930, Oct. 8, 1916.

<sup>47</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Mar. 24, 1916.

throughout Wales and beyond. The military representatives were often ill-mannered, aggressive and sometimes even slanderous, but it seems that the members of the Carmarthenshire tribunals were not prepared to be brow-beaten by them, and generally made their judgements independently.

### **Decisions of the Tribunals**

Whilst this study is largely dependent on reports in the local press which tended to highlight controversial or unusual cases, the experience of Carmarthenshire would seem to suggest that applicants to the tribunals, except those applying for exemptions on grounds of conscience, were treated with a fair degree of leniency and exemptions were the rule rather than the exception. At a national level, between March 1, 1916 and March 31, 1917, 371,500 men were compulsorily enlisted. However, up to April 30, 1917, 779,936 men had been exempted from service by the tribunals, meaning that approximately one man was compulsorily enlisted for every two men granted an exemption by a tribunal.<sup>48</sup> The statistics for Carmarthenshire show an even greater propensity to exempt applicants. Taking the cases reported which came before the tribunals of Llandovery MB, Llandovery RD, Newcastle Emlyn RD, Llanelli MB, Llanelli RD, Carmarthen MB, Carmarthen RD and Kidwelly MB, approximately one man was enlisted for every nine men exempted.

Although it is not possible to make an absolutely watertight case, because not every appeal before any tribunal was reported in the local press, the weight of evidence would certainly seem to suggest that the tribunals in Carmarthenshire were sympathetic towards those men under their jurisdiction. This is true not only in rural areas of the county, where many of the applicants would have been personally known to the members of a tribunal, but also in the urban areas where this was less likely to be so. Similarly, one might have expected more exemptions in rural areas because of the need to preserve a viable workforce to keep the nation fed, but exemptions were equally likely amongst all manner of occupations in the towns. Given that the LGB had “impressed upon tribunals the urgent need of releasing for the Army all men who can reasonably be spared from civil life”,<sup>49</sup> there are two possible explanations for this attitude of the tribunals: firstly, that those men who came before them fitted the various criteria laid down by the LGB for exemptions; or secondly, that the

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<sup>48</sup> *Statistics of the Military Effort*, 367.

<sup>49</sup> *Forty-sixth Annual Report of the Local Government Board, 1916–1917*, PP 1917–18, XIII, Cd 8697.

tribunals did not want to force men in to the army and only in extreme cases were they prepared to do so.

This provides strong evidence for the argument that support for the war, even as early as 1916, was not necessarily forthcoming in Carmarthenshire both in terms of the number of men applying for exemptions from military service and the readiness with which tribunals were prepared to keep men out of the army. Cyril Pearce, in his study of opposition to the war in Huddersfield, came to a similar conclusion.<sup>50</sup>

One, perhaps isolated, incident provides an interesting example of how the local population viewed compulsory enlistment. On September 11, 1916, two police officers, sergeant H. Lewis and PC D. Davies, went to Llansaint to arrest a conscript who had failed to report himself. The *Llanelly Mercury* reported:

the man, instead of coming quietly as was expected, showed fight, and being a powerfully built man, the struggle for some little time was between the officers and himself, but soon others of the inhabitants joined in against the police, who were very badly treated, the Sergeant receiving a nasty blow on the head which particularly stunned him and several kicks on the body. PC Davies received a nasty cut on the face and several bruises. The prisoner was rescued and the police had to retire beaten.<sup>51</sup>

The situation in west Wales was deemed to be so bad that the matter was actually raised in parliament by Stuart Wortley MP on March 16, 1916:

I have been in Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, and Cardiganshire for ten days, and I am thoroughly disgusted with what I have seen and heard of the recruiting. They are exempting everybody. I cannot mention names, but one public character who attests people and pays them 2s 9d tells everyone to “get an appeal paper at once and see So-and-so, and he will help you to fill it in”. You would think it was an election day to see them running about looking for influence to get out of serving their country [...] the whole of the Nonconformist ministers are working against the Act, and, if attested, using influence to get exemption.<sup>52</sup>

It is unlikely that applicants to the tribunals took matters in quite such a cavalier way. For many, to appear before a panel was undoubtedly an ordeal, especially when the tribunals placed unfair pressure on the families of those applying for exemptions. For example, Llanelli MB tribunal met on October 19, 1916 to consider the application for exemptions of two

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<sup>50</sup> Cyril Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience* (London: Francis Boutle, 2001).

<sup>51</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Sept. 14, 1916.

<sup>52</sup> *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 5th ser., vol. 75, col. 2357, Mar. 16, 1916.

brothers, Luther and Simon Ley, both furnacemen from Llanelli. The chairman, alderman D. James commented, "The object in getting you two here together was to decide which of you should go to the Colours. Have you considered the matter?" Simon Ley responded, "Yes, I am prepared to go provided my brother is allowed to remain".<sup>53</sup> At the Kidwelly MB tribunal in March 1916, Mrs Rees of Park Forge applied for exemptions for her son, and also another blacksmith, who were both essential employees of her business. The tribunal retired and "after a considerable time spent in discussing the matter", exempted one of the employees but left Mrs Rees to decide who it should be.<sup>54</sup> On March 21, 1916, Llandeilo RD tribunal heard the case of a farmer from Llanfynydd who applied for exemptions for his two sons, aged nineteen and twenty-one. The farmer was asked by the chairman of the tribunal, "which is the best boy on the farm?" The farmer replied "I cannot answer that". The tribunal decided to exempt only one son, and the father was to decide which one it should be.<sup>55</sup> The psychological pressures of war spread far and wide.

On November 21, 1916, Harry Evans, a collier from Furnace near Llanelli, committed suicide when he received notice calling him for military service. He had "threatened to commit suicide before he would join the colours". The coroner's jury passed a verdict of "deceased, while of unsound mind".<sup>56</sup> In the same month, Gunner John Evans, Royal Garrison Artillery, was found hanging from a tree at Morfa Farm, Johnstown. He had appealed to his local tribunal, but had been refused exemption. The coroner commented that he "should not have been sent to the army if he were in that state of health"; the jury's verdict was "suicide during temporary insanity".<sup>57</sup> In January 1917 William Daniel, a farmer from Llangendeirne, was found hanging from a chain in a stable. He had been "worrying a great deal about joining the army, and was afraid he would be called up at the beginning of the year". The coroner's jury passed a verdict of "suicide by hanging whilst of unsound mind".<sup>58</sup>

## Conscientious Objectors

If we turn now to those who applied for exemption on grounds of conscience, a different picture emerges. Although conscientious objectors

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<sup>53</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Oct. 26, 1916.

<sup>54</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Mar. 23, 1916.

<sup>55</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Mar. 31, 1916.

<sup>56</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Nov. 23, 1916.

<sup>57</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Dec. 1, 1916.

<sup>58</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Jan. 5, 12, 1917.

numbered only 16,500 (approximately 0.06 percent of all those who were conscripted) the attention given to their cases far outweighs their numerical strength.<sup>59</sup> John Davies estimated that there were at least a thousand conscientious objectors in Wales, proportionately a greater number than the rest of the United Kingdom.<sup>60</sup> The Military Service Act had stated that any certificate of exemption could be “absolute, conditional, or temporary, as the authority by whom it was granted think best suited to the case, and also in the case of an application on conscientious grounds, may take the form of an exemption from combatant service only, or may be conditional on the applicant being engaged in some work which in the opinion of the Tribunal dealing with the case is of national importance”. Although the ambiguity of the wording of the act led to some tribunals being reluctant to grant absolute exemptions to conscientious objectors, John Rae estimated that tribunals granted some form of exemption to 80 percent of all such applicants.<sup>61</sup> In 1916 in Huddersfield, the figure was 59 percent.<sup>62</sup> From the evidence of the local press in Carmarthenshire, the percentage of exemptions in the county seems to be far less. For example, between March 3, 1916 and August 3, 1916, the *Llanelly Mercury* gave details of twenty-one men who applied for exemptions as conscientious objectors; only four were granted, and seventeen were rejected. This also accords with the situation in neighbouring Cardiganshire; K. O. Morgan concluded that “Prosperous farmers and solicitors, and former high sheriffs in Cardiganshire, acted rigorously to suppress or imprison those who adopted an anti-war stand on grounds of conscience”.<sup>63</sup>

When reading the reports of the appeals by conscientious objectors, what is immediately apparent is that the questions asked by the military representatives, and members of the tribunals, were similar – if not identical – across the county. Indeed the LGB issued a circular to all local tribunals, containing ten questions which had to be asked. It stressed that “to justify exemption on grounds of conscience, it is not sufficient to show that opinions are held against war: there must be proof of *genuine conscientious conviction*”. The answers to the questions had then to be submitted to the LGB.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 71.

<sup>60</sup> John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), 500.

<sup>61</sup> Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 131.

<sup>62</sup> Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, 168.

<sup>63</sup> Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 164. See also Dewi Eirug Davies, *Byddin y Brenin* (Swansea: Tŷ John Penry, 1988), 159–60 (in Welsh), for how two conscientious objectors were questioned in Cardiganshire.

<sup>64</sup> PKRO, D/LJ/941.

The first reported cases of conscientious objectors came before Llanelli RD tribunal on March 7, 1916, when seven men appealed for such exemptions. All were subjected to ferocious and aggressive questioning by the chairman, W. B. Jones, alderman Nathan Griffiths, and especially from the military representative, Captain Evans. There was no attempt to consider the sincerity or otherwise of the beliefs of the applicants and all exemptions were refused.<sup>65</sup> On March 1, 1916, a farm servant from Newchurch appealed to Carmarthen RD tribunal for exemption, claiming conscientious objection; the questioning he was subjected to was typical of many cases:

Clerk (J Saer): You object to killing?

Appellant: Yes.

Clerk: Do you object to killing men or animals or what?

Appellant: Yes, men.

Clerk: And animals?

Appellant: Yes, I cannot kill an animal too.

Rev J Herbert: Do you eat meat at all?

Appellant: Yes.

Rev Herbert: How can you get meat without killing animals?

Appellant: There are butchers about the place.

Clerk: So long as someone else does the killing, you will eat?

Appellant: Yes.

Clerk: And as long as someone else kills Germans, you are willing to enjoy the privilege following that?

Appellant: Yes.

Clerk: Supposing you saw a German killing your sister. What would you do?

Appellant: I could not stab him.

Rev Herbert: You don't object to shooting him, but you would not stab him?

Appellant: Yes.

Capt Lewes (military representative): If you cannot kill a horse when he is dying you will be quite useless on the farm.

Appellant: I would shoot the horse.

Capt Lewes (to the Tribunal): He has not much ground to stand on. If he can kill a horse he can kill a German.

Unsurprisingly the appeal was refused, and the man was conscripted.<sup>66</sup> Virtually every conscientious objector was asked a question, along the lines of: "what would you do if you saw a German molesting/ killing/

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<sup>65</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Mar. 9, 1916.

<sup>66</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Mar. 3, 1916.

stabbing/ hitting your mother/ sister/ sweetheart/ wife? The idea seemed to be to try to tie the applicant in semantic knots which were beyond his comprehension. Questioning was based on the theory that inconsistency in a conscientious objector's attitudes could, under close scrutiny, be exposed. For example, force condoned by a conscientious objector in any situation, implied acceptance of military force. A tailor from Llanddeusant, who was a member of the Christian Commonwealth Fellowship appeared before the Llandovery RD tribunal on March 2, 1916. He was asked, "would you attend to a wounded soldier if you saw him lying on the road?" When he replied "Yes", he was told by the military representative, "you will do nicely for the Royal Army Medical Corps", and was assigned to non-combatant service.<sup>67</sup>

Whilst the conscientious objector was often subjected to tautologous and rhetorical questioning, it should also be recognized, as Martin Ceadel has pointed out, "that many of the objectors were themselves doctrinaire and unable to explain coherently their own, often esoteric, views".<sup>68</sup> Members of the tribunals also liked to try to debate the scriptures with conscientious objectors, in the hope of exposing inconsistencies, or perhaps even to try to make them seem foolish. At Carmarthen MB tribunal on March 6, 1916, the military representative, Captain Margrave, said to a theological student, "Do you know that there were wars at the time of Jesus Christ [...] Christians fought them and probably they were far better men than you and I [...] Do you know that there is a certain part of the Scriptures which tells you that you should prepare to fight against our enemies?"<sup>69</sup> At the Carmarthenshire appeal tribunal, Captain Cremlyn asked a conscientious objector, "What do you understand Christ to mean when he told the man to sell his garment and buy a sword? What do you think the sword was for – ornament?"<sup>70</sup>

The tribunals of Carmarthenshire were rarely sympathetic to the religious arguments of conscientious objectors, even when the applicants were from members of faiths known to be pacifist in their teachings and practice such as the Christadelphians and Plymouth Brethren. The Llanelli MB tribunal, which met on March 9, 1916, heard over 220 cases, including seven reported appeals by conscientious objectors. Six of the seven cited religious objections to fighting in the war; four were Nonconformists, one from the Plymouth Brethren, and one the Church of

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<sup>67</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Mar. 10, 1916.

<sup>68</sup> Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914–1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 44.

<sup>69</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, Mar. 10, 1916.

<sup>70</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, June 9, 1916.

England. Thomas Fowler, a baptist, said he “could not assume the responsibility of ending the life of any man”; Abel Richards argued that “the Holy Scriptures forbid us to take life and my conscience also precludes me from doing so”; Theo Lewis stated, “I cannot serve any person other than Him in time of war or at any other time”.<sup>71</sup> Such views and beliefs were given cursory attention before rejection, the underlying assumption always seeming to be that the conscientious objector was shirking.

An editorial in the *Llanelly Mercury* expressed concern that the conscientious objectors were not always being treated fairly:

We can quite believe that a man finds that his conscience absolutely forbids him to take part in the national strife, and we have ample reasons for doing so, and hence we would be the very last to hold such a man up to ridicule as is so often done [...] To classify every man who claims exemption for conscientious reasons as a waster, a coward or a good-for-nothing individual is unpardonable.<sup>72</sup>

The more conservative *Amman Valley Chronicle* was not nearly so sympathetic, referring to the conscientious objector as a “queer individual”.<sup>73</sup>

On March 17, 1916, three members of the Apostolic Faith appealed to the Llanelli RD tribunal on conscientious grounds. J. O. Jones stated, “I am fully convinced that taking up arms is against the teachings of the Bible”; T. J. Williams argued, “I love Christ and my enemies”, to which the chairman of the tribunal responded, “then you love the Germans as well?” Williams replied, “yes, of course”.<sup>74</sup> All three applicants were refused exemptions, and consequently appealed to the county appeal tribunal. The decisions of the local tribunal were upheld, and in June it was reported that the three men had been arrested and charged as absentees under the Military Service Act, each fined £2, and handed over to a military escort.<sup>75</sup>

In conclusion, the decisions of the military tribunals in one locality in Wales indicate a reluctance to send men to the war. This, it can be argued, illustrates an underlying lack of support for the war which has often been overlooked when the focus is wholly on the national picture. The old consensus of the war being popularly supported must be re-examined in light of local evidence. The tribunals were not dominated by the military

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<sup>71</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Mar. 16, 1916.

<sup>72</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Mar. 16, 1916.

<sup>73</sup> *Amman Valley Chronicle*, Apr. 27, 1916.

<sup>74</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, Mar. 23, 1916.

<sup>75</sup> *Llanelly Mercury*, June 29, 1916.



representatives, nor did they act as agents of the armed forces. Applicants were treated sympathetically by most tribunal members and exemptions from military service were granted with a readiness which reflected the prevailing attitudes of the locality. Those who appeared before the tribunals were accorded public support, rather than being labelled as shirkers or cowards, as they were in some other parts of the country. The one group which was treated harshly by the tribunals of Carmarthenshire – whether because of lack of understanding or lack of sympathy – was the conscientious objectors.



# THE RADICAL EX-SERVICEMEN OF 1918

PAUL BURNHAM

With the slogan “The men who carried the rifle can carry the programme”, ex-servicemen launched their general election campaign in Trafalgar Square in November 1918.<sup>1</sup> An army had been mobilized on a scale unprecedented in Britain, involving both volunteering and conscription amongst men of all social classes, who continued to see themselves as citizens and as temporary soldiers. Total wartime enlistment was 4,970,720 (22 percent of the entire male population).<sup>2</sup> Army units had been recruited on county and regional lines, or on the basis of the four national identities within the United Kingdom, or through “Pal’s battalions” based on friendship and employment networks; and the ex-servicemen’s movement reflected this diversity and localism.

An examination of the radical ex-servicemen will allow us to explore the extent and limitations in Britain of the world-wide radicalization that accompanied the war’s end; the origins of the unemployed movement of the interwar years; and the intersection between the war experience, class consciousness and the rise of the Labour Party.

The ex-servicemen’s movement will be considered in relation to its respectability, and its more militant and unruly aspects; and in relation to its use of moral and physical force, emphasizing the radical core of the movement. There is a vast range of possible sources of evidence on the ex-servicemen, but much of it is scattered across hundreds of local newspaper files. There is evidence from books by ex-servicemen, personal memoirs, cabinet papers, parliamentary debates, and the national press. Because of wartime print restrictions and a lack of money, the ex-service organizations produced local and national publications only after the armistice. Their records have mostly not survived, and those that have are not in the public domain. Their surviving material culture is also scanty: one banner, a few photographs and some newsreel clips.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, Nov. 11, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Middlebrook, *Your Country Needs You* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2000), 147.

## The Origins of the Movement

When the war began, official responses to the support needs of wounded serving people were woefully inadequate. There were voluntary groups such as the Soldiers' Help Society and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association (SSFA), with charitable funding, and able to provide only the most limited assistance.<sup>3</sup> There was almost no representation for serving or former serving personnel, and no rights to pensions or to severance payments for widows or other dependents. This gradually began to change during the war, and while improved surgical techniques kept more men alive, many were maimed by their injuries and by amputation.

By 1916, wounded soldiers were a physical presence on the streets of most towns in Britain. In Blackburn, local Labour councillor James Frankland saw wounded soldiers standing every day at the top of Castle Street, and helped them to set up the group that became the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers (NADSS, or "the Association").<sup>4</sup> This "ranker" organization was managed by a joint committee of discharged men and Labour activists. It excluded commissioned officers, demanded state provision for ex-soldiers, and proclaimed, "Begone! we say to charity".<sup>5</sup>

A deeper revolt amongst ex-servicemen began in spring 1917 when the government looked to augment the supply of military manpower. When there was an unofficial national strike of engineers against call-up, wounded soldiers around the country led public opposition to it. They paraded and sang songs, deriding the strikers for their alleged cowardice and lack of patriotism.<sup>6</sup> The Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Bill proposed the re-examination of those already exempted from service. The government hoped to find 100,000 recruits from this source, and so wounded fighters might be sent abroad to serve in menial positions.<sup>7</sup> The Poplar Discharged Sailors and Soldiers Club passed a resolution that its members would not serve again unless all other fit men had first been called

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<sup>3</sup> Graham Wootton, *The Politics of Influence: British Ex-Servicemen, Cabinet Decisions and Cultural Change (1917–57)* (London: Harvard University Press, 1963), 16–25.

<sup>4</sup> Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 78, 95.

<sup>5</sup> Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 48–9, 85.

<sup>6</sup> James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973), chap. 7; *Sheffield Independent*, May 12, 14, 16, 1917. For anti-strike protests at Rugby, see *Midland Daily Telegraph*, May 21, 1917.

<sup>7</sup> Graham Wootton, *The Official History of the British Legion* (London: British Legion/ Macdonald & Evans, 1956), 3.



Ex-servicemen marching to a Drumhead memorial service at Walthamstow, 1919, led by a priest and civic dignitaries. The bus at the rear is probably providing transport for disabled men. Pathe Newsreel Archive

up.<sup>8</sup> Its members marched in “well-dressed fours” to a rally at Trafalgar Square, addressed by MPs James Hogge and William Pringle.<sup>9</sup> They wore red, white and blue rosettes, and the ex-servicemen’s silver badge “for services rendered to King and Empire”.<sup>10</sup> They carried a banner reading “Comb them out of funk-holes and the discharged men will go again. Gott strafe the Cuthberts”<sup>11</sup> – “combing-out” meant finding further military

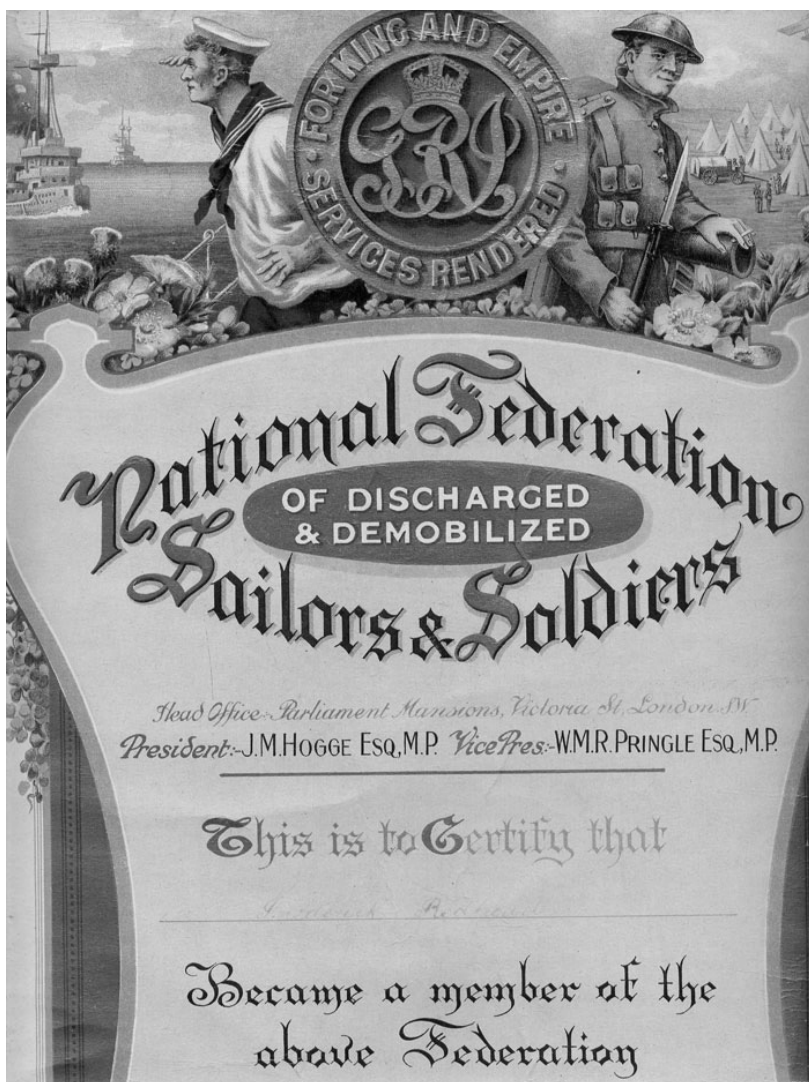
<sup>8</sup> J. St. G. Heath in *The Times*, Jan. 15, 1917, gives details of the Poplar Soldiers’ Club.

<sup>9</sup> *The Times*, Apr. 23, 1917.

<sup>10</sup> The Silver War Badge was awarded from Sept. 1916 onwards to all military personnel who were discharged as a result of sickness contracted or wounds received in the war. Around 1,150,000 badges were issued:

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/medal-index-cards-ww1.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/medal-index-cards-ww1.htm), accessed Jan. 19, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> *The Times*, Apr. 23, 1917.



Federation membership certificate, depicting the Silver War Badge with the words “For King and Country – Services Rendered”, issued to discharged serving personnel after 1916. With thanks to the British Legion Memorabilia Collectors Club

recruits from reserved occupations, and the notorious slogan “Gott strafe England” (May God punish England) was here turned against the “Cuthberts”, that is, the civil servants who were believed to be evading war service.

The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers (“the Federation”) was then launched, and at a rally in Victoria Park “Stop the war” hecklers were “removed from the meeting and threatened with a ducking”. The Federation’s secretary, ex-sergeant F. A. Rumsey, said:

Let the A1 dispensables in Government offices and factories go next, and if they don’t finish off the war, then we’ll go again as we went in the first instance – without being fetched.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Leadership of James Hogge**

The Federation excluded commissioned officers from membership, and it was controlled by the rankers themselves, with political leadership from the opposition Liberal MPs James Hogge and William Pringle as the president and vice-president respectively. Hogge and Pringle were described as “the last of the great Liberal Parliamentarians”.<sup>13</sup> By January 1917, Hogge had initiated a Naval and Military War Pensions and Welfare League, and was receiving 500 letters a week from the public on war-related welfare problems.<sup>14</sup>

Hogge was looking for a radical movement to revitalize Liberalism, and he “dreamed of a half-soldier party” based upon the ex-servicemen.<sup>15</sup> Hogge gave the Federation’s arguments a sharp class edge. The Federation gave a severe shock to the Conservative Party hierarchy in June 1917 by placing Frank Hughes, a former army private, in a parliamentary by-election at Liverpool Abercromby against Lord Stanley, a young officer and the son of Earl Derby, the Secretary of State for War. Hughes said that he was “a soldier of democracy against a soldier of the autocracy”, and his

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<sup>12</sup> *The Times*, May 14, 1917.

<sup>13</sup> George Wigg, *George Wigg: Memoirs* (London: M. Joseph, 1972), 169; Edward David, “The Liberal Party Divided, 1916–1918”, *Historical Journal*, 13, no. 3 (1970), 523.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon F. Millar, “James Myles Hogge (1873–1928)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [online edition, 2006], accessed Jan. 22, 2014; *The Times*, Jan. 16, 1917; Stephen R. Ward, “Land Fit for Heroes Lost”, in Stephen R. Ward, ed., *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975), 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ex-Service Man*, Sept. 25, 1918.

election agent advocated court martialling and shooting profiteers. The Conservative alderman Archibald Salvidge wrote that the “nasty, strident, undisciplined note” introduced by the Federation reminded him of the news from Russia.<sup>16</sup> Stanley was elected, with 2,224 votes to Hughes’s 794, but only after the government had announced that wounded men were not after all to be sent to serve again overseas.<sup>17</sup> The Federation had won the day on its main objection to the Review of Exceptions Act.

James Hogge was abruptly to abandon his leadership role in the Federation in January 1919 when he was appointed chief whip of the Independent Liberals, and he was not replaced by any comparable figure, either ex-serviceman or professional politician.

### Enter the Comrades

After the Abercromby by-election, The Comrades of the Great War (“the Comrades”) was launched as a new ex-service organization with the explicit backing of the cabinet and the War Office, and endorsed by the king himself.<sup>18</sup> Financed by rich individuals and private companies, this was a direct challenge to the Association and the Federation. The Comrades’ chairman was Captain Sir Beechcroft Towse, VC, blinded in the Boer War. In 1914 he had been an honorary staff captain, without pay or allowances, at base hospitals in France and Belgium.<sup>19</sup> Always distinguishing itself from other ex-service organizations as “non-political”, the Comrades’ grand council was packed with a mixture of officers and members of parliament, mostly Conservative, while its secretary, the Hon. Wilfred Ashley MP, doubled as secretary of the Anti-Socialist Union. The Comrades did not campaign for the rights of the discharged men, and their leading parliamentarians had supported the Review of Exceptions Bill.<sup>20</sup>

Towse was an inspired choice as chairman, and “Comrades” was a well chosen name (and without left-wing connotations at the time). The launch of the Comrades reflected a deep official fear of any stirrings of

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<sup>16</sup> *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, June 25, 1917; Stanley Salvidge, *Salvidge of Liverpool: Behind the Political Scene, 1890–1928* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1934), 160.

<sup>17</sup> House of Commons Debates (hereafter, *Hansard*), June 7, 1917, vol. 94, cc347W.

<sup>18</sup> *The Times*, July 24, 1917; Aug. 23, 1917.

<sup>19</sup> Basil Curtis, “Towse, Sir (Ernest) Beachcroft Beckwith (1864–1948)”, rev. Roger T. Stearn, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online edition, 2011], accessed Apr. 15, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 104.



radicalism, even patriotic radicalism, amongst the ex-servicemen – mainly young and having been taught military discipline and the use of arms, and often in close contact with those still serving. Conscription had sharpened potential class antagonisms within the armed forces, where there were “different rations, different pay, different risk” for officers and men.<sup>21</sup>

The Comrades grew rapidly so that the Comrades and the Federation had rival branches in almost every town. The *Comrades' Journal* carried articles about hobbies, stories of wartime derring-do and pictures of the Comrades' leaders, mainly middle-aged men with walrus moustaches. The *Journal* emphasized the fellowship of service life and the bond that was presumed to exist between all servicemen. In politics, it was plainly reactionary, with headlines like “Exit the Alien”, and “Women in the Way”.<sup>22</sup> A series of “Everyday problems” included “My comrades – or my union?”, and “Should a fighting man trade with a ‘Conchie?’”, from which predictable conclusions may be drawn.<sup>23</sup>

### Fighting the Pacifists and Socialists

James Hogge led the Federation into the anti-aliens agitation of 1918, claiming that “every enemy alien is an enemy of this country [and] ought to be fighting with his own people or locked up safely”.<sup>24</sup> Amid escalating patriotic demands, the Nottingham branch wanted neutral as well as enemy aliens to be “compelled to wear a device on the coat”.<sup>25</sup> The Federation was courted by a range of right-wing politicians. The independent MP Pemberton Billing wanted to form a Silver Badge Party out of the Federation; and there was a heavy-handed offer of patronage from Horatio Bottomley and his jingoistic magazine *John Bull*,<sup>26</sup> although his offer of funding was rejected. Two early leaders of the Federation, ex-sergeants Rumsey and Hagger, left at this time and may well have joined the National Party, a breakaway group of Conservatives campaigning strongly on the internment issue.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 42.

<sup>22</sup> *Comrades' Journal*, June, Sept., 1919.

<sup>23</sup> *Comrades' Journal*, Mar., Apr., May, 1920.

<sup>24</sup> *The Times*, July 15, 1918.

<sup>25</sup> *The Times*, July 19, 1918.

<sup>26</sup> *John Bull*, Mar. 16, 1918; Federation, EC Minutes, meetings of Feb. 2–3, Mar. 5, 1918.

<sup>27</sup> *The Times*, Aug. 14, 26, 27, 1918; Federation, EC Minutes, Aug. 25, 1918; William D. Rubinstein, “Henry Page Croft and the National Party 1917–22”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9, no. 1 (1974), 129–48.

In an area where the historical record is murky, some parts of the Federation assisted the secret state by supporting co-ordinated and covert work against strikes and pacifism.<sup>28</sup> The Federation had adopted a trade union manifesto declaring that ex-servicemen would not be used to undercut trade union agreements; but it opposed strikes in wartime. A mass rally at the Bull Ring in Birmingham against the engineers' "Embargo" strike in July, 1918 was reported in *The Times* as the work of the Federation, and many resolutions from Federation branches offered to take the strikers' places at work and to round them up for military service.<sup>29</sup> However, Captain Tupper of the right-wing National Sailors' and Firemen's Union left a vivid account of the campaign against the strike, which was co-ordinated by Winston Churchill, working with the Sailors' Union, and the Women's Party of Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst.<sup>30</sup> The Federation supported the campaign, but it did not play the leading role.

If there was moral intimidation against strikers, there was serious violence against pacifists.<sup>31</sup> Discharged soldiers often played a prominent role, as in the violent attacks on two open-air meetings at Plumstead in 1918 to prevent Ramsay MacDonald from speaking. *The Times* reported that on the second occasion, the Royal Arsenal branch of the Federation took part with banners reading, "All patriots here, so to hell with Ramsay MacDonald and his German comrades!"<sup>32</sup> However it appears from local press reports that these riots were organized by the anti-pacifist activists George Stubbs and Mrs Dacre Fox, with the evident complicity of the police.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, W. F. Watson, writing in the *Workers' Dreadnought*, denied that the demonstration had been called by the local Federation, as "that branch took no action at all, as a branch". He added that "most of the soldiers present were with the defenders of free speech", and "about 100

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<sup>28</sup> John Hope, "British Fascism and the State, 1917–1927: A Re-examination of the Documentary Evidence", *Labour History Review*, 57, no. 3 (1992), 78.

<sup>29</sup> *The Times*, July 29, 1918.

<sup>30</sup> Capt. Edward Tupper, *Seamen's Torch: The Life Story of Captain Edward Tupper* (London: National Book Association/Hutchinson, 1938), 227–32.

<sup>31</sup> The label "pacifist" was typically used for all opponents of the war in 1914–18. Only some were what we call absolute pacifists today; others objected to the foreign policy that had led to Britain's involvement in the war, or opposed the war as imperialist. The use of "pacifist" to mean opposition on principle to all wars started later.

<sup>32</sup> *The Times*, Sept. 2, 1918.

<sup>33</sup> *Woolwich Gazette and Plumstead News*, July 9, 1918, Sept. 3, 1918; G. O. J. Stubbs, "Pacifism in Woolwich Arsenal", *British Empire Union Monthly Record*, Dec. 1918.

silver badged men acted as stewards for us, and uniformed soldiers locked arms and protected our platform".<sup>34</sup> We must be aware of the ideological discourse around ex-servicemen that was being promoted by *The Times* and by wider conservative forces. This is one of many examples where an explicit reactionary role was attributed to ex-servicemen, but the reality was much more complex.

However, physical attacks on the Left by ex-servicemen continued into 1919. Patriotic "bit badgers" (men who wore the silver badge because they had "done their bit") broke up a Labour demonstration at Neath.<sup>35</sup> When ex-servicemen broke up a "Hands off Russia" meeting in the presence of unconcerned police officers, a writer in the *Daily Herald* poignantly asked Federation men to consider who their real friends were before breaking up meetings.<sup>36</sup> On other occasions, the Left in turn physically attacked Federation events.<sup>37</sup>

### The Federation after the Armistice

In October 1918, the War Ministry proposed to unify the Association, Federation and Comrades into an Empire Services League, under effective official control, using the incentive of access to wartime canteen profits (known as "Byng's millions"). However, the democratic temper of the new self-governing veterans' groups made any top-down merger problematic. Indeed, the leaders of the Comrades were vociferously against the plan.<sup>38</sup>

James Hogge used the general election campaign to disrupt talks over the merger proposal.<sup>39</sup> The Federation launched its campaign in Trafalgar Square with the slogans "Down with Bolshevism", "No pacifist government", and "The men who carried the rifle can carry the programme".<sup>40</sup> The Federation ran five national candidates, and endorsed twenty-four more candidates supported by local branches. They were a heterogeneous "pirate crew", including the proto-fascist Henry Hamilton Beamish at Clapham and Arthur Bannington at Coventry; Bannington was both a Labour councillor and a member of the Social Democratic

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<sup>34</sup> *Workers' Dreadnought*, Sept. 7, 1918.

<sup>35</sup> *Daily Herald*, July 28, 1919.

<sup>36</sup> *Daily Herald*, July 29, 1919.

<sup>37</sup> "Riot at Clapham Cinema", *The Times*, Sept. 17, 1919.

<sup>38</sup> Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 89–92.

<sup>39</sup> Niall Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy: British Veterans, Politics, and Society, 1921–1939* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 14.

<sup>40</sup> *The Times*, Nov. 11, 1918.

Federation, and had hounded the official Labour candidate who had opposed the war.<sup>41</sup> Ernest Thurtle at Bethnal Green was one of the few left-wing Federation candidates. While a wide variety of political actors found the ex-service “brand” useful, most Federation candidates ran solely on ex-service issues. The brazen promises and anti-German rhetoric of Lloyd George overshadowed the Federation’s campaign, but still it received 71,412 votes, and averaged 16.2 percent of the vote in the constituencies where it stood, although none of its candidates was elected.<sup>42</sup> Robert Barker was elected as an Association (NADSS) member for Sowerby, but in practice, he was a substitute Conservative candidate in a seat where a Liberal had received the coalition government’s.<sup>43</sup>

Official anxiety after the soldiers’ strikes of January 1919 drove rapid demobilization, demanded by men who then defied orders around the country while soldiers drove army vehicles in convoy into central London to press their demands for immediate release. This soldiers’ delegation “bore a dangerous resemblance to a Soviet”, and the government feared that the armed forces might tend to disintegrate if demobilization was delayed.<sup>44</sup>

Almost three million people were demobilized between the armistice and the summer of 1919. The Federation became a mass movement and its policy agenda shifted as problems of unemployment, pensions and housing came to the fore. Intense rivalry between the Comrades and the Federation ensued, and matters were argued out at district meetings when the authorities granted area recognition to the ex-service groups according to their support in local preference ballots.<sup>45</sup>

There was widespread strike activity in industry, with almost thirty-five million strike-days in 1919. Disputes involved Clyde engineers, miners, railway workers, shipyard workers and police officers. Federation banners flanked the platform at a mass meeting of police union members in London on June 1, and the band of the Kensington Federation headed the police strikers’ procession in their ill-fated national dispute on August

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<sup>41</sup> Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 132–3.

<sup>42</sup> John Graham George Wootton, “The Political Influence of Organised Ex-Service Men, 1917–57” (PhD diss., University of London, 1960), 206–25. The allegiance of several of the ex-service candidates is uncertain. The figures given here are based on F. W. S. Craig, *Minor Parties at British Parliamentary Elections, 1885–1974* (London: Macmillan, 1975).

<sup>43</sup> Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 132.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Rothstein, *The Soldiers’ Strikes of 1919* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 46, 91.

<sup>45</sup> *Bulletin: Organ of the NFDDSS* [hereafter *NFDDSS Bulletin*], Dec. 11, 1919.

10.<sup>46</sup> There was much anger at the broken promises of the coalition government, whose election manifesto had promised “land on a simple and economical basis for men who have served in the war, either for cottages with gardens, allotments, or small holdings as the applicants may desire and be suited for”.<sup>47</sup> There was deep popular anger against speculators and profiteers, felt most strongly by ex-servicemen. The *Comrades’ Journal* and the right-wing paper the *Ex-Service Man* ran gross cartoons of profiteering Jews, while anti-semitism in the Federation was more covert. Tom Lister, the Federation’s president from 1919, led a delegation to meet Lloyd George and spoke continuously to the prime minister for an hour and twenty-six minutes, the meeting ending with heated exchanges over the taxation of war profits.<sup>48</sup> Lister called for “a land free from want, where men may thrive, and Bolsheviks and profiteers decay”.<sup>49</sup> In his book *The Case of the Ex-Service Man*, Captain E. C. Whillier wrote that “if the mass of the workers rose against the profiteer, not one returned soldier would raise a hand in his defence”, while the “noted cheap fishmonger” Joe Simmons advertized in a local Federation newspaper with the catchline, “Kill the profiteers. Kippers 2d. per pair to Ex-Service Men”.<sup>50</sup>

The historian John Hammond wrote of “a new moral force in our society: the presence of a great mass of men, conscious of sacrifice and services, who look at the world with new eyes”.<sup>51</sup> In June 1919, the Federation adopted a “general programme” of far-reaching social reform, including public ownership of all monopolies, decent housing providing for the reduction of housework, land reform with an objective of public ownership, abolition of the House of Lords, equal pay for women, and support for the League of Nations, with armed forces reduced to a minimum level.<sup>52</sup> Captain Whillier called for the construction of garden

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Flanagan, *Parish-Fed Bastards: A History of the Politics of the Unemployed in Britain, 1884–1939* (London: Praeger, 1991), 101–2.

<sup>47</sup> F. W. S. Craig, ed., *British General Election Manifestos, 1918–1966* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 2–4.

<sup>48</sup> *NFDDSS Bulletin*, Feb. 18, 1920.

<sup>49</sup> *NFDDSS Bulletin*, Aug. 28, 1919.

<sup>50</sup> Capt. E. C. Whillier, *The Case of the Ex-Service Man* (1920), 55, 113; *Chevrons: Organ of Paddington Federation*, Nov. 1919.

<sup>51</sup> J. L. Hammond, “War and the Mind of Great Britain”, *Atlantic Monthly*, 123 (1919), 349–56.

<sup>52</sup> *NFDDSS Bulletin*, Mar. 27, 1919.

suburbs for ex-service families, with housing on communal or university lines, and the provision of extensive services.<sup>53</sup>

The ex-service groups acted as claimants' unions, handling a huge caseload. The Federation called upon its young activists to "learn to speak publicly by arguing privately".<sup>54</sup> Its members wore an "Ivy Leaf" badge, and there were Ivy Leaf clubs in many towns. The Luton Federation's sports day included events for "disabled men (one leg off) throwing the cricket ball", and "disabled men (one arm off) taking off and putting on collar and tie".<sup>55</sup> The dry humour of the movement, with its pride and its disappointment at post-war conditions, is evident in the Federation's fortnightly *Bulletin*: a Federation man is asked by a respectable lady on a train what the DS&S on his Ivy Leaf badge meant. "Discharged and seldom satisfied", he replies. An officer of the Federation is served by a waiter wearing the Ivy Leaf, and asks him the same question, but the waiter is wise to the joke, and answers, "Dinner, six and six".<sup>56</sup>

There was political polarization in the post-armistice period. In summer 1919 there were left-wing breakaways from the Federation by the International Union of Ex-Servicemen (IUX), sponsored by the Clyde shop stewards, and by the left-Labour-oriented National Union of Ex-servicemen (NUX).<sup>57</sup> The Federation's branches often sent delegates to local trades councils, which were the local Labour Parties of the day. The Federation had its own committees in major workplaces such as the Woolwich Arsenal and the military port of Richborough.<sup>58</sup> The Federation's electoral work in local authorities was extensive, sometimes on joint slates with Labour and sometimes standing independently. There was a range of political attitudes, from Norwich where the Federation candidates were led by the ex-gunner and militant socialist A. W. Votier, to Lowestoft where the Federation presented a moderate, respectable profile indistinguishable from the Conservatives.

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<sup>53</sup> Whillier, *The Case of the Ex-Service Man*, 55.

<sup>54</sup> *NFDDSS Bulletin*, Sept. 11, 1919.

<sup>55</sup> *Journal: Official Organ of the Luton Branch NFDDSS*, July 26, 1919.

<sup>56</sup> *NFDDSS Bulletin*, July 3, 1919.

<sup>57</sup> David Englander, "The National Union of Ex-Servicemen and the Labour Movement, 1918–1920", *History*, 76 (1991), 24–42.

<sup>58</sup> *The Times*, Aug. 26, 1919, Jan. 6, 1921.



Men stand with collection boxes and the Luton Federation banner. Church parade, 1919. Pathe Newsreel Archive

There was a pull towards the political centre as the Federation changed its rules to admit officers to membership and protracted negotiations moved towards amalgamation between the ex-servicemen's organizations. The Federation was always intensely patriotic, and its meetings often ended with three cheers for the king. The *Daily Mail* noted of one Federation march, that "a remarkable feature of the demonstration was its loyalty. Every other man had a Union Jack in his buttonhole, and love of country was a dominant note in the speeches".<sup>59</sup> In later years, Tom Lister remembered that the Federation, Association and Comrades had all been "intensely loyal to the Crown".<sup>60</sup> A respectable patriotism and an aversion to party politics became the hallmarks of the Federation's national leadership.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in *NFDDSS Bulletin*, Apr. 29, 1920.

<sup>60</sup> Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy*, 13.



A church parade at Luton, 1919. Members of the Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers march with banners, followed by a wagon carrying men who cannot walk. The marchers are met by serving soldiers, children, and men carrying collection boxes in aid of the families of dead veterans. Pathe Newsreel Archive

### **Moral Force and Physical Force**

The Federation was distinctive amongst the ex-service groups because it marched, in military formation, on local and national demonstrations. These were mobilizations with a purpose, exerting the moral force of the ex-servicemen and often including special wagons for the disabled.<sup>61</sup> The Federation presented some aspects of a quasi-paramilitary organization, implicitly contesting the state's monopoly of the use of violence. It also took part in church parades, and held impressive Drumhead services (open-air religious memorial services). Moral force was brought to bear at Beaconsfield, when local worthies proposed a carved stone cross as a war memorial. Elsewhere, Federationists had pressed for such memorials, but

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<sup>61</sup> *Daily Herald*, Mar. 1, 1920.



at Beaconsfield they wanted a useful memorial hall or recreation room instead, and marched 200-strong carrying the union flag, with Mr Jezeph's marching band, to the next meeting of the war memorial committee. A suitable compromise was then reached.<sup>62</sup>

Moral force became physical force on May 26, 1919, when a breakaway group from a Federation rally in Hyde Park marched on parliament, demanding that unemployed men be found work immediately at trade union rates of pay. They attacked the police with blocks of wood, tripped up police horses with scaffold poles, and pulled women tram and bus drivers from their cars. Then a delegation was invited into the lobby of the House of Commons for tea and to discuss their grievances.<sup>63</sup> Afterwards, the Luton branch of the Federation wrote that "although we deplore the fact that the boys ran amok, yet after all one can hardly blame them".<sup>64</sup> When James Hogge led an adjournment debate in the House of Commons, he did not condemn the violence, but focused on the ex-servicemen's problems of employment, training, pensions and housing. He quoted a letter from his post bag:

I am one of the poor devils that is now paying for his patriotism by having two rooms ... I am out for Bolshevism if a move is not got on soon and some of the West End houses are turned into flats at a reasonable figure.<sup>65</sup>

The most serious disorders came when Germany signed the peace treaty and celebrations of Peace Day were called for Saturday July 19, 1919. Philip Snowden called for a boycott, as did the *Daily Herald*, which mockingly labelled the event "Joy Day".<sup>66</sup> The Federation, perhaps somewhat reluctantly, joined the boycott. The Federation's *Bulletin* wrote:

When the country, and the Government representing it, realises its duty to its heroes, and honestly takes steps to make England a country for heroes to live in, we will rejoice. Till then, we weep.<sup>67</sup>

Ex-servicemen's attitudes towards the Peace Day celebrations were contradictory. They had complex feelings about the end of war, and needed to have mourning and celebration combined, in ways that non-fighters

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<sup>62</sup> *Bucks Free Press*, July 18, 1919.

<sup>63</sup> *The Times*, June 27, 1919.

<sup>64</sup> *Journal: Official Organ of the Luton Branch NFDDSS*, June 11, 1919.

<sup>65</sup> *Hansard*, 5s., vol. 116, cc. 1265–1276, May 28, 1919.

<sup>66</sup> "The Labour Situation", May 28, 1919, GT7361, CAB 24/80 (PRO); *Daily Herald*, July 11, 1919, July 19, 1919.

<sup>67</sup> *NFDDSS Bulletin*, July 3, 1919.

were sometimes unable to understand. On the day, Haig, French and Foch took the salute at the Cenotaph, and “London was gay with flags and favours, vocal with songs and cheering”; and there were thousands of local celebrations around the country.<sup>68</sup> Some Federation branches took part in the official celebrations, while others presented an alternative. Paddington displayed members’ artificial limbs on Peace Day, together with the amount of the owners’ pensions; and 3,000 marched with the slogans “We want work – not fireworks”; “Where’s that silver lining?”; “We don’t want gas – we’ve had Somme”; “Some of us have lost limbs – but we can eat as much as ever”; and “Demobilised, demoralised and pauperised”.<sup>69</sup> 500 Federationists marched through High Wycombe on Peace Day, singing “Rolling On” and other popular songs. “A big crowd of townfolk congregated and afterwards accompanied the demonstrators to their meeting place at a different part of the Rye Mead from that selected for the Peace Celebration”. In the evening, a van was drawn into the sports enclosure used for the official celebration, from which the Federationists made more speeches.<sup>70</sup> At High Wycombe, the Federation’s leader was councillor A. S. Forward, a workers’ leader during the town’s furniture dispute in 1914 when the trade unions had set up their own police force, the uniformed “Anti-Violence Brigade”.<sup>71</sup>

Letters to the *Colne and Nelson Times* showed the contradictory feelings stirred by the elaborate local Peace Day celebrations. One correspondent wrote that “the street decor was as if the King and Queen had won the war”; another that “this was a poor food ‘Treat’ for the demobbed men”; while an “ex service man, sacked by a mill owner” added, “It would have done some of these people good to have had their property damaged like Northern France and Belgium, and then they would realise what things were; and then perhaps we might have been a little better treated”.<sup>72</sup>

In Swindon, Coventry and Luton, there were three nights of community rioting, and at Grays in Essex two nights of specifically ex-service disturbances. A common feature in these four towns was discontent with the attitudes of local authorities towards the peace celebrations. The Labour council at Grays in Essex had refused to celebrate Peace Day. Ex-

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<sup>68</sup> *Daily Herald*, July 21, 1919.

<sup>69</sup> *Daily Herald*, July 18, 1919; *Chevrons*, Aug. 1919. “Gas” was “hot air”, or worthless talk.

<sup>70</sup> *Bucks Free Press*, July 25, 1919.

<sup>71</sup> *The Times*, Feb. 4, 1914; Hew Reid, *The Furniture Makers: A History of Trade Unionism in the Furniture Trade, 1868–1972* (Oxford: Malthouse Press, 1986), 63.

<sup>72</sup> *Colne and Nelson Times*, Aug. 15, 1919.

servicemen, angry that there would not even be a “party for the kiddies” and in a fruitless search for “chevrons or war service decorations”, disrupted a “Hands Off Russia” meeting and “handled” one of the speakers, Harry Pollitt, later to become a leader of the Communist Party. The ex-servicemen then marched to “bring out” Labour councillors from their homes.<sup>73</sup> At Coventry, the trigger for riot was an ornate historical pageant featuring Lady Godiva.<sup>74</sup> At Swindon, 10–15,000 people were present as the Union Jack was torn down and a ceremonial flagstaff burned.<sup>75</sup>

The violence was worst at Luton, where the provocations were greatest. Luton Federation had asked for a two-day event before deciding on a boycott. The council refused to allow the Federation to meet in a public park, while welcoming the Comrades onto the Peace Day parade; and it held a luxurious peace dinner that excluded the ex-soldiers. During the procession, the Federation strung a banner across the road outside their Ivy Leaf club with the message “Don’t Pity us – Give Us Work”, and booed the Comrades’ float as it passed.<sup>76</sup> Rioting broke out among a crowd of 10,000 during the procession, and in the evening the crowd burned down the town hall amidst “wild street scenes”. Revellers pounded out the 1914 hit tune “Keep the Home Fires Burning” on three looted pianos.<sup>77</sup> The mayor Henry Impey, who had been a particular target of the riot, left Luton during his year of office. It was said that he only ever came back twice: once to the funeral of a friend, and once to his own funeral.<sup>78</sup> The speeches outside Luton town hall showed the bitterness of the crowd: “Mr Oakley [a member of the local Military Service Tribunal] was indoors eating bacon, while I was out there on 6d. a day living on a dry biscuit”.<sup>79</sup> The three days of riot had a “broad community base”, and the leading defendants at Luton included Maud Kitchener, who had lost two brothers in the war, and who rioted wearing a soldier’s tunic and cap.<sup>80</sup>

The physical withdrawal of impeccably patriotic veterans had successfully challenged the “metaphorical parade” of the official

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<sup>73</sup> *Grays and Tilbury Gazette*, July 26, 1919, Aug. 2, 1919.

<sup>74</sup> Brad Beaven, “Challenges to Civic Governance in Post-War England: the Peace Day Disturbances of 1919”, *Urban History*, 33 (2006), 369–92.

<sup>75</sup> *Evening Swindon Advertiser*, July 22, 1919.

<sup>76</sup> Neil Orr, “Keep the Home Fires Burning: Peace Day in Luton, 1919” (MA diss., Middlesex University, 1996), 45.

<sup>77</sup> *Daily Herald*, July 21, 1919; Neil Orr, “Peace Day in Luton, 1919”, *Family and Community History*, 2, no. 1 (1999), 17–32.

<sup>78</sup> Dave Lamb, *Mutinies: 1917–1920* (London: Solidarity, 1976), 30.

<sup>79</sup> Orr, “Keep the Home Fires Burning”, 58.

<sup>80</sup> Orr, “Keep the Home Fires Burning”, 17, 56.

celebrations, with their presentation of a harmonious vision of society.<sup>81</sup> The Federation was forthright in its denunciation of the riots. Its leaders must have been horrified that the crowds had ripped down the national flag at Luton and at Swindon. The Federation provided pickets at Swindon to arrest potential rioters, and participated in a joint labour movement public meeting held to denounce the violence.<sup>82</sup> The Federation claimed that that the Luton riot was “an organised Bolshevik attack”; and that none of its members were amongst the rioters, although it provided legal advice for nine of the defendants. The Federation’s leaders increasingly turned against the Left, refusing to support the railway strike of September 1919, instead giving a favourable nod to the government’s appeal for strikebreakers.<sup>83</sup> “Wake up, England! Wake up, Ivy Leafers!” wrote the *Bulletin*, as the Federation held public showings of the film “Bolshevism: its message and its evils”.<sup>84</sup> This melodrama, dubbed the “Bolshie Bogie film” by the Left, portrayed a man who was captured by conspirators and made to listen on the telephone to his loved one being attacked, until a blind ex-soldier came to the rescue.<sup>85</sup>

## Women and the Ex-Servicemen

The ex-servicemen tended to adopt a zero-sum model of labour markets, where every female job was considered to be a male job lost. One of the first initiatives of the Association in 1916 was to call on Blackburn Corporation to stop engaging women.<sup>86</sup> Opposition to women workers did not feature on banners, or the front pages of ex-service newspapers, or agendas for meetings with ministers. However, the *Comrades’ Journal* was explicit:

Those women you’ve dreamed of, ethereal visions who cheered and inspired you to hang on when the whole world was slipping from under your feet – well they’ve got your job, and they won’t budge!<sup>87</sup>

Women working on trams and buses were lone workers, already subject to disapproving comments, and they now faced further abuse from the ex-

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<sup>81</sup> Orr, “Keep the Home Fires Burning”, 69.

<sup>82</sup> *Evening Swindon Advertiser*, July 23, 1919.

<sup>83</sup> *NFDDSS Bulletin*, Sept. 11, 1919; Englander, “The National Union of Ex-Servicemen”, 32–3.

<sup>84</sup> *NFDDSS Bulletin*, Aug. 28, 1919.

<sup>85</sup> *The Times*, Aug. 4, 1919.

<sup>86</sup> Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 49.

<sup>87</sup> *Comrades’ Journal*, Sept. 1919.

servicemen. In the Bristol tram riots of 1920, veterans “brought out” passengers from the tramcars, smashed windows, bottled the police, and sent delegations to lobby local businesses to dismiss women and employ ex-servicemen in their places.<sup>88</sup> Women, girls and hobbledehoy (awkward youths) hustled and hooted the tram conductresses, while “the flappers at the back” threw sand and gravel; until all the conductresses were dismissed.<sup>89</sup> The *Western Daily Press* wrote that while the ex-servicemen had public sympathy during their protests, afterwards people said of the conductresses that, “it’s jolly hard lines that they should be singled out in this way”.<sup>90</sup>

Crowds of ex-servicemen visited employers at Reading and at Liverpool to demand the dismissal of women.<sup>91</sup> The Liverpool crowds wanted barmaids sacked and replaced by men, but the local Federation mobilized ex-servicemen to demand that the City Council expand council services and open municipal factories to solve unemployment; while the Federation’s local president, councillor H. Walker, was a trade union organizer, negotiating large wage increases for the bar assistants.<sup>92</sup> Here as elsewhere, there was a disconnection between the attitudes of Federation leaders, whether conservative and respectable, or socialist and progressive, and the much wilder mood of ex-servicemen on the street.

Why were the ex-servicemen so virulent against women workers? The ex-servicemen were schooled in the masculine values of the fighting services, anxious about their place in post-war Britain, and they had before them the trade union aim of “the restoration of pre-war practices”. The ex-service groups all had women’s sections, and their papers had women’s columns; but women contributed little to policy debates. It was planned to elect a “lady organiser” to the National Executive of the Federation, although after much delay, this never happened.<sup>93</sup> The Dick, Kerr’s Ladies football team, strong supporters of charities and of the labour movement, invited a French national ladies’ football team for a four-match tour of Britain in 1920, with all proceeds going to the Federation.<sup>94</sup>

There was racial prejudice too. In April 1919, 5,000 Federationists marched in Liverpool, with banners reading, “Employers have you forgotten. Remember your pledges of 1914”. They complained that

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<sup>88</sup> *Western Daily Press*, Apr. 28, 1920.

<sup>89</sup> *Western Daily Press*, Apr. 27, 1920.

<sup>90</sup> *Western Daily Press*, Apr. 29, 1920.

<sup>91</sup> *Berkshire Chronicle*, Sept. 3, 1920; *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, Aug. 5, 1920.

<sup>92</sup> *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, July 29, 1920, Aug. 5, 1920.

<sup>93</sup> Federation NEC Minutes, Meeting of Jan 29, 30, 1921.

<sup>94</sup> Federation NEC Minutes, Meeting of Jan 29, 30, 1921.

“women were still occupying men’s positions, and that coloured men were being similarly retained”.<sup>95</sup> Weeks later, ex-servicemen were central to race riots at Whitechapel, Poplar, Liverpool, Newport and Cardiff. However, no direct role seems to have been played by the ex-servicemen’s organizations; instead the National Sailors’ and Firemen’s Union played an inflammatory part.<sup>96</sup>

## Ex-Servicemen and the Unemployed Movement

After the war, the government moved to meet some of the ex-servicemen’s concerns. Previously, it had resisted statutory pensions, but it now introduced them with a procedure allowing representations on appeal, with independent adjudication. There was an “out-of work donation” giving the demobilized longer periods of support than other claimants, and unemployed ex-servicemen were awarded priority at labour exchanges. These concessions were not to be made again until after 1945.<sup>97</sup> Whereas the government had previously tried to amalgamate the ex-service groups under indirect ministry control, it now embraced participation by the self-governing ex-service organizations. Ten million pounds in wartime canteen profits and bank interest was allocated to a United Services Fund, under joint control, and chaired by Lord Byng, who abruptly broke off relations with the SSFA and Soldiers’ Help, the pre-war voluntary groups which he now derided as “along the lines of patronage”.<sup>98</sup> The leaders of the ex-servicemen were courted, and grew accustomed to negotiating together and with officials, so moving the amalgamation project forward.

The activity of the ex-service organizations began to decline as more men were absorbed into work. There was a return of charity and self-help, with local Federation branches running vegetable markets and cheap restaurants.<sup>99</sup> The Federation launched Veterans Commerce Ltd, with capital of sixty thousand pounds, to finance business ventures by ex-

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<sup>95</sup> *Walton Times*, Apr. 25, 1919; “The Labour Situation”, Apr. 26, 1919, GT 7172, CAB 24/78 (PRO).

<sup>96</sup> Jacqueline Jenkinson, “The 1919 Race Riots in Britain: A Survey”, in R. Lotz and I. Pegg, eds., *Under the Imperial Carpet: Essays in Black History, 1780–1950* (Crawley: Rabbit Press, 1986), 182–207.

<sup>97</sup> David Englander, “Soldiers and Social Reform in the First and Second World Wars”, *Historical Research*, 67 (1994), 318–26.

<sup>98</sup> Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 93, 109.

<sup>99</sup> *The Times*, Oct. 6, 1919.

servicemen.<sup>100</sup> More Federation branches became absorbed in the war memorial movement, of which they had once been so critical.<sup>101</sup>

The chronic, structural, mass unemployment of the interwar years affected ex-servicemen especially badly, at a time when most employment was manual, with few workplace adaptations for the disabled. On March 1, 1920, five thousand ex-servicemen, facing discharge at the Woolwich Arsenal, marched ten miles with their families and supporters, taking a deputation to Westminster. They carried sandwich-boards bearing the words “In 1914 we helped you; in 1920 you must help us”, and vowed that “not all the police in London will stop us”.<sup>102</sup> The march, jointly organized by the Federation and the NUX, was headed by three wagons of “lame and shell-shock sufferers”, and when it was stopped by a six-deep police cordon at Westminster Bridge, “a bugle sounded the ‘Charge’, and the ex-soldiers began to rush the police at the double”.<sup>103</sup> As a sharp struggle surged, the sandwich-boards from around the wagon sides “were used as clubs, with which any policeman who came in range was bonneted”.<sup>104</sup> The police charged with batons and on horseback; and the red banner of the Federation “was captured and tossed, broken and torn, into a muddy pool behind the walls of St. Thomas’s Hospital”.<sup>105</sup> Afterwards, government ministers refused to discuss the behaviour of the police, but they agreed to delay the discharges, and to consult the disabled ex-servicemen’s committee over any future job losses.<sup>106</sup>

New local unemployed organizations grew up outside the Federation. The leader of Bristol’s ex-service unemployed was the talented agitator Comrade G. Gilmore of the IUX. In Bristol on May Day 1920, the ex-servicemen marched at the rear of the Labour Party procession, and then marched on to their own separate rally.<sup>107</sup> Gilmore based himself on the militancy of the streets, but had little to say to employed workers. The

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<sup>100</sup> *NFDDSS Bulletin*, Oct. 23, 1919, 13 May 1920.

<sup>101</sup> Nick Mansfield, “The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Soldiers and Sailors, 1917–1921: A View from the Marches”, *Family and Community History*, 7, no. 1 (2004), 28.

<sup>102</sup> *Daily Mail*, Mar. 2, 1920; *Evening Standard*, Mar. 1, 1920.

<sup>103</sup> *Daily Herald*, Mar. 3, 1920; *Daily Mail*, Mar. 2, 1920; *Daily Mirror*, Mar. 2, 1920.

<sup>104</sup> *Daily Express*, Mar. 2, 1920.

<sup>105</sup> *Daily Herald*, Mar. 3, 1920; *The Times*, Mar. 3, 1920, Mar. 13, 1920; *Daily Express*, Mar. 2, 1920.

<sup>106</sup> *Hansard*, Mar. 2, 1920, vol. 126, cc260–1; *Hansard*, Mar. 17, 1920 vol. 126, cc2223–5W.

<sup>107</sup> *Western Daily Press*, May 1, 1920.

*Workers' Dreadnought* strongly approved of Bristol's "dictatorship of the ex-servicemen":

The windows of Bristol Labour Exchanges have been smashed, because the Exchanges are regarded as a sham.

Women, often bringing their children, come to the Union with all sorts of grievances. Sometimes it is a hire purchase company, which has seized their furniture because their payments are in arrears. In such cases the Union negotiates with the Company. And there is always the menace that the shop may be wrecked unless the furniture is restored.<sup>108</sup>

In contrast, Wal Hannington found the unemployed ex-servicemen's groups in London most dispiriting in 1920:

From local shopkeepers they collected gifts of meat, groceries and vegetables which they distributed amongst themselves. They organized demonstrations to march the streets with collecting boxes solely for the purpose of begging money from passers-by and sharing the proceeds amongst the members of the organization. When two or more such demonstrations passed each other in the West End of London, open hostility was shown between them, as the men with the collecting boxes jostled each other to get money from the well-to-do shoppers.<sup>109</sup>

A key turning point was the huge demonstration in London on October 18, 1920 in support of a delegation of fifteen London mayors over unemployment relief. Ex-servicemen thronged the march, wearing their service decorations. Many of the police were also wearing their service medals, but they charged with horses and with batons to clear protesters from Whitehall. They ripped down banners and a major riot ensued. The entire demonstration had marched in military step, but the national ex-service organizations played little part in it.<sup>110</sup> For the Federation, the pursuit of "amalgamation" meant the abandonment of public protest, while the National Union of Ex-Servicemen had decided that ex-service issues were an integral part of the class struggle, to be waged through the Labour Party, and it therefore ended its separate activities.<sup>111</sup> Wal Hannington was not an ex-serviceman, but an unemployed former shop steward who had been in a reserved occupation during the war. He was a member of the

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<sup>108</sup> *Workers' Dreadnought*, Aug. 7, 1920.

<sup>109</sup> Wal Hannington, *Never on our Knees* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1967), 79.

<sup>110</sup> *The Times*, Oct. 14, 1920; *Daily Herald*, Oct. 19, 1920.

<sup>111</sup> *Daily Herald*, Oct. 5, 1920.



newly-formed Communist Party, which both organized and chronicled the developing unemployed workers' movement.

The Federation's leaders Tom Lister and J. R. Griffin pursued amalgamation through a series of unity conferences, and agreed to a tightly circumscribed constitution for the new British Legion when it was eventually launched on May 15, 1921. This was a painfully negotiated compromise. The Right was unable to dictate terms, and the Comrades had to accept that it would not be possible to use the movement to make anti-socialist propaganda or to break strikes. Their leaders Ashley and Towse found the merger negotiations so uncomfortable that each retired from activity for a period.<sup>112</sup>

Radical strands persisted after the establishment of the British Legion. In the Norfolk county farmworkers' strike of 1923, pickets assembled at war memorials. Strike-breakers were asked, "where were you in 1914?", and the Legion sent its silver marching band onto the picket lines.<sup>113</sup> Early conferences of the Legion saw furious arguments, with delegates demanding that a national demonstration be called; something that the leadership absolutely refused to contemplate.<sup>114</sup>

Ex-servicemen played a key part in the unemployed workers movement. As the Bolton contingent for the first national hunger march gathered in the misty morning of October 31, 1922, men exchanged memories of the old army days, and then fell into line as each one shouted his response to the order, "Company, number-r-1!"<sup>115</sup> When the march reached Trafalgar Square, George Cook from Altrincham said:

Do all the clapping and cheering when we have shifted away the parasites of society. We are here to be heard, to be seen, and if necessary to be felt. Seventy five per cent of the men who came on the march from Manchester are ex-servicemen, and we came up in military formation, all the way from Manchester with our Commanding Officer, our Battalion Sergeant-Major and our Company Sergeant-Major. I happened to be the Company Sergeant-Major, and we were so military disciplined that we were nothing short but ammunition and I believe we can get the ammunition when it is

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<sup>112</sup> Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 110.

<sup>113</sup> Alun Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk, 1870–1923* (London: Routledge, 1985), 167–8.

<sup>114</sup> Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 126–7.

<sup>115</sup> *Bolton Evening News*, Oct. 31, 1922.

necessary, and I do not give a damn whether we use it this week or the week after.<sup>116</sup>

When the London unemployed marched to the Cenotaph at the end of the official ceremony on November 11, 1922, “each banner had hundreds of ex-servicemen’s medals pinned on to it” and “thousands of ex-servicemen wore pawn tickets pinned to the lapels of their coats”.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, on the 1927 south Wales miners’ hunger march, “the form of organization was that of an army”, and the marchers were escorted into Trafalgar Square by the Labour League of Ex-Servicemen.<sup>118</sup> The Communists backed the ex-servicemen as the most radical group amongst the unemployed, but as a consequence, the unemployed workers’ movement failed to take organizing amongst women seriously until more than a decade after the war had ended.<sup>119</sup>

The bitterness of the ex-servicemen remained. As one unemployed man told a relief officer in 1930, “I was fighting for the likes of such fuckers as you in the trenches when I was fifteen, while you sat behind a fucking desk”.<sup>120</sup>

## Conclusion

The ex-servicemen’s movement was a complex reaction to life-changing experiences. Many men felt separated from society by their wounds, by personal loss or by mental suffering, but large numbers of ex-servicemen were also radically reintegrated into society, asserting their anger and concern over a wide range of issues.

Few ex-servicemen ever doubted that women should be excluded from workplaces after the armistice to make way for the returning fighters. Conservatives strove to impute to the ex-servicemen an automatic hostility to strikes, protests and socialism. During 1918 especially, ex-servicemen often mobilized for the Right, whose ideas at times saturated the veteran

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<sup>116</sup> Peter Kingsford, *The Hunger Marches in Britain* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982), 49–50.

<sup>117</sup> Wal Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles, 1919–1936* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936), 77.

<sup>118</sup> *Workers’ Life*, Nov. 11, 1927, Nov. 25, 1927.

<sup>119</sup> Richard Croucher, *We Refuse to Starve in Silence: A History of the National Unemployed Workers’ Movement* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), 103, 112.

<sup>120</sup> Ernie Benson, *To Struggle is to Live: A Working-Class Autobiography*, vol. 2 (Newcastle: People’s Publications, 1980), 52.

milieu; but in the long run the Right was unable to build out of a movement which contained such an obstinate working-class core.

Ex-servicemen felt validated in their use of force, and their propensity to use moral and sometimes physical coercion cast a long shadow into the post-war era. While the move away from politics by the leaders of the British Legion reflected the wish of most ex-servicemen to resume their peacetime lives, a militant group of ex-servicemen joined the unemployed workers' movement. However, it is likely that the Labour Party was the main indirect political beneficiary of the ex-servicemen's movement. Nick Mansfield has written that the Federation helped to initiate fledgling Labour parties in some areas.<sup>121</sup> As yet, we know little about the trajectory into the 1920s of the Federation's local councillors who had been elected on joint slates with Labour in 1919; and further research on these topics would be useful.

The war had been fought as a war of principle, setting high moral standards against which the realities of the conflict and its aftermath were subsequently measured. The radical ex-servicemen were at the forefront of this process, contributing in some measure to the mood of reappraisal which, little more than five years after the armistice, brought the once-detested Ramsay MacDonald to office as prime minister in the first Labour government.

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<sup>121</sup> Mansfield, "National Federation", 24.



# INDUSTRY, LABOUR AND PATRIOTISM IN THE BLACK COUNTRY: WEDNESBURY AT WAR, 1914-1918

PAUL FANTOM

## Introduction

Claire Culleton has noted the tendency for historians of the First World War to differentiate between those who fought and those who waited; a more appropriate division, perhaps, being between “those who fought and those who worked”.<sup>1</sup> This paper examines the latter group’s experience with reference to economic mobilization, munitions production and industrial relations in Wednesbury, to explore the support that the war effort received on the home front and its significance for the town’s economic, political and social structures. This enables the question to be addressed: How did notions of patriotism and especially those described as community patriotism, popular patriotism, working-class patriotism and “patriotic labour” influence the working-class community in Wednesbury during this conflict?

To assess this, the transition from the initial period of “Business as Usual” towards total war will be charted, together with its local translation from the first measures of state intervention, coupled with an improved status for the labour movement and new freedom for women. Consideration will be given to the war’s specific impact on Wednesbury’s industry and the deeper implications of the shortages and industrial disharmony increasingly felt at home. The discussion of industrial relations will focus on the dispute at the Crown tube works of James Russell & Sons Ltd in the summer of 1917 and by analyzing the motivations of those involved will add a further dimension to the examination of the local labour movement’s development and the wider community’s cohesion and patriotism during these years. The intention,

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<sup>1</sup> C. A. Culleton, *Working Class Culture, Women and Britain, 1914–18* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 1.

therefore, is to extend the historiography of the Black Country during the early twentieth century and to contribute to scholarship on the Great War by assessing whether the changes described should be attributed to the requirements of fighting and winning the war, or whether their roots should be associated with earlier events.

### **Wednesbury on the Eve of the War**

It is appropriate to provide some background information in respect of Wednesbury as it was in 1914.<sup>2</sup> Situated eight miles to the north-west of Birmingham, in terms of its geographic position and the trades associated with the town, Wednesbury was one of the Black Country's most important localities. This area's boundaries continue to generate controversy, with competing views on which outlying towns should be included; the most compelling definition relying on the extent of the south Staffordshire coalfield and associated manufacturing districts, "since it is the mineral producing region that should rightly be known as the Black Country".<sup>3</sup> Economically distinct and geographically separate from their neighbours, each Black Country town used the abundant natural resources to specialize in mining and manufacturing activities. For example, Darlaston produced nuts, bolts and screws, Dudley and its surrounding district made nails and chains, while in West Bromwich they made springs, and in Willenhall locks and keys.<sup>4</sup>

Although a noted centre for the production of edge tools, axles and wheels for rolling stock, bridges and other items of railway infrastructure, Wednesbury's principal renown was for the manufacture of steel tubes. Having regard to the town's economic structure, according to the 1912 edition of *Kelly's Directory*, ten of Wednesbury's twenty principal employers were tube manufacturers; the other factories and foundries

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<sup>2</sup> The principal work on the town to date remains J. F. Ede, *History of Wednesbury* (Wednesbury: Wednesbury Corporation, 1962; repr. Wednesbury: Simmons Publishing, 1991). Two masters dissertations have also covered aspects of the town's history, namely: S. Langley, "History of the Iron and Steel Tube Trade in Wednesbury" (MCom diss., University of Birmingham, 1948); P. A. Fantom, "Radicalism, Reaction and Reform: Popular Protest, Public Order and the Working Class in Wednesbury, 1838–1848" (MA diss., Open University, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> J. M. Fletcher, "What is the Black Country?", *The Blackcountryman*, 1 (1967), 12.

<sup>4</sup> G. C. Allen, *The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country, 1860–1927* (London: Frank Cass, 1929), 78.

being engaged in the production of castings, nuts and bolts, and valves.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it was host to an industrial concentration ranging from small firms employing a handful of workers through to large complexes, such as the Crown tube works and the Patent Shaft & Axletree Company, a component of the internationally renowned Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon and Finance Company.<sup>6</sup> The Patent Shaft was the town's largest firm, occupying 475 acres spread over three sites (Brunswick, Monway and Old Park), and in 1913 it fulfilled the largest order then placed with a single firm by supplying the Great Central Railway with 6,500 wagons.<sup>7</sup>

The years immediately prior to the outbreak of the war and especially the period 1911–1914, subsequently known as the “Great Unrest”, were marked by considerable social and political tension. Unprecedented industrial militancy led to numerous strikes, as the trade unions exerted growing influence and strength to press their demands for improved conditions and wages for their members.<sup>8</sup> One example of this was the Black Country strike that occurred between May and July 1913. This dispute came to be celebrated as the fight for the “Bottom Dog”, when the Black Country experienced what C. L. Staples and W. Staples have described as “a series of strikes, meetings, marches, and demonstrations initiated by largely young, unskilled male and female labourers and their supporters”.<sup>9</sup> With the exception of the skilled men of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, prior to this few Black Country workers were unionized and hence were exploitable by unscrupulous employers paying poverty wages. In assessing the prior attitude of the Black Country's working class to trade unionism, Eric Taylor asserted that it was

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<sup>5</sup> Kelly's *Directory of Staffordshire, 1912* (London: Kelly & Co., 1912), 500–6.

<sup>6</sup> Allen, *Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country*, 193, 358. The Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon & Finance Company was formed from an amalgamation of carriage and wagon building firms in 1902. The Patent Shaft & Axletree Company had itself been formed in a merger with another large Wednesbury firm, Lloyd Fosters, in 1867.

<sup>7</sup> K. Beddoes and C. & S. Wheeler, *Metro-Cammell: 150 Years of Craftsmanship* (Huddersfield: Runpast Publishing, 1999), 13, 95; Ede, *History of Wednesbury*, 243–5.

<sup>8</sup> H. Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889*, vol. 2: 1911–1933 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 24.

<sup>9</sup> C. L. Staples and W. Staples, “‘A Strike of Girls’: Gender and Class in the British Metals Strike, 1913”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 12, no. 2 (1999), 158; S. Langley, “History of the Iron and Steel Tube Trade in Wednesbury” (MCom diss., University of Birmingham, 1948), 74–5. “Bottom Dog” (similar to Under Dog) was the local slang term when referring to the unskilled workers who performed the hard, dirty work in the Black Country's factories and foundries.

“distinguished chiefly by characteristics of insularity and intellectual submissiveness”.<sup>10</sup> The history of the Workers’ Union cites a local official’s exasperated comments that “the Black Country temperament does not incline towards organization; several people have broken their hearts over fruitless labour for the bringing together of the workers into the various unions”.<sup>11</sup>



Demonstration outside of works, Walsall – The 1913 Black Country Strike, Wednesbury. Source: Ian Bott, Private Collection

The dispute began in Wednesbury on May 9, 1913 when 200 employees of the Old Patent tube works of John Russell & Co Ltd commenced strike action for improved pay. Their claim was based on the sizeable difference in wage rates paid to local workers when compared with others elsewhere. For instance, Birmingham’s unskilled workers received 23s whilst their Black Country counterparts were paid 18s for men and 10s for women for a 54-hour week.<sup>12</sup> Putting this into context, Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree’s 1901 study of living conditions in York, *Poverty: A Study of*

<sup>10</sup> E. Taylor, “The Working Class Movement in the Black Country, 1863–1914” (PhD diss., University of Keele, 1974), 114.

<sup>11</sup> R. Hyman, *The Workers’ Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 49.

<sup>12</sup> *Midland Counties Express*, May 10, 1913; *Wednesbury Herald*, May 10, 1913; *Manchester Guardian*, June 4, 1913; S. Langley, “History of the Iron and Steel Tube Trade in Wednesbury” (MCom diss., University of Birmingham, 1948), 75.



*Town Life*, had calculated that for a family consisting of a man, woman and three children, the minimum weekly income required to prevent poverty was 21s 8d.<sup>13</sup> The strike spread rapidly and according to the Board of Trade's chief industrial commissioner, Sir George (later Lord) Askwith, involved:

50,000 operatives in boiler and bridge works, metal-rolling mills, tube works, railway carriage and wagon works, nut and bolt works, and other allied trades, and thousands of people indirectly in various industries.<sup>14</sup>

From May to July, frequent demonstrations, meetings and processions took place.<sup>15</sup> Deputations left Wednesbury with the aim of bringing workers from other local towns out on strike, and they were successful at Bilston, Blackheath, Darlaston, Great Bridge, Tipton, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton.<sup>16</sup> Although mostly peaceful, a small number of the demonstrations ended in disturbance and violence, such as at Walsall's Talbot-Stead works on June 11 and at the Darlaston firms of F. W. Cotterill Ltd and Messrs Keay Ltd on June 24.<sup>17</sup> Poverty afflicted many of the local families, so that benefit concerts were organized and free meals for the children of the strikers' families provided by the wider community. Some of the men set out to spread their message beyond the Midlands by walking towards London, Glasgow and south Wales. They carried banners with such slogans as "Blessed are the piece workers", "In the midst of life we are in debt" and "Get everything cheap, especially labour".<sup>18</sup>

The strikers' demands were set out in the Workers' Union manifesto, *The Fight for the Bottom Dog*, describing the dispute as "the greatest battle the sweated, starvation-suffering, underpaid, underfed workers have ever

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<sup>13</sup> C. S. A. Chinn, *Poverty amidst Prosperity: Urban Poor in England, 1834–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 25.

<sup>14</sup> G. Askwith, *Industrial Problems and Disputes* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1920), 252.

<sup>15</sup> *Express and Star*, May 13, 16, 22, 1913; *Wednesbury Herald*, May 17, 1913; *Midland Counties Express*, May 17, 1913.

<sup>16</sup> *Express and Star*, June 26, 1913.

<sup>17</sup> *Express and Star*, June 11, 12 and 25 1913; The National Archives Home Office Papers (hereafter TNA HO) 45/10706/239811: Strikes – Labour Unrest at Darlaston and Wednesbury, 1913.

<sup>18</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 12, 1913; *Express and Star*, June 17, 1913.

engaged in”.<sup>19</sup> The strike gained national attention with such prominent figures in the labour movement as Tom Mann and Julia Varley visiting the area to support the action.<sup>20</sup> Resolution of the strike was achieved by the intervention of Sir George Askwith. The employers’ proposals for a minimum of 21s were put to a ballot on June 27, before which more meetings were held with speakers denouncing the employers’ offer as idiotic and insulting.<sup>21</sup> A draft agreement based on achieving parity with the Birmingham rate within six months was reached on July 7 and a ballot held four days later confirmed acceptance of the settlement and resumption of work by a majority of over three to one.<sup>22</sup> Askwith’s memoirs recognize the significance of this dispute, which he describes in prophetic terms as “a blessing in disguise, because it provided methods of dealing with difficulties which proved of service during the war”.<sup>23</sup>

The impact of the strike on the local communities across the Black Country was immense; it was also an opportunity for the labour movement to make progress locally. Many workers joined trade unions for the first time and by the autumn of 1913, Birmingham and the Black Country accounted for one quarter of the total membership of the Workers’ Union,

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<sup>19</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 2, 1913; J. Ward, “Emergence of the Labour Party in the Black Country, 1910–1922” (MA diss., University of Wolverhampton, 1993), 29.

<sup>20</sup> *Express and Star*, May 30, 1913; *Midland Counties Express*, May 30, 1913. Julia Varley (1871–1952) had risen from weaver in a Bradford mill to become secretary of the Birmingham Women Worker’s Organization Committee, assisting Mary Macarthur to unionize the women chain makers of Cradley Heath for the National Federation of Women Workers. Having joined the Workers’ Union, she spoke to 400 female workers in Wednesbury on May 30, 1913, telling them that the fight was not confined to the men, adding “it was always the women that had to suffer through low wages”. *Express and Star*, June 11 and July 3, 1913; *Midland Counties Express*, July 5, 1913. Tom Mann (1856–1941) was a trained engineer who joined the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) before founding the Workers’ Union in 1898. He made his first visit to Wednesbury on June 10, returning on July 3 to address meetings in the Market Place. He urged the people to stand firm and loyal, warning that those working were betraying their class and that the stamp of dishonour would be upon them.

<sup>21</sup> *Express and Star*, June 25, 1913.

<sup>22</sup> Cd. 7658, *Report and comparative statistics for 1913 (Trade – Boards, Disputes, Unions: Strikes and Lock-outs)*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1916), 186–7; *Express and Star*, July 11, 1913; *The Times*, July 12, 1913.

<sup>23</sup> G. Askwith, *Industrial Problems and Disputes* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1920), 256.

with six full-time officials being appointed for the area.<sup>24</sup> Yet when war came in August 1914, many of the participants in the 1913 strike demonstrated their patriotism by either volunteering to serve with the armed forces or striving to increase the supply of munitions for the front line. Drawing on his research into the organization of Shropshire's farmworkers, Nick Mansfield points out "the apparent contradiction in the action of workers, trade unionists and even socialists, who, at odds with the established order, still volunteered to fight for their country".<sup>25</sup> Yet just as it had done in Wednesbury during 1913, working-class commitment and community mobilization was evident from the outset during a war of national survival. Hence, on August 15, 1914, the *Wednesbury Herald* reported that Wednesbury's mayor (Councillor Nat Bishop) had urged local manufacturers to assist the families of employees who had volunteered or had been called away as reservists.<sup>26</sup>

### Wednesbury and the Production of Munitions

As Gerard de Groot has related, "In total war, strategy is affected by home front capabilities. The size of a country's military force is strictly limited: too many soldiers means not enough workers to equip them".<sup>27</sup> In 1914, few factories were dedicated to munitions production and this would have significant implications as the government attempted to provide the military with supplies, while simultaneously maintaining civilian goods and services and combatting inflationary pressures.<sup>28</sup>

The official *History of the Ministry of Munitions* records that from the end of the war's first year, there were increasing demands from the army for "a more liberal supply of ammunition" and that by the following

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<sup>24</sup> Centre for Modern Records, University of Warwick (hereafter CMR) MSS.126/WU/4/1/9–14: *Workers' Union Fifteenth Annual Report and Accounts*, 1913, 147.

<sup>25</sup> N. Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism, 1900–1930* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 79; CMR MSS.126/WU/4/1/9–14: *Workers' Union Annual Report and Statement of Accounts, 1913–1918*. The 1915 volume features a Roll of Honour of union members who had been killed in action in 1915, including photographs of three Wednesbury soldiers who were pre-war trade unionists.

<sup>26</sup> *Wednesbury Herald*, Aug. 15, 1914.

<sup>27</sup> G. J. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), 80.

<sup>28</sup> R. M. Shill, "Munitions Workers in the Black Country", *The Blackcountryman*, 21, no. 3 (1988), 50.

March, “so far as the immediate future was concerned, an adequate supply of ammunition could not be assumed”.<sup>29</sup> With early expectations being that there would be a war of movement, requiring the deployment of mobile artillery firing small-calibre shrapnel shells, as the belligerents adapted to the reality of trench warfare, existing stockpiles of high-calibre high-explosive ordnance were quickly expended. Replenishment depended on the royal arsenals and dedicated small arms manufacturers struggling to increase supply given production bottlenecks and labour shortages. Despite this, ordinary engineering firms were unable to carry out such work immediately, when there was little or no organization or supervision. Askwith recalls that “neither contactors nor subcontractors could fulfil contracts or subcontracts without more skilled labour”.<sup>30</sup>

The first steps towards increasing output were taken on March 4, 1915, when the Engineering Employers’ Federation, engineering trade unions and the government concluded the Shells and Fuses Agreement, which was followed by the Treasury Agreement of March 17–19. Acceptance of greater workplace flexibility was vociferously supported by the *Wednesbury Herald* in an article entitled: “Everybody’s Duty”. This stated, “we rely on the patriotic good sense of employers and employed to ensure that the reasonable requirements formulated by the Government in the vital interests of the nation shall be cheerfully and completely fulfilled”.<sup>31</sup> Locally, at a meeting on March 9, the chair of the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board, Mr George Macpherson, paid tribute to the patriotism of the local workers, noting that they had sent recruits to the army, supported benevolent causes and adjusted their working conditions. Negotiations on wages at this time of sacrifice had been accepted by the unions because “it would be against the national interest to strike at the present juncture”. Furthermore, “the men had pledged themselves to use the information they had to the end that there should be no commotion of work, especially where contracts for the Army and the allies are concerned”.<sup>32</sup>

The military situation came to a head when, on May 14, 1915, *The Times* published an article by its military correspondent, Charles a’Court Carrington, stating that at the Battle of Festubert, “the need for an unlimited supply of high explosive was a fatal bar to our success”.<sup>33</sup> This

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<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Munitions, *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions*, vol. 1, 130.

<sup>30</sup> G. Askwith, *Industrial Problems and Disputes* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1920), 364.

<sup>31</sup> *Wednesbury Herald*, Mar. 6, 1915.

<sup>32</sup> *Wednesbury Herald*, Mar. 13, 1915.

<sup>33</sup> *The Times*, May 14, 1915.

prompted the House of Commons debate on May 21 concerning the shortage and poor quality of munitions that helped to further undermine Asquith's Liberal administration, prompting the formation of a coalition government. On October 30, 1915, the *Midland Advertiser* reported on a meeting at which the Wolverhampton MP, Alfred Bird, addressed employees of the Wednesbury firms of Messrs Edwin Richards & Sons and Messrs C. Walsh Graham. His speech stated, "we now have two kinds of soldiers: there were the soldiers in the trenches and the workers at their benches, and they were absolutely indispensable to each other".<sup>34</sup>

The concentration of metal-based manufacturing in Wednesbury and elsewhere in the Black Country ensured that when the War Office and Admiralty eventually began to place orders with new suppliers, local firms could fulfil much of this work. At the end of the war, a guide was produced by Wednesbury Borough Council listing local firms holding military contracts and elaborating on the particular types of production undertaken.<sup>35</sup> The Patent Shaft & Axletree Company already carried out an extensive array of manufacturing activity at its three Wednesbury works. The expertise gained in providing items of rolling stock for the railway industry domestically and internationally meant that the firm was ideally placed to supply the army with suitable vehicles onto which large calibre naval guns could be mounted in order to act as mobile siege artillery.<sup>36</sup> Arising from the confirmation of government control in August 1915, the company's Monway works began to deliver the various forgings that were then shipped to other establishments across the country where they were transformed into finished artillery shells ready for the front line. Arguably, the most significant contribution to be made from 1916 onwards, however, remains the manufacture of the British army's first tanks at the firm's Old Park works.

By 1915, the combination of efficient rapid-firing artillery, barbed wire and the machine gun, which gave a considerable advantage to the defenders of entrenched positions, had resulted in the stalemate on the Western Front. Major W. G. Wilson is attributed with having conceived the idea for the tank when working on designs for a trench-crossing machine. Between September 1915 and January 1916, the early prototypes were designed in collaboration with William Tritton, a director of William

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<sup>34</sup> *Midland Advertiser*, Oct. 30, 1915.

<sup>35</sup> *Wednesbury as a Manufacturing and Commercial Centre and a Base for the Establishment of New Industries: Official Handbook of Wednesbury Town Council* (London: J. Burrow & Co. Ltd, 1918).

<sup>36</sup> Sandwell Community History and Archive Service (hereafter SCHAS) BS-PS/10/3/359–367: Patent Shaft – Works Photographs of gun trolleys, etc.

Foster & Company, and assembled at Fosters' Lincoln works.<sup>37</sup> A practical demonstration being given at trials held on January 29, 1916, the military observers were so impressed by the machine's ability to deal with the obstacles placed before it that ten days later the Army Council recommended to the War Office that one hundred of these tanks (as they had become known) be ordered.

As the official *History of the Ministry of Munitions* confirms, the contract was awarded to two firms. Twenty-five machines were to be built by William Foster & Company in Lincoln and, owing to its greater capacity, seventy-five would be constructed in Wednesbury by the Patent Shaft on behalf of its parent, the Metropolitan Railway Carriage, Wagon & Finance Company.<sup>38</sup> The Metropolitan also won the contract authorized by the War Office in April 1916 to supply an additional fifty tanks. These Mark I vehicles were allocated to the new tank companies raised within the Heavy Section of the Machine Gun Corps, and went into action for the first time on September 15, 1916, during the battle of Flers-Courcelette.<sup>39</sup> Improvements to design and capability brought forth new models, such as the Mark IV and Mark V machines that came into service in 1917 and 1918. By the end of 1918, 2,297 tanks had been manufactured, with many of them originating from Wednesbury.<sup>40</sup> Naturally, this bolstered the Metropolitan's finances, but production was dependent upon the cooperation and good will of the workforce. On December 22, 1917, the *Midland Advertiser* reported that the Wednesbury workers and their colleagues at the company's other works in Oldbury and Saltley, had demonstrated "their very practical patriotism" by raising £5,000 for the production of a tank that was to be named *The Metropolitan*. This vehicle was presented to the army in a ceremony attended by the commander of the Tank Corps, Major-General Sir Hugh Elles.<sup>41</sup>

Equally diverse was the output produced by another respected Wednesbury firm, F. H. Lloyd & Co. Ltd., which had been responsible for

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<sup>37</sup> Beddoes and Wheeler, *Metro-Cammell*, 23; D. Fletcher, *British Mark I Tank, 1916* (Oxford: Osprey, 2004), 10.

<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Munitions, *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions*, vol. 12, 75.

<sup>39</sup> Fletcher, *British Mark I Tank*, 12.

<sup>40</sup> TNA MUN 4/4175: Negotiations with the Metropolitan Carriage, Wagon & Finance Co. Ltd. for a contract for tanks; Ministry of Munitions, *The Official History of the Ministry of Munitions*, vol. 12, appendix VI. Production figures: Mk I (150), Mks II & III (100), Mk IV (1,015), Mk V (400), Mk V\* (632); Total tank production: 2,297.

<sup>41</sup> *Midland Advertiser*, Dec. 22, 1917.

the fulfilment of a number of pre-war armaments contracts. Notably, this included producing castings that were then used in the construction of the Royal Navy's Dreadnought class of battleships and battlecruisers. As with many of the local firms, a sizeable portion of its manufacturing effort was subsequently to be turned over to the production of artillery shells and other forms of ordnance. In a booklet published in 1919, F. H. Lloyd's management chronicled the company's other wartime endeavours, including producing the caterpillar tracks for the new tanks, creating the castings used for the construction of submarines and torpedo boats, and the development of transporter gear that enabled the Royal Navy's ships to be re-coaled whilst at sea.<sup>42</sup>

Wednesbury firms undertook a number of other contracts. This included manufacturing three-inch Stokes mortar bombs, as performed by Steel Nut & Joseph Hampton Ltd.<sup>43</sup> In addition to providing shell castings, John Spencer's Globe works installed automatic water sprinklers in the explosives factories. Edwin Richards & Sons manufactured axles for military vehicles, including gun carriages. Elsewhere in the Black Country, the Birmingham Metals and Munitions Company factory in Rowley Regis produced 12,000,000 rounds of .303 mark VII ammunition per week; Dudley's National Projectile Factory and the Walsall Munitions Company made 4.5- and 6-inch-calibre artillery shells; and Albright & Wilson's Oldbury chemical works supplied phosphorous and Tri-nitro-toluene (TNT).<sup>44</sup>

The pressure to increase munitions production was inextricably linked to the workforce's size and skill level, which led to dilution, that is, the replacement of skilled men by semi-skilled or unskilled workers, and substitution, the replacement of one semi-skilled or unskilled worker by another.<sup>45</sup> This was assisted by the demand for standardized products, and made possible by new engineering techniques, semi-automated machinery and mass-production processes. Furthermore, it facilitated the progression of unskilled (often female) workers to semi-skilled status, thereby narrowing the economic and social demarcation between workers, and

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<sup>42</sup> SCHAS BS-FHL/9/7/1: F. H. Lloyd & Co. Ltd. – Booklet issued to commemorate the First World War.

<sup>43</sup> TNA MUN 3/59: Supply of 3" Stokes Bombs – Steel Nut & Joseph Hampton Ltd., Wednesbury.

<sup>44</sup> *Wednesbury as a Manufacturing and Commercial Centre and a Base for the Establishment of New Industries: Official Handbook of Wednesbury Town Council* (London: J. Burrow & Co. Ltd, 1918); Shill, "Munitions Workers", 50.

<sup>45</sup> D. Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 31.

raising the wages of the formerly unskilled operatives. Initially, the intention was for a more flexible deployment of existing skilled labour, “not to reduce the skills of existing male workers, but rather to release them to jobs where their skills could be used more effectively”.<sup>46</sup> However, in practice, it released men for military service and the consequences of this remained contentious, with comb-outs exacerbating tensions between the protected skilled workers, the semi-skilled and unskilled, and their respective trade unions. Even as late in the war as July 1918, the Minister of Munitions, Winston Churchill, expressed his concern that this had an undesirable impact on tank production:

To take hundreds of men from the manufacture of tanks, thus dislocating the whole of the Metropolitan works, with the result that for the sake of getting enough men to make a couple of companies of infantry, the equipment of perhaps four or five battalions of tanks will be lost. Considering that one tank is worth hundreds of men, and, properly used, may conceivably be worth a whole battalion, I must avow myself unable to comprehend the processes of thought which are at work.<sup>47</sup>

Labour shortages first becoming evident in early 1915, when employers turned to the unemployed and casual labour, the retired, boys about to leave school and men working in the non-essential industries. The depletion of labour had immediate consequences. Because some employers were prepared to pay higher wages to retain the services of skilled labour or to entice others to join them, the government had to control this, which it attempted to do via the introduction of the Leaving Certificate scheme.<sup>48</sup> There were signs of an increase in employment for women in the latter months of 1914 and following the Board of Trade’s introduction of a special war register in March 1915, but it was the necessity of replacing those men conscripted after January 1916 that accelerated the entry into industry of large numbers of women munitions workers. After a faltering start, the number of women industrial employees

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<sup>46</sup> A. Reid, “World War I and the Working Class in Britain”, in A. Marwick, ed., *Total War and Social Change* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 20.

<sup>47</sup> The National Archives Cabinet Papers (TNA CAB) 24/58: War Cabinet Memoranda, July 12, 1918: Labour position in Munitions Industries.

<sup>48</sup> Under the 1915 Munitions of War Act, employers were forbidden from hiring munitions workers not possessing Leaving Certificates from their most recent employer unless six weeks has elapsed since they had left their last job.



rose from 212,000 in 1914 to 819,000 by 1917, with overall female employment increasing from 5,966,000 in 1914 to 7,311,000 in 1918.<sup>49</sup>



Artillery shell production, the Globe works of John Spencer Ltd., Wednesbury.  
Source: David Worley, Private Collection

Some firms trained their own female workers, whereas others benefited from courses run at technical colleges and government training facilities. On October 28, 1916, the *Midland Advertiser* featured an article “Women Munition Workers – Wednesbury Education Committee seeking students” describing the County Metallurgical and Engineering Institute’s scheme to train women aged between eighteen and forty-five years to become munitions workers. Lasting six weeks and with a starting wage of £1 per week, the scheme’s suitability for soldiers’ wives was stressed and reference made to how the wider community could help with these women’s childcare arrangements. The *Midland Counties Express* of November 11, 1916 reported in an item, “Women Workers – Patriotic Services as Munitions Workers – How they are trained in Walsall and Wednesbury” on a visit to such training facilities by the government’s special commissioner. Drawing attention to the numerous applications for

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<sup>49</sup> Cmd. 135, *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1919), 80.

admission that had been made, it added that “In all cases the training is given free, but the student undertakes to enter a munitions factory at the end of the course”.<sup>50</sup> In the final days of the war, the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* openly questioned what would happen to the women workers with the approach of peace and closure of war industries. This newspaper expected there to be widespread dislocation, as the women would have to leave jobs to make way for the men returning from military service, and that this would have a major social as well as economic impact.<sup>51</sup>

### **Industrial Relations and the Labour Movement in Wednesbury**

G. D. H. Cole stated that for the trade unions, “the declaration of war was the signal for an industrial truce” and any strikes in progress were settled quickly, the number of disputes recorded for August 1914 falling from over one hundred to twenty.<sup>52</sup> For the next two years, industrial relations in the manufacturing industries enjoyed an unparalleled absence of strife until such factors as wages being unable to keep pace with rising prices and the first public revelations of the making of extraordinary profits provided the causes for workplace disharmony. This can be contrasted with the rural districts of the Midlands where, until challenged by rural labour, the war was used by elites to blur class divisions and reinforce conservative attitudes, as demonstrated by Nick Mansfield’s research.<sup>53</sup> A prophetic warning had been made by the *Daily Herald* in the war’s earliest days: “It is the duty of all now to insist that the poor shall be protected against the machinations of plunderers, who, taking advantage of the necessities of the people, will force up food prices”.<sup>54</sup>

By willingly surrendering the right to strike without gaining any significant concessions in return, the trade unions had relinquished what was arguably their most effective and potent weapon for dealing with uncompromising employers. This was a decision of the union leadership,

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<sup>50</sup> *Midland Advertiser*, Oct. 28, 1916; *Midland Counties Express*, Nov. 11, 1916.

<sup>51</sup> *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, Oct. 26, 1918.

<sup>52</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *Labour in War Time* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1915), 43; G. Askwith, *Industrial Problems and Disputes* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1920), 357.

<sup>53</sup> Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, 123–8.

<sup>54</sup> *Daily Herald*, Aug. 5, 1914. This article is reproduced in C. Hampton, ed., *A Radical Reader: The Struggle for Change in England, 1381–1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 601.

without there being a consultation of the movement's rank-and-file, and it had been made in the belief that when peace returned the nation would be grateful to the workers for their sacrifice. On the assumption that the war would be a short one, as the months passed the number of workplace grievances requiring settlement began to rise again. Real wages fell by 30 percent during the first two years of the war and, for the Black Country's foundry workers who had been earning between 33 and 38s per week in 1914, the purchasing power of this income declined to a level below which had been the cause of the 1913 strike.<sup>55</sup> In January 1916, the *Midland Advertiser* reported that Wednesbury workers had rejected the proposed wage increases being offered by the Midland Employers' Federation. A joint meeting involving several trade unions had concluded that the offer of 2s per week for day workers and 1s 6d for men aged eighteen to twenty-one years, and 1s for youths, was unsatisfactory but no strike action was taken.<sup>56</sup>

National wage negotiations eventually allowed the engineering workers to recover some of the ground lost. The records of the chief industrial commissioner's Department of the Board of Trade offer a valuable insight into the attempts to reach conciliatory agreements by arbitration. Three cases involving Wednesbury firms during the early years of the war are extant. In November 1915, in the case of Edwin Pugh & Co and the Amalgamated Society of Gas, Municipal and General Workers, regarding the piece rates paid to youths employed in making hand grenades, the commissioner found in favour of the employer.<sup>57</sup> In August 1916, the case between James Russell & Sons Ltd. and the Workers' Union, concerning an adjustment in the agreement between the Midland Employers' Federation and the Midland Counties Tube Trade Federation, the commissioner Charles Doughty determined in favour of the union.<sup>58</sup> In December 1916, between Isaiah Oldbury & Co. and the National Union of General Workers, for the payment of piece rates to various categories of workers, Commissioner Doughty again supported the workers' grievance.<sup>59</sup> The British Steel Smelters' Mill, Iron, Tinplate and Kindred

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<sup>55</sup> Cd. 6054, *Wages (Standard Time Rates) Board of Trade*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1914), 64.

<sup>56</sup> *Midland Advertiser*, Jan. 1, 1916.

<sup>57</sup> The National Archives Labour Papers (hereafter TNA LAB) 2/40/IC2473/1915: Arbitration Award – Edward Pugh & Co., Wednesbury v Amalgamated Society of Gas, Municipal and General Workers.

<sup>58</sup> TNA LAB 2/194/IC3420/1916/IC1871: Arbitration Award – James Russell & Sons Ltd., Wednesbury v Workers' Union.

<sup>59</sup> TNA LAB 2/194/IC3420/1916/IC5223: Arbitration Award – Isaiah Oldbury & Co., Wednesbury v National Union of General Workers.

Trades Association's records illustrate the negotiations involving the Patent Shaft & Axletree Company. On May 24, 1916, correspondence between the local branch and the union's general secretary indicated that for employees producing the steel to be cast for shell cases, the pay rates and war bonuses were incorrect, this matter being pursued in conjunction with another union, the Ingot Makers' Association.<sup>60</sup> Reports of alternations to wages and conditions on June 30, 1916 and February 4, 1917 confirm that the company's crane drivers were to receive increases in pay and bonuses due to the scale of the work at the firm's Brunswick site.<sup>61</sup>

The increasing effectiveness of trade unions and their stronger bargaining power encouraged growing membership, with one consequence of the war being the putting aside, to an extent, of employer resistance to workplace organization, at least for the duration. Membership in the general unions of the semi- and unskilled workers rose dramatically and, for example, the Workers' Union gained over 250,000 new members by 1918. In Wednesbury, this union increased the number of branches from four to six and, by reference to the entrance fees given in the annual reports, it is demonstrable that even allowing for the surge in membership during the 1913 strike, there was a consistent year-on-year increase in most of the branches.<sup>62</sup> Yet there was relatively little dissent against the war effort and the *Express and Star* reported on May 28, 1917 that the Midland Counties Trade Federation had provided no strike pay during the whole of the year, and this was due to "the conduct of officials and the rank-and-file".<sup>63</sup>

Nevertheless, the engineering industries were troubled by some unrest, coinciding with the increasingly negative view within local trade union branches of the passivity of the labour movement's national leadership. Perceived as an abdication of responsibility, a vacuum was created that would be filled by the emergence of a radical shop stewards' movement. The government's response to the engineering disputes that commenced across the country in the spring of 1917 came on June 13, 1917 with the

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<sup>60</sup> CMR MSS.36/W13: Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and predecessors, Wednesbury branch Documentation regarding Monway Works, 1900–1921.

<sup>61</sup> CMR MSS.36/B31: Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and predecessors – Negotiations with employer, the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd. Brunswick Works, 1897–1926; CMR MSS.36/P47: Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and predecessors – Correspondence regarding the Patent Shaft & Axletree Co. Ltd. Brunswick Works, 1914–1928.

<sup>62</sup> CMR MSS.126/WU/4/1/9–14: *Workers' Union Annual Report and Accounts, 1913–1918*.

<sup>63</sup> *Express and Star*, May 28, 1917.

creation of Commissions of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest for eight munitions districts, including the west Midlands. The Commission's report acknowledged that the area had been generally free of strikes, which was due to "the wise and patriotic action taken by the employers' federation and by the trade union leaders, and by the people generally". The report also stressed the "bitter resentment amongst workers at the thought that someone is making excess profits out of them".<sup>64</sup> The main areas of discontent were the loss of hard-won liberties and rising food prices. Specific grievances focused on conscription, dilution and the erosion of the differentials between skilled and unskilled labour, and the Leaving Certificate system. Subsequent Ministry of Labour situation reports indicate that numerous small-scale disputes in local firms continued into 1918. At this point, these were mainly concerned with the calling up of skilled men for military service when dilutees were also available.<sup>65</sup>

Nationally, the overall view of the trade unions and of strikers offered up by the popular press during wartime was generally highly critical. Examples are encapsulated in cartoons that appeared in *Punch*, and which were syndicated to other publications, such as the *Midland Counties Express*. Beginning with appeals to refrain from industrial action, these became increasingly accusatory. From questioning worker patriotism, they proceeded to the outright depiction of the trade unionist as a traitor willing to stab his brother, the front-line Tommy, in the back.<sup>66</sup> This can be contrasted with the coverage given in the local press. For example, the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* ran an article on June 2, 1917 concerning "Teddy" Williams, a Wednesbury trade unionist who had voluntarily enlisted in the South Staffordshire Regiment. Believed killed in action on February 17, 1917, official notification being received that he was a prisoner of war, the newspaper commented:

That in the days after the war, industrial strife will, if it exists at all, be experienced in an atmosphere of conciliation where there will be opportunity for that peculiar brand of sweet reasonableness which under a rough exterior of blunt manner and sometimes crude utterance manifested itself in the gallant Tommy who is now captive in the enemy's country.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Cd. 8665 *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest: No. 4 Division, West Midlands Area*, Command Papers (London: HMSO, 1917–18), 3, 9.

<sup>65</sup> TNA CAB 24/42; CAB 24/57; CAB 24/58; CAB 24/65; CAB 24/66: Labour Situation Reports, 1917–1918.

<sup>66</sup> *Midland Counties Express*, Aug. 13, 1915, May 26, 1917, Oct. 5, 1918.

<sup>67</sup> *Express and Star*, June 2, 1917.

# The WAR

## FOUR QUESTIONS TO EMPLOYERS

1. **A**S an employer have you seen that every fit man under your control has been given every opportunity of enlisting?
2. Have you encouraged your men to enlist by offering to keep their positions open?
3. Have you offered to help them in any other way if they will serve their country?
4. Have you any men still in your employ who ought to enlist?

Our present prosperity is largely due to the men already in the field, but to maintain it and to end the War we must have more men. Your country will appreciate the help you give.

**More men are wanted——**

**TO-DAY**

**What can you do?**

**GOD SAVE THE KING.**

## The 1917 Crown Tube Works Strike

Tony Adams has emphasized “the ability of trade unions to construct an identification between their own fortunes and those of others within the local community”.<sup>68</sup> An incident occurred in Wednesbury during the summer of 1917 that showed just such a connection, with the workers and their trade unions appearing in a very different light to that often portrayed and, given its potential implications, was of such importance that even the War Cabinet was made aware of it. This concerned a strike at the Crown tube works of James Russell & Sons Ltd, and a War Cabinet memorandum of August 1, 1917 concluded with the statement: “The incident is not without significance”.<sup>69</sup>

The dispute’s origins can be traced back to the morning of July 26, 1917, when a former employee of the company, Frank Bowen Smith, arrived at the Crown works site with the intention of regaining his job. This man had volunteered for the army at the outbreak of the war, served with distinction in France (including being mentioned in despatches), and been discharged following wounds received that resulted in the loss of his leg. The *Midland Counties Express* reported that he wore the Silver War Badge, awarded to men honourably invalidated out of the conflict.<sup>70</sup> In returning to the his former employer, Smith said he was “depending upon a promise given in the early stages of the war that every man who offered himself for the fighting forces would be given his job again if he returned” and that “if wounded or invalidated he should be found employment suitable to his physical condition”.<sup>71</sup> Having reported to the firm’s office, where he was initially told to wait and a job would be found, Smith’s reward for his valour was to endure an abrupt interrogation by the works superintendent, Alexander Marshall, who demanded to know why he was there. Despite the explanation given, Marshall ordered Smith out of the office, stating that it was not the place for him, manhandled him and told him to go and wait at the factory gate. The incident was witnessed by several other workers, who felt a great sense of outrage and offence at the deplorable treatment meted out to the wounded former soldier. When news of what

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<sup>68</sup> T. Adams, “Labour and the First World War: Economy, Politics and the Erosion of Local Peculiarity”, *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 1, no. 10 (1990), 28.

<sup>69</sup> TNA CAB 24/21: War Cabinet Memoranda – Strike at the Crown tube works, Wednesbury over refusal to reinstate ex-employee discharged from Army.

<sup>70</sup> *Midland Counties Express*, July 28, 1917.

<sup>71</sup> *Wednesbury Herald*, Jan. 30, 1915. This edition features such a notice, urging employers to keep open the positions of those men on military service.

had transpired became known more widely, over 1,800 of the firm's workforce immediately downed tools and walked out on strike.<sup>72</sup>

Meetings were held in Wednesbury that day and the next, and the workers' demands communicated to the firm. These were that Smith should be reinstated without delay and that Marshall should be sacked.<sup>73</sup> The firm's senior management were keen to make amends for the offence caused and offered reassurances that the promise to returning soldiers would be honoured, but tried to gloss over Marshall's treatment of Smith. This was not well received and it was clear that Marshall no longer had the confidence of the Crown's employees, who passed a resolution that the Minister of Munitions should hold a full inquiry into the matter. Although a return to work had occurred on July 30, when it became evident that no action was to be taken against Marshall by the company, the strike action was resumed.<sup>74</sup> Support for the strikers was offered by trade unionists from the Patent Shaft & Axletree Company and other firms in Wednesbury, together with those in the nearby towns of Darlaston and Tipton. The *Express and Star* observed the same strength of feeling and spirit in the people that had endured to win an earlier dispute, as many "were prepared to cease work in support of the action of the men at the Crown works, similar to 1913".<sup>75</sup>

Negotiations now involved the trade union representing most of the firm's employees, the Workers' Union, with the local organizer being Birmingham councillor John Beard, well known for his part in settling the 1913 Black Country strike.<sup>76</sup> Beard and other representatives (from the Engineers and Firemen's Union and the Tube Makers' Society) held several meetings over the following days with James Russell's chairman (Stanley Mills Slater) and managing director (Frederick Guy) to try to reach a conciliatory understanding and minimize the impact on production

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<sup>72</sup> TNA CAB 24/21: War Cabinet Memoranda: Strike action at Crown tube works, Wednesbury over refusal to reinstate ex-employee discharged from Army.

<sup>73</sup> *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, July 28, 1917.

<sup>74</sup> *Express and Star*, Aug. 3, 1917.

<sup>75</sup> *Express and Star*, Aug. 4, 1917.

<sup>76</sup> John Beard (1871–1950) had a varied career as an agricultural worker in Shropshire, coalminer and engineering labourer before joining the Workers' Union, rising to become president of the Trades Union Congress in 1930. A Birmingham City councillor from 1904, he was involved in the establishment of the Birmingham Municipal Bank in 1915 and was awarded the CBE (Civilian Division) in 1938. Notably, during the war he became very jingoistic, attending union meetings wearing his Volunteer Training Corps uniform and flirted with the National Democratic Party.



for the war effort.<sup>77</sup> At a meeting at Wednesbury town hall on August 9, chaired by Workers' Union branch secretary Fred Thorpe, it was made clear that the measures proposed by the firm were most unsatisfactory. Mr Wright of the Engineers and Firemen's Union told the assembly, "in future it would be the duty of every worker to see that when their brothers came back from the war, they shall have justice done".<sup>78</sup> In a secret ballot held on August 10, over 95 percent voted to remain out until their demands were met, thereby necessitating arbitration.<sup>79</sup> The view of the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* was that "the Wednesbury men in the trenches knew the exact position, and were with them as far as sympathy was concerned".<sup>80</sup>

The situation had become greatly inflamed because Marshall had offered no public apology to Smith, although a letter giving a less than convincing version of the event as he saw it was published in the *Express and Star* on August 9.<sup>81</sup> As reported in the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* on August 11, it was apparent that Marshall already had a poor reputation, contributing to considerable resentment amongst the firm's employees. The workers' representatives were clear that had this been an isolated incident they would have been willing to come to an accommodation, but this was the latest in a series of objectionable dealings and Marshall's behaviour towards a wounded ex-serviceman such as Frank Smith was the final straw.<sup>82</sup>

A meeting of union representatives was held on August 15. Those present from Darlaston and Tipton confirmed "they had notified their employers that they were willing to support the men at the Crown tube works to any extent".<sup>83</sup> The difficulties of resolving the dispute being reported to the Ministry of Munitions, representatives of both sides were called to a summit convened at the Ministry's London offices on August 16.<sup>84</sup> The dispute finally came to its conclusion with an emergency meeting of the National Employers' Federation in Birmingham on August

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<sup>77</sup> *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, Aug. 11, 1917. As well as being the chairman of James Russell's, Mr Slater was the mayor of Walsall. His late wife, Mary Julia, was mayoress of Walsall when she became one of the victims of bombs dropped on the Black Country by a Zeppelin on Jan. 31, 1916.

<sup>78</sup> *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, Aug. 11, 1917.

<sup>79</sup> *Express and Star*, Aug. 4, 6 and 10, 1917.

<sup>80</sup> *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, Aug. 11, 1917.

<sup>81</sup> *Express and Star*, Aug. 9, 1917.

<sup>82</sup> *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, Aug. 11, 1917.

<sup>83</sup> *Express and Star*, Aug. 15, 1917.

<sup>84</sup> *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, Aug. 18, 1917.

24. Testimony was taken from the parties, including Smith and Marshall, and corroboration given by other witnesses. The Ministry concluded that it was an extremely unfortunate situation, but the demand for Marshall's dismissal could not be supported; in the aftermath of these proceedings, Marshall resigned of his own accord, which was accepted by the company. On the following day, a resolution to return to work was passed unanimously.<sup>85</sup> Six months' later, in an article headed "Tribute to Labour – Extracts from Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches", the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* reproduced elements of the December 25, 1917 despatch. This commented on "the invaluable help and zeal manifested by the workers in the district in enabling the Commander-in-Chief to carry out so successfully his operations on the Western Front". Furthermore, within the same article, a letter from Colonel S. L. Cozaster, Chief Mechanical Engineer, addressed to Messrs James Russells & Sons, Crown tube works, Wednesbury, was featured. Writing on behalf of the director of Fortifications and Works, this emphasized the relevant sections of the despatch and requested that the field marshall's appreciation and thanks be communicated to "your staff, foremen and workmen, who have contributed to the successful supply of engineer stores to our armies in the field".<sup>86</sup>

For organized labour, the logical extension was to seek political power at local and national levels. In the eight general elections held between 1868 and 1910, the Wednesbury constituency was won by the Conservative/Unionist Party candidate on five occasions, with the other three being victories for the Liberal Party.<sup>87</sup> However, in the "Coupon" general election of December 1918, Wednesbury returned its first Labour member of parliament Alfred Short.<sup>88</sup> Contrary to the national trend of almost overwhelming support for the Lloyd George-led administration, it was one of four Black Country constituencies to disregard the overtures of this Coalition's candidate, which in Wednesbury's case was Archibald White Maconochie.<sup>89</sup> Labour went on to consolidate its position in

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<sup>85</sup> *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, Aug. 25, 1917.

<sup>86</sup> *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, Feb. 16, 1918.

<sup>87</sup> Ede, *History of Wednesbury*, 360–1.

<sup>88</sup> Alfred Short (1882–1938) was a boilermaker by occupation, a city councillor in Sheffield and from 1911 had been the secretary of the Sheffield branch of the Boiler Makers' Society. He was member of parliament for Wednesbury, 1918–1931. In his later career he worked for the Transport & General Workers' Union before being elected as Labour MP for Doncaster from 1935 to 1938.

<sup>89</sup> Archibald Maconochie (1855–1926) had been the Liberal Unionist MP for Aberdeenshire East from 1900 to 1906 and was managing director of the firm

Wednesbury, becoming a growing force and then the majority party on the borough council, and Short held the parliamentary constituency until 1931, when it was briefly lost to the National government candidate, Viscount Ednam. Regained at a by-election in 1932, Labour has retained this seat and its successor, West Bromwich West until the present day. The *Express and Star* newspaper records that during the 1918 campaign the Labour Party's supporters frequently sung the strike songs from 1913, and that Alf Short was carried shoulder high from election meetings, "not by pacifists nor by pro-Germans but by discharged soldiers".<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

During the First World War, the contribution of Wednesbury's munitions industries and its people, both at the front line and on the home front, was crucial. In spite of the many difficulties, it was essential that workplace harmony be maintained and the endeavours of local manufacturers and trade unionists were paramount, and they remain a source of pride to the wider community.

It is notable that the 1917 Crown works strike occurred during a year in which great pressure was being experienced by the allied cause. In February, Germany resumed its policy of unrestricted submarine warfare in an attempt to blockade Britain and its allies; and, in March, Russia had experienced the first of the year's revolutions, upsetting the prospects for concerted action against the central powers on all fronts. There was growing discontent among the munitions workers across the country on the issues of dilution and substitution, wages rates and rising prices, but the dispute in Wednesbury was of a completely different nature.

The *Midland Counties Express* of July 28, 1917 highlighted the workers' motivation in that they saw themselves "acting in the interests of their comrades who were still fighting their battle in the trenches", to which John Beard added that "no one could charge the employees of the Crown tube works with a lack of patriotism".<sup>91</sup> He also informed the *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald* on August 11, 1917 that "nobody could accuse Wednesbury men of doing anything against the success of the war" and that the promise made to the workers "was based

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Maconochie Brothers, responsible for the manufacture of a range of tinned foods that were issued as rations to the front line troops. The best known of these products was Maconochie's Stew; it did not enjoy an enviable reputation amongst British soldiers during the First World War.

<sup>90</sup> *Express and Star*, Dec. 4, 1918.

<sup>91</sup> *Midland Counties Express*, July 28, 1917.

on the fundamental principles of liberty, and would have to be redeemed”.<sup>92</sup> This sentiment was echoed in the Ministry of Labour’s report to the War Cabinet for the week ending August 8 that “the incident suggests that the workers have a very high regard to the rights and interests of the discharged soldiers”.<sup>93</sup> The patriotism exhibited by Wednesbury’s working-class community was indicative both of the wider concern for the welfare of the men when they returned home from the conflict and of the power that the local labour movement had acquired, both in the workplace and beyond. Its roots lay in the 1913 Black Country strike, during which a significant part of the community had been mobilized to take action. It was reinforced by the experience of 1917 and has endured thereafter.

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<sup>92</sup> *Midland Advertiser and Wednesbury Herald*, Aug. 11, 1917.

<sup>93</sup> TNA CAB 24/21: War Cabinet Memoranda – Strike at the Crown tube works, Wednesbury over refusal to reinstate ex-employee discharged from Army.

# COMMEMORATING THE FALLEN IN SURREY'S OPEN SPACES AFTER THE GREAT WAR

KEITH GRIEVES

During and after the Great War gifts of open spaces in the countryside became permanent useful war memorials to enhance life. These open space memorials to serve the living have been neglected in the cultural history of commemoration and remembrance. The acquisition or provision of these amenities in the countryside on which houses would never be built became a sacred act, as richly textured as any other war memorial scheme, and sometimes obscured from view where schemes to commemorate the fallen were subsequently subsumed into larger estates in longer timelines of land acquisition and management. Some county and regimental war memorial debates sought fitting locations which emphasized the long continuities of needful sacrifice, meaningful historical associations and located the memory of the fallen in beautiful countryside which they had known and defended. The extensive but ultimately unsuccessful investigation of hilltop sites by the Somerset War Memorial Committee provides one example, as does the profoundly impressive memorial tower to the Sherwood Foresters at Crich Stand.<sup>1</sup> In both cases their proceedings resonate with George Mosse's study *Fallen Soldiers* where he located nature as "home, changeless, transcendent of sacrifice and recovery".<sup>2</sup> These schemes emphasized the capacity of panoramic views from specific hilltops to help explain the purpose for which men died in the First World War.

However, in the immediate post-war years there were numerous land bequests and purchase schemes which originated locally, emphasized well-loved corners of the land, "saved" scenic settings from residential development or timber sales and memorialized soldiers who were

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<sup>1</sup> *Somerset County War Memorial Committee* (Taunton: E. Goodman and Sons, 1923) Report of Executive Committee to General Committee, Sept. 16, 1919, 7–8.

<sup>2</sup> George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 107.

associated with particular districts and counties. These gifts of land as memorials to fallen soldiers were profoundly utilitarian acts, given for public use in perpetuity for the health and happiness of future generations.<sup>3</sup> The historic role of landowners in the preservation of rural England ebbed amid the dissolution of the great estates. Scenes of natural beauty were rediscovered by, or on behalf of, men and women overseas whose imaginary constructions of home took precisely delineated form in letters, poems and post-war acts of remembrance. In particular, the plight of wooded slopes, well-timbered vistas and pinewood plantations during relentless timber extraction in 1917–1918 highlighted the vulnerability of much-loved “beauty spots” in the final year of a long attritional war. During and after the war the need for recreational “land for the landless” acknowledged the delight in the country and a sensitivity to nature among “common people” which the propertied had barely understood before war was declared in 1914. A “country worth fighting for” became a literal expression of war service, and landscapes in their local setting necessarily mediated the causes for which the war was fought as practical sense-impressions of home.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, tracts of land in Surrey, as elsewhere, were re-dedicated or re-described after 1918, both privately and publicly, to make sense of service and sacrifice and to enhance the health and happiness of future generations in town and country. In Surrey those soldiers and civilians who visited or remembered Leith Hill, contributed to the enlargement of Box Hill estate, enjoyed the facilities of Wimbledon Commons extension, and subscribed to the purchase of Severalls Copse at Friday Street will be the focus for the exploration of these themes.

In soldiers' letters, love of familiar home-centred things became visualized emotional antidotes to war. Captain W. P. “Billie” Nevill, whose footballs were kicked into No Man's Land to encourage forward the men of the “C” Company, 8th Battalion, East Surrey Regiment on the first day of the Somme offensive, viewed the wooded heights near Amiens in September 1915 and imaginatively reconstructed the Surrey hills. Behind the line he wrote to his sister at Lavender Cottage, Holmbury St. Mary and remembered family visits to villages near Dorking, “The orchard behind us running down about 300 y[ar]ds to the river is simply alive with apples. I never saw such a crowd. We have great apple fights,

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<sup>3</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, July 12, 1923.

<sup>4</sup> On a “Country Worth fighting for” see “Saki”, “When William Came” in I. F. Clarke, ed., *The Great War with Germany, 1890–1914* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), 369–70; and for Charles fleeing England after the Battle of Worcester see The Tramp, *The South Downs* (London: London, Brighton and South Coast Railway, [1919]), 78–9.

like we used to in the Redlands at Cold Harbour. I wonder how Holmbury is now. That is one of the spots I intend to visit *when I get home*”.<sup>5</sup> The likeness of the wooded hills around Amiens to the greensand hills in Surrey brought as much comfort as the content of his bookshelf in the dugout – a candle, copy of *Punch*, tin of butter, some cigarettes and a bar of Nestle’s milk chocolate. In the weeks before the Somme offensive Nevill described how villages and woods quickly vanished and became featureless voids “all while you look on”, in ways that Samuel Hynes summarized as the “Death of Landscape” on the Western Front.<sup>6</sup> Nevill’s intimations of delightful homely scenes, and their normative qualities, made explicable the abstractions of fighting for king and country. On immobile battlefronts where static war pulverized natural shapes, formless desolate anti-landscapes arose. Hynes has argued that they were full of danger, difficult to interpret and brought no reassuring intimations of home.<sup>7</sup> As a visual antidote Nevill described a scene near Amiens to his sister Elsie: “Away on my right I can see a little wooded hill with a dear little village snuggling on it. There’s a charming old windmill too, just loping round as if he thought he ought to have finished his day’s work too. The rest of the view is only French, because of the inevitable rows of solitary trees (that’s rather a ‘bull’, but you know what I mean), otherwise I might be on Leith Hill, or old Holmbury Head. Where is the war?”<sup>8</sup> Populated wooded heights facilitated an imaginative reconstruction of the greensand hills amid foreign fields, excepting the “land of poplars” which *Country Life* in its New Year issue for 1919 thought that the homeward bound soldier would miss.<sup>9</sup> In his “papery chats” Nevill’s sincere expressions of war experience comprized a privately expressed patriotism, which reconstructed peaceable places known to his family amid the terrible topographies of war. In a world of despoiled landscapes, George Mosse noted, there was “untouched nature as pieces of eternity”.<sup>10</sup>

Entries in the surviving wartime visitors book for Leith Hill Tower, the highest point in south-east England, contain the general exclamations of the age – “A1”, “Spiffing”, “Tophole”, “Exquisite”, “Dashed Good”, “Oh

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<sup>5</sup> Imperial War Museum (IWM) Nevill MSS., Capt. W. P. Nevill, Sept. 15, 1915, f. 207.

<sup>6</sup> IWM Nevill MSS., Capt. W. P. Nevill, June 27, 1916, f. 191.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Bodley Head, 1989), 196–9.

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Elwin Harris, *Billie: The Nevill Letters, 1914–16* (London: Julia MacRae Books, 1991), 47–8.

<sup>9</sup> *Country Life*, Jan. 4, 1919.

<sup>10</sup> Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 116.

ripping" – and the more prosaic "Feel fine after a good cup of tea", "Too many stairs" and "Lovely Milk and Ginger Cake".<sup>11</sup> Away from the battlefield, some soldiers, including parties of wounded and convalescent men from military hospitals in Brighton and Epsom, commented briefly on the extensive vista from the Gothicized prospect tower and juxtaposed present safety with past dangers. One visitor from a territorial infantry battalion based in London noted in the address column that he was "late of Beaumont Hamel". Alun Howkins has argued that "the horror and waste of the Flanders landscape is constantly set against a soothing and restoring land of England".<sup>12</sup> An inhabitant of nearby Dorking noted, "Better than Mesopotamia anyday". Home landscapes could, by contrast, convey the horrors of war. On May 23, 1920 the ubiquitous wartime sentiment was expressed, "If you know of a better ole [hole] go to it". Details of wartime identity, such as rank and regimental affiliation, accompanied these short entries in the immediate post-war years. On the soldier's return to distinctive homely scenes sense-impressions provided antidotes to scarred landscapes and lives away from shattered trees, trenches and barbed-wire entanglements. In Robertson Scott's words, demobilized soldiers "leaned on nature" to recover from the "nerve tangle" of war.<sup>13</sup>

Locality mattered and county affinities persisted. A group of soldiers from Kingston barracks visited Leith Hill on May 31, 1916. Their consecutive entries were "Only to be expected/ Only beaten by Sussex/ Was it ever like/ Nearly equal to Devonshire/ Better/ [ditto]/ Nothing Seems better/ [ditto]".<sup>14</sup> Eight entries constructed a "finest views" debate in microcosm of which there were so many in national and local newspapers and morale-raising anthologies during the Great War. Further, it was not the only time that the visitors' book recorded the wish to be in Sussex, rather than glimpse it from afar. These entries suggest that the early-twentieth-century ubiquity of "south country", as if it were a lived

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<sup>11</sup> Dorking Museum (DM), R23 Leith Hill Tower Visitors' Book, entry for May 23, 1920. On Surrey as a pleasure ground of London see A. R. Hope Moncrieff, with plates by Sutton Palmer, *Surrey* (London: A & C Black, 2nd. edn., 1922), 3; and Peter Brandon, *The North Downs* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), 166–77.

<sup>12</sup> Alun Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside since 1900* (London: Routledge, 2003), 41.

<sup>13</sup> J. W. Robertson Scott, *England's Green and Pleasant Land* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1925; 1947 edn.), 89.

<sup>14</sup> DM R23 Leith Hill Tower Visitors' Book, entries on May 31, 1916. For an expression of pride in county in an era of grateful remembrance see Ian Hay [J. H. Beith], *Their Name Liveth: The Book of the Scottish War Memorial* (London: John Lane, 1931), 2–4.



and perceptual experience, might be reassessed, when historians and literary commentators contemplate generalizing, propagandizing images of home in posters, charity gift books, postcards and artists' impressions of the battlefield. The scenery and associations of a Wealden peacefulness transformed an elevated day on the Surrey hills into a privately expressed county patriotism, which afforded delight and solace to a greater extent than generalizing notions of Blighty. Everywhere, each soldier had their own meaning of "Tipperary". Heart-felt expressions of separation and longing in the ubiquitous marching song could include an upland Pennines hamlet "Where one may lounge in the market-place/ and see the meadows mown".<sup>15</sup>

At the time there were richly textured home-centred "sincere transcripts of personal experience", which as G. H. Clarke noted, led poets "impatiently away from the attempt to represent actual warfare and tries instead to visualize some emotional antidote".<sup>16</sup> His anthology of war poetry constantly averted the reader's gaze from the battlefield towards an "interior spirit" and included his own "Lines Written in Surrey 1917" which might have been written around the time that he visited Leith Hill tower, where he noted "England in essence" in the visitors' book.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Lord Crewe suggested that an important function of war poetry was to provide "delight and comfort brought by scenery, associations and peacefulness of home with precise, lived and evocative detail".<sup>18</sup> G. H. Clarke was born at Chatham and returned to England from his academic post in English literature at the University of Tennessee to join the War Trade Intelligence Department at the Foreign Office. His observation of England in microcosm, or as a garden plot to be viewed from a chain of commanding heights, was not dissimilar to Captain R. B. Anderson of Winnipeg, Manitoba, at a hospital in Epsom, who wrote "Helping Dear Old England". After the war, known intact landscapes such as the view from Leith Hill tower afforded visitors a sylvan solace. The vista from the tower mustered an example of Jay Winter's "ministering romanticism, taking near commemorative form".<sup>19</sup> "Stock-taking" away from the

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<sup>15</sup> E. B. Osborn, ed. and intro., *The Muse in Arms* (London: John Murray, 1918), ix.

<sup>16</sup> G. H. Clarke, ed. and intro., *A Treasury of War Poetry: British and American Poems of the War, 1914–1919* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), 36.

<sup>17</sup> Clarke, *A Treasury of War Poetry*, 35, 47.

<sup>18</sup> Lord Crewe, *War and English Poetry* (London: The English Association, 1917), 25.

<sup>19</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 221.

battlefield became possible for survivors amid palpably unblasted trees, copses, fields and, indeed, hills with intact natural contours. These expressions of private patriotism arose from empirically observed scenes which infused familiar landscapes with a meditative moral dimension. In the immediate post-war years this form of ministering romanticism was sometimes described as the propinquity of place. More generally, Barbara Bender has written of the conjunction of memory and materiality, “reminiscing, silently remembering, touched by the physicality of ‘things’ that matter”.<sup>20</sup>

Mrs Humphry Ward lived near Haslemere and noted in her survey of the home front in 1916 for American consumption:

The Surrey commons and woods, the Wiltshire downs, the Midland and Yorkshire heaths, the Buckinghamshire hills, have been everywhere invaded – their old rural sanctities are gone. I walked in bewilderment the other day up and down the slopes of a Surrey hill which when I knew it last was one kingdom of purple heather, beloved of the honey-bees, and scarcely ever trodden by man or woman. Barracks now form long streets upon its crest and sides; practice trenches, bombing-schools, the stuffed and dangling sacks for bayonet training, musketry ranges, and the rest are everywhere.<sup>21</sup>

Signs of war in the countryside initially took the form of vast camps for the new armies on the parklands which were owned by influential raisers of military manpower and on the heaths of West Surrey in close proximity to Aldershot. In 1917, and especially after April 1918, softwood timber extraction at beauty spots for pit and trench props became contentious in some local districts. The Timber Supply Department of the Board of Trade sought to reassure the National Trust that any representation made to protect public amenities would be seriously considered, but that the remorseless logic of the total exploitation of all material resources in the countryside could not be avoided at scenes of natural beauty. On April 22, 1918 the Board of Trade wrote to the National Trust, “The policy of this Department has always been to interfere as little as possible with the amenities of the situation, but the timber position is now becoming so grave in consequence of the prolongation of the War that it is doubtful whether any of the large blocks of timber in the country will survive. It may be possible to delay the cutting of woods of particular interest to the

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<sup>20</sup> Barbara Bender, “Introduction, Meaning and Action”, in Barbara Bender, ed., *Landscape. Politics and Perspectives* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Mrs Humphry Ward, *England's Effort: Six Letters to an American Friend* (London: Smith Elder and Co., 1916), 86–97.

public, and so far as this can be done without hampering the production of timber and increasing the cost of exploitation we shall be very happy to do so".<sup>22</sup>

Picturesque woodland, including the plantations close to the heights of Leith Hill, were felled in scenes that brought the machine age and militarized labour to the countryside in the form of saw mills driven by electricity, tram lines and a prisoner-of-war camp at Holmbury St Mary. Abinger Parish Council passed a resolution of protest which was discussed and supported in the local newspapers.<sup>23</sup> Lord Farrer, "old Liberal", Abinger resident and land-amenity activist, expressed his concern as chairman of the Surrey Archaeological Society at its annual meeting in April 1918. He thought it was entirely apposite to appeal for the local defence of natural beauty at a time of national crisis noting, "Although, of course, people and not things were the first interest of all of them, they were dependent for much of their pleasure on the things around them, and to which they were accustomed, and they desired to keep those interesting things for their nation and their soldiers when they returned". He continued, "I for one rejoiced to see the local, and, indeed, national patriotism in things of beauty that had been aroused by any attempt to override county opinion (hear, hear)".<sup>24</sup> Lord Farrer defended "Patriotism in things of beauty" and challenged the assumption that despoiled landscapes were necessary patriotic consequences of all-out war. This "presentist" appeal to county opinion, perhaps still suffused by the social hierarchy of independent gentlemanly scholarship, arose from his determination to ensure that taste, history and beauty would not be rationed to oblivion in a county of few great buildings whose scenic settings returning soldiers would need access to as therapeutic antidotes to the ghastliness of war landscapes. Furthermore, the hills continued to be an important pleasure ground during the war. For example, in 1917 A. J. Arkcoll from Wallington located a "lost" section of the Stane Street Causeway in Ockley. Over many years he had acquired knowledge of the byways that led from Leith Hill southwards to Horsham and hoped that overgrown tracks would be reinstated sufficiently for pedestrian use. His letter to the Ancient Monuments Committee of Surrey County Council on

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<sup>22</sup> Surrey History Centre (SHC), Farrer MSS. 2572/48/6, H. Murray to S. H. Hamer, secretary to the National Trust, Apr. 22, 1918.

<sup>23</sup> SHC, Surrey County Council (SCC), General Purposes Committee f.171-2; *Surrey Advertiser*, Mar. 30, 1918; *The Times*, Mar. 27, 1918.

<sup>24</sup> *Surrey Advertiser*, Apr. 27, 1918.

October 2, 1917 highlighted the insistent rediscovery of historic routes by individual ramblers despite the vicissitudes of war.<sup>25</sup>

The preservation of the built and natural environment had become a local imperative in war. These palpable landscapes were intimately known to quietly contemplative residents and visitors. As J. H. Grainger has noted, "Their mild unoffending patriotism sought contraction to local assuaging landscape and sky".<sup>26</sup> Two months earlier, Lord Farrer drew attention to the disfigured beauty of Newlands Corner, on the road from Dorking to Guildford, due to the erection of telephone poles and wires by the War Office, under Defence of the Realm powers.<sup>27</sup> This expression of concern was not dissimilar to the protest he mounted before the war as telegraph poles were erected along the Tillingbourne valley, but his constancy of protecting "beauty spots" in war reflected an abiding sense that the Defence of the Realm should be responsive to local opinion within the aesthetic frame of a "country worth fighting for". Scenes of natural beauty were rediscovered in war and they were sometimes inscribed with new meanings after 1916. Attritional war mobilized resources in the countryside and damaged sylvan sanctuaries where visitors might expect to see pieces of eternity in the form of lasting and familiar things.

Captain Basil de Selincourt need not have worried what his friends might think about his seemingly trivial contributions to the "Country Diary" in the *Manchester Guardian* in wartime. C. P. Scott was adamant that the "Country Diary" would avoid war topics so that one part of the newspaper might maintain an interest in "lasting things".<sup>28</sup> The "Country Diary", as ever, depicted the beauty of nature's seasonal round in local familiar places so that "Blighty" might continue to be understood as a variegated England. John Drinkwater, who later contributed to the Box Hill Fund, had the same purpose as he collected poetry for one-hour readings in a Christmas tour of the Western Front. It involved taking poems about all parts of England, "so that if a man in the audience wants something about any particular place he can have it". He was well prepared for this "delightful form of heckling".<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> SHC, SCC, Ancient Monuments Committee Minutes, A. J. Arkcoll letter, Oct. 2, 1917.

<sup>26</sup> J. H. Grainger, *Patriotism: Britain 1900–1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 223.

<sup>27</sup> SHC, SCC, General Purpose Committee minutes, Feb. 21, 1918; Mar. 16, 1918; *Surrey Advertiser*, Mar. 16, 1918.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Wainwright, *The Guardian Book of Wartime Country Diaries* (London: Guardian Books, 2007), 57.

<sup>29</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Nov. 28, 1917.

Love of tranquil, familiar, delightful home landscapes known to soldiers informed Professor of Civic Art at Sheffield University William Rothenstein's quest for dignified and beautiful memorials. He depicted local worlds where new spiritual landmarks, perhaps evoking homely landscapes as Burgundian painters had in another time, would connect love of beauty and useful war memorials towards a more creative life in towns and villages. He pondered,

How often must these youths have longed for a sight of the common fields and hedges, the houses and gardens, the sheltered farms and familiar streets, to be among them once more must have seemed the extreme of happiness. To see these things with the eyes of these men in the trenches is to see them more fully than ever before. Something of this heightened sense of the beauty of familiar things we must express in our memorials, if they are to be true memorials and the natural idealization which has coloured the familiar scenes of home in their eyes we must prove, those of us who have remained at home, to be no false vision.<sup>30</sup>

Rothenstein contemplated ideas which might inform the construction of utilitarian war memorials by artists and craftsmen to usefully beautify the built environment in specific localities. Canon Rawnsley, one of the founders of the National Trust, wrote less prosaically and with still more patriotic intent, and his letter on war memorials in the *Manchester Guardian* on March 29, 1916 referred to the duties of men and women who stayed at home to similar effect. Canon Rawnsley wrote, "Why should we not remember that the men laid down their lives for a very fair country, and as they fought and fell in far-off places their hearts went back to the beauty of their homeland? It is this beauty that we need to conserve for future inspiration. Could we do better than make some beautiful scene, some open space, a lasting memorial of the heroic dead?"<sup>31</sup> In particular, he admired the purchase of twenty-seven acres of moorland for the National Trust at Thurstaston in Cheshire by A. V. Paton in memory of his brother who died in battle at Achi-Baba in the Sinai desert and who loved the view over the Dee estuary towards the Welsh hills.

The utility of rural quietude in well-loved corners of England was part of the more peripheral discourse that war memorials might be "useful for life's sake". W. R. Lethaby, and other members of the Art Workers Guild, urged that war memorials might focus on service, rather than sacrifice. He

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<sup>30</sup> William Rothenstein, *A Plea for the Wider Use of Artists and Craftsmen* (London: Constable, 1916), 16.

<sup>31</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Mar. 29, 1916; Eleanor F. Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life* (Glasgow: Maclehose Jackson and Co., 1918), 115.

advocated schemes that pursued “health, joy and beauty”, not least to re-enliven town and country, and to avoid “lavish oblations of marble, brass and glass”.<sup>32</sup> The appropriateness of local open spaces as permanent war memorials for “public use and enjoyment”, which would not be burdensome to ratepayers, was publicized in a letter to *The Times* on April 7, 1919 from representatives of the Commons and Footpath Preservation Society, the Kyrle Society, the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association and the National Trust. The list of suggestions was led by “places where there exists some hill-top commanding extensive views” and then included the acquisition or improvement of sea cliffs, woodland, a riverside walk or meadows; “the dedication of this feature of natural beauty to the public use and enjoyment would be an ideal war memorial even where recreation grounds or children’s playgrounds already exist”.<sup>33</sup> In towns public gardens, recreation grounds and playing fields could be provided or improved or tree planting undertaken in the highways. A common could be purchased or regulated. The suggestions also included footpaths and the preservation of ancient earthwork, ruins and buildings of beauty and historic associations. This appeal has been much neglected, although there was some consideration of “The Alternatives”, focused on parks, recreation grounds and bowling greens in urban settings, in Alex King’s *Memorials of the Great War in Britain*.<sup>34</sup> It is also important to note from Angela Gaffney’s study of war memorials in Wales that utilitarian schemes were usually much more expensive than monuments in stone.<sup>35</sup>

In response to the publication of the National Trust annual report for 1920–21 the *Manchester Guardian* noted numerous niches of England, marked by antiquity or known for their loveliness, that had become publicly accessible as memorials to the local soldiers killed in the war.<sup>36</sup> In a limited way the experience of war and its legacy in local communities provided an impetus for the preservation of, and access to, “open space for the landless”. It was a counterpoint to land nationalization claims and rebuttals in turbulent socio-economic conditions. Although the involvement of the National Trust might suggest a co-ordinated national effort in proximity to the warfare state, local committees often initiated

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<sup>32</sup> W. R. Lethaby, “Memorials of the Fallen: Service or Sacrifice?”, *Hibbert Journal*, 17, no. 4 (1918–19), 623–31.

<sup>33</sup> *The Times*, Apr. 7, 1919; War Memorial Schemes, Claims of Open Spaces, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 68.

<sup>35</sup> Angela Gaffney, *Aftermath: Remembering the Great War in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), 87.

<sup>36</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 27, 1921.

subscription schemes and managed land which was gifted for public access to enjoy, without the tyranny of by-your-leave or tramping to lodges for the forbidding formalities of permission. Fields and woodlands might be saved from vandals, root-snatchers and bird-nesters and a “modest stone” in harmony with nature might inscribe remembrance of the fallen soldiers and clarify public access in perpetuity. Endangered private parkland and unprotected green spaces could be re-dedicated as dignified and beautiful war memorials.

In February 1923 *Country Life* mobilized its readership in the cause of “Land for the Landless”, acknowledging that many readers would have playgrounds of their own.<sup>37</sup> For Londoners who delighted in visiting the countryside the Box Hill Fund was both an urgent national and local war memorial appeal. Tracts of woodland on the lower slopes were at risk from residential development at the end of the war. In 1913 Leopold Salomons purchased 230 acres of the famous Surrey height of Box Hill for the National Trust as the Hope trustees started to dispose of the Deepdene estate. *Country Life*, alongside the High Sherriff’s Fund, urged the acquisition of adjacent open country as a fitting tribute to the memory of the fallen, especially for those who had climbed the chalky slopes on bank holidays before the war.<sup>38</sup> The *Observer* noted in the month in which the Treaty of Versailles was signed that Londoners should give “in thankfulness that they are spared to enjoy them and in everlasting and grateful memory of those Londoners and others who, by their willing sacrifice, have saved this and all the other sacred spots of Britain”.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, literary associations with John Keats, who finished *Endymion* there, and George Meredith, who lived at Flint Cottage above Burford Bridge, located this chalky eminence as a “poet’s hill”.<sup>40</sup>

This appeal followed Miss Warburg’s donation of £1,000 which was widely reported as a “thanks offering” for the end of the war. It allowed seventy acres to be purchased including Lodge Hill. The Box Hill Fund received numerous subscriptions which it listed in monthly balance sheets, including a gift of 1s 6d from an “Unemployed Ex-Service Reader in Plymouth Free Public Library” who wrote, “I only wish that I could do

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<sup>37</sup> *Country Life*, Feb. 10, 1923, editorial, 166. For an introductory description of Box Hill and its association with George Meredith see F. E. Green, *The Surrey Hills* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1915), 81–91.

<sup>38</sup> *Country Life*, Feb. 3, 1923, 135; Feb. 24, 1923, 243. On Box Hill as a sanctuary rather than a playground see G. Chapman and B. Young, *Box Hill* (Lyne Regis: Serendip Books, 1979), 7–14.

<sup>39</sup> *Observer*, July 20, 1919; Lord Farrer’s Appeal, 6.

<sup>40</sup> J. Dixon-Scott, *England under Trust* (London: Alex Maclehoose, 1937), 95–6.

more than this to save a bit of old England".<sup>41</sup> The National Trust lands at Box Hill were significantly extended through the acquisition of 252 acres comprising the woods and slopes of adjacent "wild" open country known as Happy Valley and Juniper Top to the north of the summit. This wooded valley, secured in 1923, did not form a unified entity and no obelisk stands at Box Hill to commemorate the fallen of the Great War. Gifts of parcels of land, like a hospital cot or a secondary school scholarship, were utilitarian war memorial schemes that over time became more anonymous in purpose, where a commemorative plaque or stone was absent.<sup>42</sup> Lord Farrer, as chairman of the local committee of management at Box Hill, appealed that "more of the surrounding country as a tribute to the memory of those whom they have lost" might be acquired.<sup>43</sup> In part, the National Trust estate at Box Hill, which amounted to 680 acres by 1928, was secured in memory of the fallen – indeed, a memorial to serve the living. Subscriptions were collected at city insurance offices, fund-raising events in nearby towns, refreshment outlets and railway stations in the district and from afar. This much publicized scheme was located within the public discourse of post-war remembrance.

In the Dorking Museum there is a walking stick which was used by Charles Robertson, formerly Lance Corporal, 10th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, which accompanied his solitary walks over Box Hill after the Great War. It is alongside the citation for his award of the Victoria Cross for repelling attacks with his Lewis gun on at least two beleaguered positions near Polderhoek Chateau on March 8–9, 1918. His battalion recruited in London and after the war he returned to Dorking, where he died in 1954, being buried in Dorking Cemetery which is overlooked by Box Hill. His working life was punctuated by three periods of service to the country – 1900, 1914 and 1939 (in the Home Guard) – and the walking stick, displayed in a civic space, becomes a memorial artefact which honours the courageous life of its owner and memorializes the enduring utility of the downland slopes for war-worn ex-servicemen.

The saving of beauty spots for the people – in Surrey, the Lake District, the New Forest and elsewhere – purchased or bequeathed for ever, were places of natural beauty which might be accessible to the most penurious and brought some acknowledgement that the scenery of the "country round" was appreciated by men and women of all classes. The quest for "natural" open spaces by appreciating minds was known to Richardson Evans, secretary of Scapa, which campaigned against roadside

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<sup>41</sup> *Country Life*, Apr. 7, 1923, 481.

<sup>42</sup> Gaffney, *Aftermath*, 95.

<sup>43</sup> *The Times*, July 5, 1919.



advertisements in the countryside. He wrote to Lord Farrer in 1921, “I have now long experience in this question and my conclusion is that sensibility & insensibility are diffused in about equal measure amongst all sorts and conditions of men. If there is any difference, it is that the wage-earners take a much keener interest in foreserving out-of-door scenery. The rich folk have their parks and gardens and the means of escaping into the wilder undisfigured regions, whereas the poor man has only the scenery of the common round”.<sup>44</sup>

In 1922 forty-two acres of Newlands Farm near the Beverley Brook were acquired by the Wimbledon Commons conservators. Richardson Evans, chairman of the Wandsworth and Wimbledon Memorial Garden Fund, informed Lord Farrer in April 1921, “It will form for all time one of the most beautiful prospects in the neighbourhood of London. We are also making progress with the Memorial Garden feature”.<sup>45</sup> On Wimbledon Common Extension a five-acre war memorial grove was landscaped to include a garden of rest and bird sanctuary near a sports ground of five cricket and eight football pitches.<sup>46</sup> The granite war memorial cross is twenty feet high and set on a plinth comprising a three step-octagon, platform and wide octagonal base. The names of 114 men of Wandsworth and Wimbledon are inscribed alongside the statement, “Nature provides the best monument the perfecting of the work must be left to the gentle hand of time but each returning spring will bring a fresh tribute to those whom it is desired to keep in everlasting remembrance”. It was dedicated on July 15, 1925. Holly and hawthorn hedgerows surround the site, which contains rings of broadleaved trees. There are surviving traces of a classical war memorial grove of forest trees which frame views across the open space.<sup>47</sup> This complex conception, which conjoined nature, remembrance of the fallen and recreation, realized a pre-war ambition to secure endangered farm-land from residential development between Putney and Kingston and exemplified Richardson Evans’s determination to establish living memorials. His gift of Toy’s Hill near Brasted in Kent in 1898, overlooking the weald, encouraged the National Trust to receive

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<sup>44</sup> SHC, Farrer MSS. 2572/1/81, Richardson Evans to Lord Farrer, Apr. 14, 1921. SCAPA was the National Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising: see P. Readman, “Landscape Preservation, ‘advertising disfigurement’ and English National identity, c1890–1914”, *Rural History*, 12, no. 1 (2001), 61–83.

<sup>45</sup> SHC, Farrer MSS. 2572/1/81, Richardson Evans to Lord Farrer, Apr. 14, 1921.

<sup>46</sup> Arthur Mee, *Surrey: London’s Southern Neighbour* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 320.

<sup>47</sup> *The Times*, Apr. 25, 1921.

gifts of land that might convey memorial purpose without monumental expression.

The proposal to erect a Celtic cross of roughened granite, thirty feet high, on the crest of Redhill Common was deeply controversial. The design by W. H. Seth-Smith, whose architectural practice largely focused on commissions from Surrey, included a base of four curved seats, each accommodating five or six people, to view the panoramic view of the weald. But, historically, Celtic crosses had marked moorland tracks rather than crowned hills. This war memorial scheme in Reigate and Redhill encountered fierce opposition in 1920 from arbiters of taste beyond the district. They feared that every peak might acquire an obelisk, even if the age of the lordly eye-catcher at the extremity of landed estates had passed. Surrey was not granite country and in a Wealden context the hill had a wider context which might be "disfigured". The proposal seemed less obviously place-related than Surrey's prime example of a hill-top memorial. The *Observer* noted, "We accept the eighteenth century tower on Leith Hill because it is now respectably ancient; it is built of the local stone, and it is almost the single thing of the kind in the county".<sup>48</sup> The scheme failed to raise sufficient funds and, instead, a figurative sculptural war memorial took form at Shaw's Corner between Reigate and Redhill.

The wariness of using heath and hilltop war memorials on this occasion did not curb S. P. B. Mais's enthusiastic expectation that panoramic viewpoints were to be associated with the fallen of the Great War. On a fine walking day after the Second World War he stood at the granite monument on Colley Hill and placed the death of Captain George Simpson, 5th Battalion, Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment, in the 1914–18 war: "This gift of a lovely tract of ground is surely by far the most worthy as it is the most lasting memorial we can make to those who gave their lives that the land should remain free".<sup>49</sup> However, the gift of land of part of Colley Hill in his memory by his mother pre-dated the war. Captain Simpson, a Lloyd's underwriter and Territorial Army officer, of Wray Park, Reigate died in February 1909 and the monument was erected in 1910.<sup>50</sup> Mais's collection of essays *Oh! To Be in England* published in 1922 was suffused by the need to find rural quietude amid the pervasive presence of war. His Bunyanesque sentiments were frequent stated and on Matlock Hill he declared, "I feel more than ever like Christian, his Hill of

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<sup>48</sup> *Observer*, Feb. 8, 1920.

<sup>49</sup> S. P. B. Mais, *Southern Rambles for Londoners* (London: London British Railways Southern Region, 1948), 120.

<sup>50</sup> *The Times*, Feb. 26, 1909; Mar. 2, 1909.

Difficulty overcome”.<sup>51</sup> Paul Fussell devoted much attention to the Great War’s inability to communicate its own terms and the use of *Pilgrim’s Progress* as a consolatory devotional text by a generation that knew it so well to interpret journeys up the line. Mais applied the meaning more diffusely, but the solace and consolation that might be derived from family memories of home landscapes remained apparent in land preservation schemes ten years after the war had ended. In 1929 G. M. Trevelyan’s essay “Must England’s Beauty Perish?” entirely associated the preservationist movement to counter concrete, wire fences, bungalows, straight roads, electric power on poles and conifers with the work of the National Trust. He wondered what future generations would say to the generation that survived the war only to destroy England, on account of which “young men went to die in the Great War?”<sup>52</sup>

In October 1929 the scenic integrity of the picturesque hamlet Friday Street, near Leith Hill, was threatened by the proposed sale of Severalls Copse for residential development. The Friday Street Fund was quickly established in Dorking and district, and encouraged and amplified by an appeal in the letter columns of *The Times*. Mrs Capel Relfe of Caterham sent two pounds to the Friday Street Fund. She observed, “Friday Street has always seemed to me to be one of the places our men died for 1914–18. I read once some verses – where before going into action the only thing the writer could see was “The road from Steyning to the Ring”. I often think that Friday Street, lying as it does in the middle of a district which gave its manhood unsparingly, must have been the same to many who cared for it. You will forgive me for writing like this, but I feel I had to say it, in some way in which it might matter, for the sake of some of my own who have died loving it, in war & in peace”.<sup>53</sup> She urged that the appeal should be widened beyond the letter columns of *The Times* if the sum desired was not immediately obtained, because the “penny daily readership” wished to respond. Her second letter of the same date urged that “other dailies” be contacted and that ramblers, convening at a conference in Manchester, would respond if their monthly magazine *Out-*

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<sup>51</sup> S. P. B. Mais, *Oh! To Be in England: A Book of the Open Air* (London: Grant Richards Ltd., 1941), 32.

<sup>52</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, *Must England’s Beauty Perish?* (London: Faber and Gwyer Ltd., 1929), 15; G. M. Trevelyan, “Autobiography of a Historian” in his *An Autobiography and Other Essays* (London: Longmans, 1949), 37.

<sup>53</sup> SHC, Severall Copse Fund MSS. 6536/430, Mrs Relfe to W. Calvert, Sept. 29, 1929.

*o-Doors* was contacted: "I have much enthusiasm but little money".<sup>54</sup> Again the "country worth fighting for", so evident as a generalizing Englishness in the pre-war invasion scare literature, took more precise form in this family memory with reference to Friday Street as a distinctive local topography.<sup>55</sup>

In Mrs Relfe's letter the sentiment of caring for this place was heightened with reference to the poem by Lt John Purvis, which was written while he waited to "go over the top". It was published under the pseudonym Philip Johnson in the *Daily News* in 1916 without the knowledge of the author and begins,

I can't forget the lane that goes from Steyning to the Ring  
In summer time, and on the downs how larks and linnets sing  
High in the air. The wind comes off the sea and, oh, the air!  
I never knew till now that life in old days was so fair.<sup>56</sup>

John Purvis knew the view to Chanctonbury Ring across the Surrey Weald as a schoolmaster at Cranleigh School. He joined the Royal West Surrey Regiment and subsequently transferred to the 5th Battalion, Yorkshire Regiment. Ernest Raymond, author of *Tell England*, first read the poem in the Sinai desert on war service. He loved the South Downs, crowned by the beech clump at Chanctonbury Ring, and knew the poem by heart, "I don't know how many times I've walked up that lane quoting this last couplet to those walking with me, or how often I have mentioned on platforms and in articles the magical little poem by an author unknown". He concluded that the last couplet conveyed "an English soldiers native patriotism with simpler or more perfect words than another lines in that luxuriant yield of poetry which sprang up from the First World War".<sup>57</sup>

The interplay of a poem remembered from a wartime newspaper, a beauty spot known to suburban and rural Surrey and family remembrances of a place beloved in war and peace in Mrs Relfe's letter was expressed long after the war amid debates on the condition of the countryside and the democratization of access to a "country worth fighting for". Here a generalizing "south country" was not ubiquitous or meaningful. Instead,

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<sup>54</sup> SHC, Sevall Cope Fund MSS. 6536/22, Mrs Relfe to W. Calvert, Sept. 29, 1929 [second letter].

<sup>55</sup> David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), 17–20.

<sup>56</sup> Keith Grieves, *Sussex in the First World War* (Lewes: Sussex Record Society, 2004), 306–7.

<sup>57</sup> Ernest Raymond, *Good Morning, Good People: An Autobiography – Past and Present* (London: Cassell, 1970), 46.

local processes to protect places of natural beauty from the speculative builder, the timber merchant and the charabanc operator were rooted in the wartime vulnerability of specific home landscapes and the need to commemorate the places, as well as the ideas, for which men died in the Great War. In 1909 C. F. G. Masterman depicted a decaying, deserted English countryside, where the labourer's persistent "Love of the Land" was ill-served by vast tracts of sparsely cultivated private land.<sup>58</sup> In the financial collapse of large estates Masterman contemplated the possibility of an accessible nature beyond the cities which might be the inheritance of future generations. He was not to know that this aspect of the land question might partly develop as a legacy of the experience of war.

The commemorative landscape in the English countryside was extensively depicted by Arthur Mee in his *New Domesday Book*, which the motorist and the rambler explored with the county volumes in hand. In his King's England series, first published in 1936, dedicated new open spaces, obtained by subscription and bequest, including viewpoints, woodland, village greens and recreation grounds, became visible sites which honoured the service and sacrifice of the fallen as much as the cenotaphs, figurative sculpture and more expensive war memorial schemes of city and town.<sup>59</sup> In his summary chapter "The Great War comes to the Village" Mee wrote, "One of the pathetic experiences we have had which has come to none of our predecessors in the Grand Tour of England has been the visible mark of the Great War in every place".<sup>60</sup>

For Alun Howkins the countryside after 1918 became a "site of recreation and escape",<sup>61</sup> accessible to the walker, cyclist and privileged motorist. Southern Pathfinders was founded in 1931 and drew its membership from Croydon and Beckenham. Its main walking terrain was the North Downs in Surrey and Kent. The members "rambled for the sake of the Beauty that is always to be found in Nature, for healthy exercise and for genial comradeship". Its first annual publication in 1932 noted that fatigue and hardship were endured. However, the quiet use of ancient footpaths and opposition to huge advertising hoardings and unsightly tea places were not adventures that bore comparison with those of other places and times: "Those who are young now have not, thank heaven, to pass

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<sup>58</sup> C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen, 1909; 1960 ed.), 150–2, 157. On the paramountcy of the aristocracy see A. J. Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 10.

<sup>59</sup> Arthur Mee, *Enchanted Land: Half-a-Million Miles in the King's England* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936), 163.

<sup>60</sup> Mee, *Enchanted Land*, 144.

<sup>61</sup> Howkins, *Death of Rural England*, 41.

through the fire of war like those who were young fifteen years ago".<sup>62</sup> Southern Pathfinders relished a genial comradeship in open spaces away from the fireside, armchair and street lamps and were prepared for just a modicum of discomfort. Indeed, the club motto "We won't go cosy" summarized well their alternative to the fire of war.<sup>63</sup>

It was an era that remembered, as Edmund Blunden did, that John Clare had had little cause to love England. But, as John Drinkwater pointed out in 1924, he "loved a few English fields", which his poetry named and depicted with precise and subtle delineation and without translating the landscape or natural beauty into symbolic form as a generalizing homeland.<sup>64</sup> John Clare served in the Northamptonshire militia in defence of Helpston in the years 1810–13. Blunden's biographical essay on the "Northamptonshire Peasant Poet", published in 1920, highlighted Clare's intimate knowledge and deep affinity with "lonely favourite places" known through farm work in the parish of Helpston, near the cottage of his birth.<sup>65</sup> When rumours spread that French forces had reached Northampton during the Napoleonic war, Clare joined the Northamptonshire militia and departed for billets at Oundle, "The morning we left home our mothers parted with us as if we were going to Botany Bay, and people got at their doors to bid us farewell and greet us with a Job's comfort that they doubted we should see Helpston no more".<sup>66</sup>

In the Great War place mattered, as it had in the Napoleonic War, and natural beauty was rediscovered in named localities. Their preservation and access sometimes became associated with the remembrance of the fallen, whether as private memory or public schemes of purchase and management for the free use of all. Perhaps, to some extent, endangered commons, woods and parkland had become a shared heritage in an era that acknowledged the need for recreational access to a "country worth fighting for". Gifts of land for public access connected town and country, locality and nation, and donor and subscriber. In remembrance of pre-war lives, the effects of attritional war and the solace that might be derived from rededicated sanctuaries, the countryside bore antidotal comparison to the desolate landscapes of war. Campaigns in Surrey to enlarge the Box Hill

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<sup>62</sup> Museum of English Rural Life (MERL), SR CPRE C/1/54/80, Southern Pathfinders annual report, 1932.

<sup>63</sup> MERL, SR CPRE C/1/54/80, Southern Pathfinders annual report, 1932.

<sup>64</sup> John Drinkwater, *Patriotism in Literature* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1924), 128, 134.

<sup>65</sup> Edmund Blunden, ed., *John Clare: Poems chiefly from Manuscripts* (London: Richard Cobden-Sanderson, 1920), 12–13.

<sup>66</sup> Blunden, *John Clare*, 14.

estate, extend Wimbledon Common, save Severalls Copse and, abortively, erect a war memorial on Redhill Common attached new significance to landscapes, which partly arose from a persistent “local” patriotism. This premodern, residual and often neglected propinquity of place provided a sense-making capacity by intermingling remembrance, nature and liberal reconstruction in the Surrey hills after 1918. Unexpectedly, land purchase schemes after the Great War conjoined remembrance and open-air recreation in peaceful green spaces where war experience might be more fully understood. In Armageddon’s aftermath they became rather more than Alfred Austin’s private haunts of ancient beauty.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Alfred Austin, *Haunts of Ancient Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1902), 169.





# WIGWAMS AND RESORT TOWNS: THE HOUSING CRISIS IN FIRST WORLD WAR DEVON

BONNIE WHITE

On the eve of the First World War the county of Devon found itself in the grip of a housing crisis. The war not only prevented the construction of new homes, but the influx of thousands of refugees from Belgium and France into the county exacerbated the housing crisis and influenced housing policies and reforms that emerged during the conflict.<sup>1</sup> Further, the housing industry was not free from wartime profiteering that kept rents high and accommodation in short supply. To get around rent restrictions many property owners completed superficial repairs to their properties and landlords were careful when selecting tenants, preferring to rent to those who could pay the most. Also of concern for working-class families in Devon was that although the government introduced rent regulations in 1915, these restrictions served to aggravate housing shortages and increase class conflict. Wartime legislation discouraged the building of new homes for working-class families since they could not afford to pay the rent required to make the deal lucrative, and the Rent Act did not set rent limits for new buildings.<sup>2</sup> This chapter aims to understand how Devonians dealt with the physical, emotional, and psychological effects of the housing shortage under wartime conditions. As the inequality of state-initiated regulations entered public awareness, the perception developed that the local authorities did not always act in accordance with the best interests of the people as a whole. The extent of these inequalities was especially prevalent in regards to inadequate housing conditions, where conflict was often the result of competing interests that arose between different social groups as wartime conditions highlighted class and regional differences

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the problems facing housing see J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986), 242–5.

<sup>2</sup> Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 809.

within the county along a north-south divide. Although the war was not responsible for the county's housing deficiencies, it did prevent the construction of new homes.

In the years prior to the First World War it was estimated that 85 percent of working-class families in Devon rented and after August 1914, due to the housing shortage, some families were forced to rent homes that were previously deemed uninhabitable and marked by town councils to be demolished.<sup>3</sup> The difficulties of wartime housing were especially devastating for semi- and unskilled labourers who were particularly affected by the wartime market and could not afford to pay increased rates. Overcrowding and the lack of proper sanitation, combined with rising food prices, profiteering, and charges of "special treatment" against middle-class and service families, created animosity and resentment among working-class residents.

The issue of housing was not simply a matter of building more houses; rather, it was rooted in the structure of the county itself. Despite signs of decline in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the large landowners of the aristocracy and gentry still retained significant wealth and power. A small middle class, approximately 18 percent of the population, tended to live in the urban centres in the southern half of the county. The vast majority of the population belonged to the urban and rural working class and the marked social divides of the county were not blurred by the war. Intra-regional divisions compounded class tensions within the county. North Devon had relatively few towns compared to the south and was far less commercialized. The late arrival of the railway in the 1890s meant that northern communities were largely disconnected from the southern half of the county and economically disadvantaged as the towns in the south took advantage of expanding trade networks. As the fishing industry grew and the dockyards expanded in the south, the population swelled producing slum conditions in Plymouth, Stonehouse, and Devonport. The agricultural depression of the 1870s and 1880s brought an increasing number of rural workers into the southern towns, adding to an already dire

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<sup>3</sup> Report on Housing, Nov. 1911, Devon County Council, Devon Record Office [hereafter DRO], Okehampton Borough, 3248A-0/12/59; Housing Committee Minutes, Apr. 22, 1913, R4/1-0/C/47; Housing and Town Improvement Committee Minute Book (No. 1), DRO, Paignton Urban District Council Clerk's Departments, R4582A-P/PC/57; Housing and Accommodation Committee Minute Book, Apr. 1913, DRO, Newton Abbot Clerk's Department, R2365A-O/C/63; Working Class Housing Committee Minutes, Apr. 22, 1913, DRO, R7/7-O/C110; Sidmouth Urban District Council, A. L. Bowley, *Some Economic Consequences of the Great War* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1930), 81.

housing shortage.<sup>4</sup> The cumulative pressures of the changing economic profile of the county, the stresses of increased urbanization, and the general lack of basic amenities for the most disadvantaged segments of society riled the working class, alarmed the middle class, and caught the attention of town and county councils. At the outbreak of war working-class housing conditions in the towns were appalling, and although the housing issue affected the county generally, Exeter, Plymouth, the port towns of Devon's south coast and the struggling communities in the north were the most negatively affected. As such, social activism in the form of community groups advocating for reform were most pronounced in those areas.

The German invasion and occupation of Belgium forced thousands of civilians to flee from their homes. While London and the east coast towns absorbed the majority of the refugees, counties in the west, south, and north also provided care for families displaced by the war.<sup>5</sup> In late August 1914 the lord lieutenants (Earl Hugh Fortescue and Lord William Henry Edgcumbe) of Devon and Cornwall founded the Relief of War Refugees Committee to find suitable accommodation for the region's growing refugee population. The first task of the county's Relief of War Refugees Committee was to find suitable accommodation for Devon's refugee population. Exeter, the largest centre for refugee care in both counties, housed more than 8,000 refugee families during the war and Devon as a whole provided care and accommodation for more than 28,000 refugees between August 1914 and January 1919.<sup>6</sup> Local volunteers, whose most pressing concern was finding suitable housing, were responsible for

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<sup>4</sup> G. E. Mingay, *The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (London: Longman, 1976), 168–178, 188–9; J. V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England, 1660–1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 468–9. See also M. L. Bush, *The English Aristocracy: A Comparative Synthesis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 61–9; David Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords: The Aristocracy and the Towns, 1774–1967* (New Jersey: Leicester University Press, 1980), 420–1; Gerald Wasley, *Devon in the Great War* (Tiverton: Halsgrove Press, 1998), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England During the Great War* (London: Garland, 1982), 18–25; The Devon and Cornwall War Refugees Committee Report, Aug. 22, 1914, DRO, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262MM/O/LD/138–139. Britain was home to approximately 500,000 refugees between 1914 and 1919.

<sup>6</sup> Devon and Cornwall War Refugees Committee Report for 1917, Report for 1919, Jan. 12, 1920, DRO, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262MM/O/LD/138–139. The city of Exeter retained a separate committee until Feb. 1916 when it was amalgamated with the Devon and Cornwall Committee.

refugee care in the county. Upon arrival in Exeter the refugees were registered at one of four relocation centres to ensure that families in need received assistance. Once registered, they were assigned to accommodation. If assigned accommodation proved to be unworkable, the refugees were to return to the relocation centres to receive an alternative housing assignment.<sup>7</sup> There were two primary methods of allocation. The first was that refugees would share a dwelling with a local family. Responsibility for the care of the refugees would fall to the host family with some aid provided by local charities. The second option, and of central concern here, was that the refugees would be housed separately in cottages, hostels or church rooms that were designated for such a purpose. In August 1914, Devonians were largely enthusiastic about offering aid to Belgium's displaced refugee population, but by November 1914 the first wave of patriotic euphoria began to subside and was replaced with a grim awareness that the struggle would be longer than initial estimates suggested.<sup>8</sup> Declining support for the refugees, reflected in the reduction in the number of committees and public support for refugee programmes, was in part due to the financial burden of feeding extra mouths, but it was also compounded by the shortage of appropriate accommodation, which ignited feelings of animosity and resentment among Devon's urban working class.<sup>9</sup> While the county and its staff of volunteers worked tirelessly to tend to the needs of refugees, many Devonians found themselves without a roof over their heads and in competition for the basic necessities with the county's newest arrivals.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* Refugees most often arrived in groups of 200 to 300 at all hours of the day and cost the county £2,000 per month for each group.

<sup>8</sup> Lucy B. Spencer, "Belgian Refugees", *Teignmouth Post*, Sept. 11, 1914, 4; "Kilkhampton", *Hartland and West Country Chronicle*, Nov. 18, 1914, 5; F. Mackenzie, *Hartland and West Country Chronicle*, Nov. 8, 1914, 3; William Bate, "Clovelly", *Hartland and West Country Chronicle*, Nov. 18, 1914, 5; "South Brixham: Support for Refugees", *Paignton Western Guardian*, Jan. 6, 1916, 5; "Report of Torquay Advisory Committee", *Paignton Western Guardian*, Feb. 24, 1916, 8; "Belgium Refugees", *Dawlish Gazette*, Sept. 5, 1914, 4; Refugee Placement Scheme, Letter to Lady Fortescue at Castle Hill, May 23, 1916, DRO, Lord Lieutenant Papers, 1262MM/12/3.

<sup>9</sup> Bampton Committee Report, Oct. 1, 1914, DRO, Belgian Refugee Relief Committee, 1044B-11G; Letter from Mr. Holly to Lord Fortescue, Feb. 5, 1915, DRO, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 3248A/13. In response to declining support for refugee care in Devon a government fund was started and made available to those refugee families that were not cared for by philanthropic organizations. The Devon and Cornwall War Refugees Committee Report 1917, Jan. 30, 1918, DRO, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262MM/LD/138-139.

A plan to solve the refugee-housing problem was introduced in the winter of 1915 when the Devon and Cornwall Relief of War Refugees Committee petitioned Devon County Council for the use of abandoned working-class homes in Exeter and Plymouth. The conversion of these dwellings was part of the Exeter Garden City Project, introduced in 1906 when the Liberals won a landslide victory in Devon, and was intended to clean up slum areas and convert them into respectable middle-class districts.<sup>10</sup> In the pre-war years the government cast the responsibility for housing management upon local authorities who were reluctant to make reforms due to the increased cost of supplies, rising interest rates, and poor wages and working conditions that encouraged builders to seek other forms of employment.<sup>11</sup> The result was “an almost total stoppage of house-building for the lower income groups between 1890 and 1918”.<sup>12</sup> The consequence of stagnant building activity was that working-class dwellings tended to be old, overcrowded houses, and in 1911 more than 30 percent of the British population lived in unsuitable conditions that lacked basic amenities such as running water.<sup>13</sup> The Exeter Garden City Project was part of a broader government programme to reduce slum areas across the country, but the government failed to offer financial assistance and the programme was slow to get underway.

In 1914 more than fifty homes were vacant in Exeter’s east end, and the Exeter Relief Committee believed that these dwellings would provide a partial solution to the refugee problem. Devon County Council commissioned the use of the buildings in November and refugee families were moved in immediately. The Council alleged that returning the former residents to these areas would create unnecessary complications by forcing a second withdrawal at the end of the war. Instead, it was accepted that when the war was over and the building projects resumed, the refugees would be

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<sup>10</sup> A new housing scheme for Devon was initiated in 1906 when the Liberals took ten of the county’s thirteen seats. However, housing plans for Exeter, and Devon generally, were downgraded in 1910 when the Conservatives won a majority, although housing developments continued in Barnstaple, a Liberal stronghold under Sir Geoffrey Baring, albeit at a slower pace than originally determined in 1906. Housing Report, May 7, 1906, DRO, Barnstaple Borough Council, 2654–4; Housing Report, May 9, 1910, DRO, Barnstaple Borough Council, 2654. For more on housing developments in Britain see John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815–1985* (London: Methuen, 1986), 183–7, 220–1.

<sup>11</sup> Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 242–3.

<sup>12</sup> Enid Gauldie, *Cruel Habitations: A History of Working-Class Housing 1780–1918* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), 81.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 37.

returned to Belgium and the homes would be vacant once again, although this was not always the case.<sup>14</sup>

Prior to the war families living in the identified slum areas were relocated to cottages and temporary buildings while new homes were being constructed, but without government assistance, local authorities were less willing to commit to costly building projects. As Pamela Gilbert argues, the abandonment and subsequent destruction of older buildings exacerbated the housing shortage, intensified overcrowding, sped up the spread of disease, and resulted in rising rents.<sup>15</sup> As the 1910 election approached, there was renewed interest from Liberal candidates about the continued need for housing reform, but the loss of seats to the Conservatives stalled building projects, and as Alison Ravetz points out, “other than [for] war purposes, virtually no new building, maintenance or repairs were carried out” after August 4, 1914.<sup>16</sup> Although the 1914 Housing Act and the Rent and Mortgage Act of 1915 prevented the inflation of rents and mortgages on working-class housing above the rate set on August 4, 1914, rental costs were already high and there was a shortage of affordable, working-class housing in Devon.<sup>17</sup> Also, the acts only applied to “small dwelling houses” and only offered protection to tenants who remained in a tenancy – if a family moved from their fixed rate accommodation to a vacant property then rents were deregulated and most likely higher.<sup>18</sup> The inability of owners to increase rents during the war, coupled with inflation and general shortages, resulted in deteriorating housing conditions and depressed building activity. Building costs more than doubled in the four years of war, the labour force was dispersed, and between August and December 1914 the index for rents rose substantially. J. M. Winter demonstrates that although the government’s rent regulations did force the real costs of rent to decline, which benefited working-class families, there was no attempt at housing reform during the war years.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Devon and Cornwall War Refugees Committee Report for 1914, Jan. 25, 1915, DRO, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/145. The Devon and Cornwall War Refugees Committee Report for 1915, Jan. 25, 1916, DRO, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262MM/LD/ 138–139.

<sup>15</sup> Pamela Gilbert, *The Citizen’s Body: Desire, Health, and the Social in Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007), 84–5.

<sup>16</sup> Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 71–2. Although this was generally the case, there were exceptions. See Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War* (Oxford: Polity Press / Blackwell’s, 1986), 810.

<sup>17</sup> All working-class houses under £26 per annum were fixed at the rate they were obtained prior to Aug. 4, 1914.

<sup>18</sup> Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, 71–2.

<sup>19</sup> Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, 242–3.

As a result, the private housing market was unable or unwilling to respond to the public demand.<sup>20</sup> The government's decision to abandon local building projects and the local authorities' dedication to finding adequate living accommodation for Devon's refugee population, meant that working-class Devonians were forced into more crowded living conditions and as a result, housing shortages became a cause of wider civil unrest.

In November 1914 petitions for Lord Fortescue to find a solution to Devon's housing shortage increased substantially. In a letter to M. W. Cecil of the Housing Committee, Fortescue reported receiving "upwards of one hundred letters in the last fortnight on the matter of housing in Devon. Residents have secured the assistance of community leaders and the situation cannot be stalled any further".<sup>21</sup> Fortescue's letter to Cecil came after a public statement by Father Daniels, an Anglican minister from Dartmouth who was quite vocal regarding the deplorable state of living conditions in Devon. The Rentpayers' Association<sup>22</sup> held a large public meeting at Dartmouth to consider the state of housing conditions in the county. At the meeting, Father Daniels referred to the housing conditions as being the "greatest evil in their midst", and stated that there was little attempt by the government to remedy them.<sup>23</sup> Father Daniels was not alone in voicing his displeasure with government. In a letter to the county director the Devonshire Voluntary Aid Organization wondered if more could be done to support housing initiatives in the county. In their efforts to raise money for the war effort, volunteers encountered concerned citizens who wondered if some money could not be spared for cottages, particularly in areas outside of Exeter and Plymouth. Complaints came after Sir Ian Amory<sup>24</sup> announced that the group had raised more than £40,000 since the start of the war. The Organization decided to send letters to Lord Fortescue, Sir Ian Amory, and Devon County Council supporting fund raising efforts to aid in the construction of new houses.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, 809.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Fortescue of Castle Hill to M. W. Cecil, Nov. 6, 1914, DRO, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L18.

<sup>22</sup> Formed in 1910 the Rentpayers' Association represented tenants' rights and fought for rent legislation (rent control) and an appeals process for wrongful evictions.

<sup>23</sup> Reverend Father Daniels, "Housing at Dartmouth", *Paignton Western Guardian*, Oct. 18, 1914, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Sir Ian Amory-Heathcoat was the owner of Heathcoat's Lace Manufacturing in Tiverton. Amory, along with Lady Fortescue, were actively involved in the Devonshire Voluntary Aid Organization.

<sup>25</sup> Devonshire Voluntary Aid Organization, Nov. 3, 1917, DRO, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L141/30.

In response to public criticisms, Devon County Council decided to relocate refugee families and working-class residents to Devon's resort towns.<sup>26</sup> This plan was not without problems. Exeter was the primary distribution point for refugees arriving in Devon, and one solution to the housing shortage was to relocate refugees to the southern resort towns. Unlike the resorts in north Devon, the south-coast resorts were equipped for long-term stays and were linked to Exeter by rail and road. The south coast was a popular holiday destination and had developed considerably since the early 1840s. While the construction of new hotels and motels and the commercialization of the towns in the early twentieth century meant that the southern towns and the resorts located there were able to accommodate several hundred displaced persons, the problem was that the south-coast resorts, unlike those in the north, were accustomed to an upper-class clientele. Rents tended to be higher in the south than in other areas of the county, a trend that predated the war. The rent restrictions of 1915 did not apply to resorts and rents were frequently raised to dissuade interest from undesirable occupants. In many cases resort owners chose to rent to families from the East Coast and Midlands, as well as refugee families who could pay more, instead of working-class Devonians, many of whom could not afford the basic rates. Furthermore, community funds and subsidies from the local government covered the costs of refugee housing and owners were guaranteed payment, which was not the case with working-class residents. In the north, few owners were able to take advantage of the influx of refugees and government subsidies. The north Devon resorts were characterized by boarding houses (smaller and more secluded than the luxurious resorts in the south) that advertised moderate prices and lacked the necessary amenities for a long-term stay.<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting that the towns and communities of northern Devon experienced more severe shortages and, due to continual disruptions to rail lines, were impractical for housing refugees, or anyone who worked in the southern part of the county. Although some northern resorts like the one at Ilfracombe experienced growth between 1880 and 1917, most failed to attract renters and experienced stagnation during the war years.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Housing Relief, Report for Oct. 1914 [no date provided], DRO, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L126.

<sup>27</sup> John Travis, *The Rise of Devon Seaside Resorts, 1750–1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 141–2.

<sup>28</sup> The character of perspective lodgers was also an issue for consideration among some landlords. Landlords were picky about who they rented to and many were hesitant about renting to the working class. The operation of resorts was expensive and some of the northern resorts closed their doors rather than risk outlaying costs



Conversely, some resort owners in the south benefited from wartime rates. For example, the Mallock and Cary families of Torquay, traditional landowners who developed their resorts over time, retained their upper-class clientele and were able to maximize profits and benefited from the war. This was especially true for those owners who rented to wealthy refugee families. Resort owners who had recently invested in expansion and updates, however, such as the Fletchers who purchased land in south Devon in the late nineteenth century to build villas, or those whose business came primarily from the middle class, were hit hard by price inflation and the loss of visitors. Initially, over one hundred refugees were housed in the resort towns of Torquay and Teignmouth and some resort owners in these areas did particularly well.<sup>29</sup> New problems arose in the summer, however, when resort owners who wished to rent to well-to-do refugees or wealthy Londoners forced government-subsidized refugees to abandon their lodgings. These refugees were either sent back to the relocation centres or had to find alternative accommodation until the summer holiday season ended.

The relocation scheme thus did not solve the housing problem and public agitation increased, particularly in Exeter and Devon's large towns. In Exeter "Members of the Public", a loose organization of Devonians who were dissatisfied with local housing conditions, came together in an effort to pressure the local government to improve conditions.<sup>30</sup> In a letter to the editor of the *Western Times* J. Landfear Lucas inquired how the:

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that would not be recuperated. Some landlords also chose not to rent to outsiders. For more on this issue see David Englander, *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 237–41.

<sup>29</sup> Refugee Relief Committee Report to Lord Fortescue, Oct. 2, 1914, DRO, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L129. Mr. A. Cary, Aug. 10, 1900, Villa, Cary Park, DRO, Cary R4582A-7/1; Report for Cary Park, June 7, 1920, Cary R4582A; Mallock Property, Torquay, June 17, 1917, DRO, Mallock of Cockington, 48/13/17–21.

<sup>30</sup> Although it is difficult to know how many Devonians participated in this group, they appear numerous times and in several areas of Devon, and seem to have been most active in the first two years of the war. They were also referenced as a "group" by both the People's Light Brigade and the Rentpayer's Association, and had some contact with those fighting for better housing conditions in Devon, such as Father Daniels. Further, in a memorandum to Lord Fortescue on the issue of housing, the mayor of Exeter refers to "'Members of the Public' as a loose organization of disgruntled citizens", but there is no indication of whether or not they were connected to other activist groups, labour, or trade unions: Letter from Mayor's Office to Lord Fortescue, Nov. 17, 1915, DRO, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L151.

Government expects the people to be productive and supportive of the war when we face hardship at home everyday? Are our Devon and Cornwall Members of Parliament pressing the Government for this [public works projects] to be carried out? What of our magistrates and local authorities at Exeter, Plymouth, Bristol, Bodiam, etc.? In this matter local initiative is necessary, as the Government can hardly be expected to take a lead, with their daily war distractions in London. I look around Exeter and I see our "Guests of the Nation" (great hulky, healthy looking chaps) that have engaged in the most nominal of tasks, or, in other words, wasting their time away. It is not practical for England to keep feeding them by the thousands when they do nothing to earn our help or respect. We have saved them from death and we are not using their labour on urgent public works that have been neglected for years on the very score of no suitable or available labour.<sup>31</sup>

In a series of letters to Lord Fortescue the group cautioned, "The housing conditions are shocking in all the city and large towns. Now, the question you should ask is, Why do such bad conditions exist?"<sup>32</sup> The group was less interested in waiting for Fortescue's response than it was in making its own point: "Our magistrates and local representatives have mismanaged our resources, time and the allocation of housing and labour supplies. If something is to be done we must be finished with platitudes and meaningless nothings and mobilize a work force".<sup>33</sup> "Members of the Public" suggested that housing projects that were terminated in August 1914 be resumed under the authority of local contractors who could complete the projects by using available labourers, including refugees and prisoners of war.

Lord Fortescue's response was less committal than "Members of the Public" had hoped it would be. Fortescue accepted the government's programme that the refugees would be taken care of by the government and philanthropic organizations, and that all building projects were to be

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<sup>31</sup> J. Landfear Lucas, "Public Works", *Western Times*, Oct. 25, 1915, 3. "Guests of the Nation" refers to Belgian refugees.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> R. W. Stephens, "The Housing of the People", *Western Times*, Nov. 21, 1915, 3. "Members of the Public" was not the only group dedicated to encouraging Britain to live up to its wartime principles. Some ex-service men formed groups of their own to protect and improve living and working standards of returning servicemen. See Nicholas Mansfield, "The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Soldiers and Sailors, 1917-1921: A View from the Marches", *Family and Community History*, 7, no. 1 (2004), 24-8.

suspended until the end of the war.<sup>34</sup> His reason, understandably, was that “the war’s management is and must be the primary concern of government at all levels”. He also stated that “the Belgian refugees in our care are our guests, and will not be forced to work on local building projects. This situation will be resolved in good time, but not until the war has been brought to a successful end”.<sup>35</sup> However, the “Guests of the Nation” policy, as it was termed in August 1914, was adopted early in the war when it looked as though unemployment would pose a problem for native-born workers. Refugees were discouraged from working so that Britain’s men could be afforded every opportunity to find employment.<sup>36</sup> Concerns about unemployment were short lived and by late 1915 there was a certain incongruity to Fortescue’s continued support for the “Guests of the Nation” policy. On the one hand, Fortescue was attempting to protect the integrity of British involvement in the war by pandering to middle-class patriots who saw the refugees as the embodiment of the British cause.<sup>37</sup> But on the other hand, and perhaps of more practical concern, neither Lord Fortescue nor Devon County Council had any appreciable control over local contractors.

When public works projects were put on hold and the guaranteed work that had been promised under the Exeter Garden City Project failed to materialize, the Exeter building trade went on strike over building contracts and higher wages in early August 1914.<sup>38</sup> Local unions followed the dictates of their members and after 1910 were increasingly vocal in expressing their displeasure at the continued depression in building

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<sup>34</sup> Lord Fortescue did not reply to “Members of the Public”, but did address the housing issue in a letter to the Mayor of Exeter. Letter from Lord Fortescue to the Mayor of Exeter, Nov. 22, 1914, DRO, Lord Lieutenant Papers, 1262M.

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Lord Fortescue to Mr. Potts, Nov. 13, 1914, DRO, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L151.

<sup>36</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*, 217–27.

<sup>37</sup> Hugh Fortescue, the fourth Earl Fortescue, was an important figure in Devon politics. As lord lieutenant of Devon he served as a representative of the king, a position he took over from his father, the third Earl Fortescue, in 1904. He had been involved in local politics since the mid 1880s when he served as a Liberal member of parliament for Tiverton (1881–5). Prior to his appointment as lord lieutenant, Fortescue served as a justice of the peace and was well known at court as aide de camp to His Majesty.

<sup>38</sup> Meeting of Devon County Council, Aug. 10, 1914, DRO, Lord Lieutenantcy Papers, 1262M/L140. For more on union activism and the role of the British state in labour relations see Chris Howell, *Trade Unions and the State: the Construction of Industrial Relations Institutions in Britain, 1890–2000* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 48–66.

activity. The building contracts promised after the Liberal electoral victory in 1906 were cut short by the Conservative victory in 1910. Building projects were scaled back in Exeter and cut altogether in 1911 in several outlying communities. Most of the dispute was quickly settled and carpenters and labourers returned to work in late August, but the bricklayers refused to go back to work until an hourly wage increase was agreed upon, in mid October, but there were still few building projects undertaken.<sup>39</sup> When in 1915 local contractors proposed to build cottages throughout the county, they were only willing to do so at double the pre-war cost to the county, which more accurately reflected wartime building costs. Tenants would be asked to pay rent at 8s per week until 1919 and then 8s 2d beginning in 1920 (the cost would continue to rise in subsequent years). This dramatically exceeded Devon's pre-war rents of 5s per week in January 1914.<sup>40</sup> The cost to build the cottages was to be paid over a longer period of time and the bill would ultimately fall to the taxpayers. Also, although rents could not be raised above the set price, once the cottages were built landlords could force all expenses for repairs on tenants, therefore raising rents beyond the 8s per week set by the government. Rather than forcing the cost of housing construction on local residents, Devon County Council opted to delay building projects all together until a more cost effective option became available, or until local contractors agreed to lower the initial costs. With neither the county council nor local contractors willing to compromise, few houses were built in Exeter between 1915 and 1925.

The housing situation in Plymouth was considerably worse than it was in Exeter. Plymouth, one of Britain's main passenger ports, had a large and diverse population in 1914.<sup>41</sup> The town grew rapidly and in 1906 had a population of 107,636 (the population of Devon was 662,197 in 1911) compared to Exeter's population of 47,185 and Barnstaple's 9,698 for the same year.<sup>42</sup> Further, the Anglo-German naval race resulted in the expansion of the shipbuilding industry in Devon, and the sudden availability of new jobs brought an influx of workers from north Devon

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<sup>39</sup> "City Talk", *Express and Echo*, Oct. 2, 1914, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Report for Building Plan submitted to Devon County Council, Oct. 15, 1915, DRO, Fortescue of Castle Hill, 1262M/L141/1.

<sup>41</sup> Mark Brayshay, "The Emigration Trade in Nineteenth-Century Devon", in Michael Duffy *et al*, eds., *The New Maritime History of Devon*, vol. 2 (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1994), 104–17.

<sup>42</sup> Wasley, *Devon in the Great War*, 32; Mark Brayshay, "The Emigration Trade", 115–16; Peter Hilditch, "Devon and Naval Strategy since 1815", in Duffy, *New Maritime History of Devon*, vol. 2, 157–8.

and south Wales in the years 1909 to 1912.<sup>43</sup> Plymouth's dockyards were expanded to accommodate warships and Devonport benefited from the escalating demand for naval building. Between the 1889 Naval Defence Act and the First World War new construction accounted for over half of the labour resources employed in Plymouth and Devonport. At Devonport dockyard the civilian labour force increased from 5,206 in 1890 to 12,290 in April 1914. In 1911 the number of naval personnel in Devon rose to 21,581 compared to just 8,289 in 1881.<sup>44</sup>

Unfortunately, the housing industry in Plymouth had not kept pace with population growth, leading to an acute housing shortage by 1914. Between 1914 and 1917 the city experienced a large influx of residents, naval staff, and personnel, adding to its overcrowding. Church rooms and community buildings were filled to capacity and working- and middle-class tenants received eviction notices with little warning. Maud MacLean of Plymouth rented on a quarterly basis, and after being evicted from her home noted that:

there are too many people in this uncertain position. People are being made aware of the profitable sale of their residence, with enormous benefit to the landlord, without any interference from the local authorities. The government has implemented measures to protect the people from these war profiteers, but what are we to do when our local magistrates do nothing to stop said injustices?<sup>45</sup>

The county register substantiates MacLean's claim. Although many of the letters of complaint have since been destroyed, the register records an inventory and précis of complaints submitted to Devon County Council and the rulings reached. The register reveals two trends. First, that the nature and volume of the complaints remained unchanged with the introduction of the Rent Act of 1915. Second, the register reveals that the council often found in favour of landlords and there was little protection offered to renters regardless of the dictates of the act. In many cases, landlords simply found a way to circumvent the restrictions of the act without being held accountable for rent increases or evictions. The local authorities were responsible for enforcing the Rent Act, but they were ill equipped to deal with the quantity of complaints each of which could require a hearing and subsequent ruling, which could be a time-consuming

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Hilditch, "Devon Naval Strategy since 1815", in Duffy, *New Maritime History of Devon*, vol. 2, 156–9.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Maud MacLean, "The Housing Problem", *Western Evening Herald*, Mar. 15, 1917, 3.

process. Many cases were simply ruled on without a hearing and sometimes without contacting the complainant.<sup>46</sup> The registers speak to a much larger issue: due to the cost in time and money, the county council was unable and consequently unwilling to invest in building projects without government assistance.

Class conflict was not, however, confined to tensions between the working class and their social superiors, and the housing question evoked class tensions at all levels of society. Although some did well financially out of the war, such as skilled workers, many did not and suffered as a result of wartime inflation.<sup>47</sup> In Barnstaple, cabinetmakers went on strike due to insufficient wages and bank clerks threatened to strike for a minimum wage of £1 16s for a fifty-four-hour week.<sup>48</sup> Many coal lumpers, for example, were forced to abandon their jobs to join the military where regular pay, along with separation allowances, brought in more income than their current jobs afforded. While some families, such as those employed in the fisheries, may have been spared the initial shock of the wartime economy (many were in the naval reserve and were given a reserve income of £1 5s a week), dockyard employees were particularly hard hit, as were those who worked for the railways. The incomes of both groups were fixed and stable,<sup>49</sup> which benefited each in the pre-war years, but with wartime inflation, these families would have been especially affected. Housing conditions around the dockyards of Plymouth and Devonport were exceptionally appalling. In late 1914 Plymouth Town Council indicated that on average 6.2 people occupied a single-family dwelling. Rates of sickness doubled in the winter of 1914 among dockers, causing delays in the shipyards. Similarly, in Newton Abbot families

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<sup>46</sup> County Register for Devonshire, 1915, The National Archives, MH 60/19; County Register for Devonshire, 1916, TNA, MH 60/19.

<sup>47</sup> The incongruent impact of the war shaped frictional responses. Dissenting actions could not be reduced to questions of nationalism or class interest; rather, a blend of unfulfilled expectations and the practical realities of wartime revealed the inequalities of war sacrifice and hardships. See Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 100–1; Nicholas Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism, 1900–1930* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 123–30.

<sup>48</sup> Wasley, *Devon in the First World War*, 97. For more on wages and skilled labour see, Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914–1918* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 140–59.

<sup>49</sup> County of Devon, Quarter Sessions, Aug.–Sept. 1914 General Report, DRO, QS/107/66/Plymouth. County of Devon, Quarter Sessions, Employment Report for Apr.–June 1914, Railways, DRO, 4558Z–0/11. County of Devon, Quarter Sessions, Employment Report for July–Sept. 1914, Railways, DRO, 4558Z–0/12.

connected to the railway were forced into more crowding living conditions as rents climbed after August 1914. Housing conditions in Devon's industrial areas, as well as the pay benefits associated with military service, might help to explain why railway men and dockers were well represented among military recruits in August 1914.<sup>50</sup> Rising rents and shortages were of particular concern for the families of semi- and unskilled labourers, particularly in areas where pre-war congestion was intensified by new arrivals after August 1914. In rural Devon, farm labourers also found themselves in a precarious situation. Some men remained on the land in the hope that the importance of agriculture during the war would bring much needed changes to the industry, specifically that wages would improve or that the monetary incentives offered to skilled men would be accorded to other groups as well. Another explanation was that some labourers were bound to the land by yearly contracts, while others still were tied to the land due to their cottage rental agreements. If a man left to join the army, his wife and family would have to vacate their cottage. Many cottages were a dreadful state on the eve of the First World War, but given the housing shortage in Devon, abandoning a residence, regardless on conditions, was not an attractive option. In some cases, the economic benefit of enlistment had to be weighed against the possibility of losing one's home. As such, while railway men and dockers were often quick to enlist, agricultural labourers in Devon were less likely to do so.<sup>51</sup> Although some agricultural labourers enlisted to escape poor pay and working conditions, others could not, which led to conflict and resentment within the agricultural labour force.<sup>52</sup>

The issue of suitable and affordable living accommodation was not confined to the working class. The middle class in Devon was relatively

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<sup>50</sup> Enlistment Records by name, age, and occupation, 1914–1918, Local Government: World War I, Devon Record Office, Ref. 1037M–O/1; Voluntary Enlistment of Men Category B, Army Reserve, 1914–1915, DRO, 1037M–O/4; County of Devon Quarter Sessions, Great Western Railways, Labour Books 1914–1919, DRO, QS/DP/687; Courtney of Powerham, Labour Books Rail Operation, 1915–1917, DRO, Devon Whitchurch, D1508M/64.

<sup>51</sup> Bonnie White, "Volunteerism and Early Recruitment Efforts in Devonshire, August 1914–December 1915", *Historical Journal*, 52, no. 3 (2009), 641–66. For a national look at enlistment and monetary incentives see David Silbey, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914–1918* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 82–103.

<sup>52</sup> Labour on the Land, Oct. 1, 1914, DRO, Lord Fortescue Papers, 1262M/O/LD/144; Voluntary Recruitment for Devon, May 18, 1915, DRO, Lord Lieutenancy Papers, 1262M/O/LD/144 Bundle 30; Devon Farmers' Union, "Our Need", *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, Mar. 13, 1915.

small and tended to be concentrated in Exeter and coastal areas. Many of these families were involved in small businesses and trades, and were negatively affected by the wartime economy. For example, many bank clerks and small shop owners were put out of work by the war. In late 1917 rates of cottages for middle-class families rose, forcing many to leave their private dwellings and find accommodation with family or neighbours. Trends that largely affected working-class families in the first two years of the war now had a greater impact on the middle class as well. Furthermore, rent protection for working-class families set in 1915 afforded no protection for middle-class renters against eviction or sale of property by landlords. One way for landlords to get around the government's cap on working-class rents was to evict these families, complete superficial repairs, and then rent to middle-class families who could *supposedly* afford to pay more.<sup>53</sup> For example, the Waller family found themselves in this predicament when they were forced to abandon their home in Plymouth. After the landlord evicted them in order to rent to a family from Essex that was willing to pay a higher rent, Mr. Waller complained that "after living in that residence for more than four years the landlord evicted my family with only a week's notice. While he lines his pockets, we find ourselves homeless. Is this really patriotism? Aliens, slums, and traitors have destroyed all sense of honour in this war".<sup>54</sup> This trend was not uncommon in wartime Devon. In Plymouth several small business owners were evicted from their shops and adjoining lofts (normally located above the shops). When business declined and they could no longer afford to pay their shop rents, some landlords took the opportunity to simultaneously evict them from their lofts, likely out of fear of lost rents for both properties. In response, several business owners appealed to the Plymouth Town Council for assistance due to unjust eviction from their homes. While the town council appealed to landlords at a town meeting to keep rents low and avoid unnecessary evictions, little was done to protect renters.<sup>55</sup> As the above discussion of the county registers indicates, there was no change in the outcome of complaints concerning unlawful evictions over the course of the war. In Devon, the

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<sup>53</sup> "Overcrowding and Housing in Plymouth", *Western Evening Herald*, Jan. 15, 1917, 4.

<sup>54</sup> "The Waller Family", "Homeless in Plymouth", *South Devon Weekly News*, May 14, 1915, 5. Also see "No Rooms for Rent: Stonehouse", *Brixham Western Guardian*, Jan. 26, 1917, no page number; "Housing in Plymouth: Your Legal Position", *Western Evening Herald*, Jan. 16, 1917, 4.

<sup>55</sup> Report on Housing in Plymouth, Town Council Minutes, May 1917, Plymouth Record Office, 2834/1886/45.



adversity experienced by some middle-class residents resulted in increased hardships for Devon's working class. In addition, the failure of local authorities to enforce the Rent and Mortgage Restriction Act meant that working-class families were doubly burdened by the war.

Outside of Devon's major urban areas living conditions were equally deplorable. In the town of Barnstaple servicemen were returning to discover that their wives and children had been forced from their homes. "A Sailor's Wife with Three Children" wrote to the editor of the *Western Evening Herald* to draw attention to the fact that while waiting for her separation allowance she was evicted from her home for not paying her rent on time. She was unable to find another apartment in Salcombe and "After several inquiries I have met with nothing but contempt from landlords. Knowing that separation allowances have been infrequent they have refused to rent to us".<sup>56</sup> In other instances military men had to spend their leave doing home repairs because landlords refused to buy supplies at wartime rates, or to pay labourers the increased wages granted by Devon County Council. In the *Western Evening Herald* Edith Stark called attention to an increase in "requests to local charity organizations for assistance with housing repairs. There have been several reports of soldiers doing repairs while on leave and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association [SSFA] would like to ask for donations and support to help our men in uniform" to have a healthier place to come home to.<sup>57</sup>

Particularly in the opening stages of the war, service families, plagued by the slow receipt of separation allowances, were reliant on the Servicemen Support Fund for food and rent, and it was not uncommon for two or more families to share a single dwelling. However, as the war went on, service families began to be targeted by other groups. Some groups, particularly women whose husbands were employed in essential industries, but who did not benefit from government bonuses, perceived the allocation of separation allowances to service families as an unfair advantage. Many of these women felt that service families were given excess money and preferential treatment from charities and landlords

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<sup>56</sup> "A Sailor's Wife with Three Children", "Encumbrances", *Western Evening Herald*, Aug. 18, 1915, 5; Edward Southcomb, Letter regarding the position of army families in Devon, Apr. 23, 1917, DRO, 4131add/F51/1917; Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association, report on service families in Devon, Feb. 23, 1916, DRO, War No. 12, 2162A/PM288, 2; Devonshire Patriotic Fund, Servicemen Fund, Letter from Lord Fortescue to Mayor of Exeter, DRO, Devon County Lieutenancy, Sept. 16, 1914, 2165A/PM294.

<sup>57</sup> Edith Stark, "What *Herald* Readers Think", *Western Evening Herald*, Jan. 5, 1917, 3.

when the men working in essential industries were also doing important work for their country, work that often meant that they were not allowed to enlist.<sup>58</sup> The perception was that service families did particularly well from the war, and also that wartime charities catered to service families specifically – some shop owners set aside supplies for the wives and children of servicemen in their areas and some landlords reserved rooms for the families of enlisted men.<sup>59</sup> The SSFA also allocated resources to service families to help alleviate the burdens and stresses of the war. The SSFA organized labour to assist in home repairs and yard work, collected clothing and food for local families, and created a support network for the wives and children of enlisted men. It was not just that the SSFA provided assistance to service families, but as an organization the SSFA did not come with the same social stigma that was attached to other “charities”.

The displeasure expressed by working-class families in protected industries was as much the perception that their service was not valued in the same way as enlisted men, as the perception that charity organizations designed to assist working-class families were not respectable. The most disgruntled groups appear to have been dockworkers, railway men, and

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<sup>58</sup> The SSFA was not the only wartime organization designed to help protect workers from the economic impact of the war, and such disagreements played out nationally as well as locally. The War Emergency Workers’ National Committee (WEWNC), established in Aug. 1914, aimed to assist workers ranging from employment to accessing essential commodities. Matthew Hilton argues that the WEWNC and the Food’s Consumers’ Councils (FCCs) may have prevented wartime grievances from becoming violent engagements. Most Britons preferred to voice their grievances regarding perceived inequalities, rather than taking physical action. The WEWNC and FCCs, together with the Food Vigilance Committees, provided an outlet for workers to voice their criticisms and thereby helped to manage discontent: Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 61. For more on the WEWNC see Royden Harrison, “The War Emergency Workers’ National Committee, 1914–1920”, in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., *Essays in Labour History, 1886–1923* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1971), 211–59.

<sup>59</sup> The debate between service families and other groups began in 1914 and continued until the end of the war: “Working Men Profiteers”, *Express and Echo*, Dec. 10, 1917, 4; “Food Prices”, *Western Morning News*, Nov. 29, 1917, 3; “Families of Reservists”, *Western Morning News*, Aug. 6, 1915, 5; “Mother of Four”, letter to the editor [untitled], Oct. 22, 1918, 4; “Wife of One of the Old Contemptibles”, letter to the editor [untitled], *Western Morning News*, Oct. 22, 1918, 4; “Service Families and Supplies at Exeter”, *Dawlish Gazette*, Dec. 3, 1917, 3; “No Public Sympathy”, *Okehampton News*, May 15, 1915, no page number. For more on conflict between and within various labour groups see Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*, 130–45.

skilled and semi-skilled labourers who worked in the mines.<sup>60</sup> Although these groups were well paid during the war, they were unable to provide for their families under wartime conditions and were forced to seek the assistance of local churches and community centres for sleeping quarters, as well as the Special Food Committee established in September 1914 by Devon County Council to provide the basic necessities to families experiencing economic hardship.<sup>61</sup> The contentious relationship between service families and the families of skilled workers indicates that class was not simply defined by economic criteria, but social and cultural criteria as well, including status, power, attitudes, and behaviour.<sup>62</sup> The housing issue was understood not only in terms of shelter or general health, but the ability of families to earn a living, and their relationships with other socio-economic groups.

To alleviate predicted post-war pressures in Barnstaple, the town council decided to resume building projects against the advice of Devon County Council. In 1913 the northern districts of the county had drafted plans to build ten new cottages, which were to be completed between 1914 and 1916, and to repair existing cottages in Bideford, Marwood and North Molton.<sup>63</sup> The outbreak of war, however, meant that these building

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<sup>60</sup> Devon had copper and tin mines in the north and around Plympton and Dartmoor: W. G. Hoskins, *A New Survey of England: Devon* (London: Collins, 1954), 174–5.

<sup>61</sup> Many working-class families resented the efforts of the Special Food Committee and it was derisively referred to it as “The Poverty Fund”. Special Food Committee, Report to Lady Fortescue, Sept. 14, 1915, DRO, Charity Papers/Fortescue of Castle Hill, 2165A/234; “The Poverty Fund”, *Dawlish Gazette*, Feb. 23, 1915, no page number; Rachel Harris, “Help for the Poor?”, *Dawlish Gazette*, Feb. 23, 1915, no page number. A heated public debate among the wives of dockworkers, railway men, mine workers, and service men took place in the local press in Jan. 1917 and highlighted the nature and nuances of class conflict in Devon. See, “Not Downhearted Yet”, letter to the editor [untitled], *Western Evening Herald*, Jan. 5, 1917, 3; “A Separation Lady or One of ‘These People’”, letter to the editor [untitled], *Western Evening Herald*, Jan. 5, 1917, 3; “A Lover of Fair Play But Can’t Get It”, letter to the editor [untitled], *Western Evening Herald*, Jan. 5, 1917, 3; “A Sailor’s Wife”, letter to the editor [untitled], *Western Evening Herald*, Jan. 5, 1917, 3; “C. P.”, letter to the editor [untitled], *Western Evening Herald*, Jan. 5, 1917, 3; “Grain and Coal Corners”, *Crediton Chronicle*, May 15, 1915, 7.

<sup>62</sup> John Benson, *The Working Class in Britain, 1850–1939* (London: Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1989), 72.

<sup>63</sup> Rural District Council Minute Book, Bideford, Apr. 8, 1913, North DRO, 2414A/C5/12; Rural District Council Minute Book, Bideford, Nov. 14, 1916, North DRO, 2414A/C5/34.

projects had to be put on hold. In late 1916 local building contractors agreed to use remaining supplies and labour in the construction of eight new cottages, as well as to begin immediate repairs on cottages built before 1913. Business owners agreed to support the project by offering families a wage increase where possible and local philanthropic organizations arranged to redirect their financial support away from sustaining refugee families in the area and instead to support local building projects that would benefit their home communities. Some additional labour was secured by enlisting the help of refugees, but results remained limited throughout the war. Instead, local contractors relied on the labour of older men, teenage boys and women.<sup>64</sup>

With the building project underway in Barnstaple, other communities felt pressure to assuage living conditions in their own areas. Similar building projects were initiated in Tiverton, Dawlish, South Molton and Totnes, but with mixed results. Building projects in Tiverton, for example, were slow to get underway and in the end the exorbitant costs of construction forced local government to abandon the projects. In Dawlish a new strategy was worked out between local magistrates and building contractors, and although the scheme was more successful than it was in Tiverton, it was less successful than it was in Barnstaple. Cottages in Dawlish were erected for approximately £270 each (actual cost), and as one local man put it, they “resembled wigwams rather than cottages”.<sup>65</sup> The buildings were intended to be temporary and building codes had to be slightly relaxed in order for the structures to meet the requirements of the Local Government Board. In actual fact, it would take longer to pay for the cottages than the buildings were expected to last and they would only provide new homes for a few families. Nevertheless, Dawlish Council agreed to a capital outlay of £1,550 and rent at no less than 8s per week. P. Williams of Dawlish cautioned the local government that “the burden on the people is excessive and greatly impedes local support for the war effort. These proposals are crude, untrustworthy and invite stern criticism of the local authorities”.<sup>66</sup> The residents of Dawlish were outraged over the cost considering that in Barnstaple similar cottages were being constructed

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<sup>64</sup> Rural District Council Minute Book, Bideford, Aug. 23, 1917, North DRO, 2414A/C6/56; Town Council, “Working Class Conditions Deplored at Barnstaple”, *Western Independent*, Oct. 17, 1917, 5; “Alternative Labour Sources”, *North Devon Herald*, Sept. 4, 1915, no page number.

<sup>65</sup> “Ratepayer”, “Workmen’s Dwellings”, *Dawlish Gazette*, Dec. 30, 1916, 4. See “Totnes Board of Guardians: Housing”, *Western Guardian*, Jan. 13, 1916, 7.

<sup>66</sup> P. Williams, “Workman’s Dwellings”, *Dawlish Gazette*, Dec. 30, 1916, 4.

and rented at a rate of 6s 6d per week.<sup>67</sup> When war was declared the people of Dawlish received assurances from local authorities that a respectable standard of living would be maintained, but the length of the conflict complicated their feelings about the government's response: "We have spent thousands of millions on war and there is no indication that we have come to anything like the end of our resources. Would anyone agree that for the purpose of Human Betterment we can afford to end needless civilian suffering?"<sup>68</sup> Although a few homes were built during the war, they made a minor contribution to reducing the housing shortage or alleviating public outrage at the deplorable state of living conditions in the county.

The housing crisis in Devon and calls for reform were therefore not simply about building houses; rather, they reflected growing concerns about the relationship between the state and the citizenry. Support for the British cause meant that sacrifices would have to be borne by the people, but the justification for the war implied that the state would still bear responsibility for the people and their well-being. The housing crisis revealed that this was not the case and in spite of the fact that the middle class also suffered due to the shortage of suitable housing, working-class Devonians felt that conditions had deteriorated beyond an acceptable limit. It was not simply that houses were not being constructed, but that housing reform had been long delayed and "need" is most immediately evaluated within a local context. Across Devon the housing question was not addressed until the 1920s and even then it took considerable time for the populace to experience a real rise in the standard of living.<sup>69</sup> Although significant improvements in housing did not occur until well into the post-war period (the late 1930s for Plymouth and Devonport), social activism in

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<sup>67</sup> "Resident", *Dawlish Gazette*, Dec. 30, 1916, 3.

<sup>68</sup> "Against Poverty", *Western Times*, Oct. 28, 1916, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Housing Committee Minutes, Oct. 6, 1925, DRO, Clerk's Department, Tiverton Borough Council, R4/1-0/C/47; Housing and Town Improvement Committee Book, Sept. 25, 1925, DRO, Torbay County Borough Council, R4582A-O/PC; Housing Committee of Rural District Council Minute Books, May 5, 1927, DRO, Crediton Rural District Council, R4/3-0/C/12; Housing Accommodation Committee Minute Book, June 3, 1929, DRO, Newton Abbot Rural District Council, R2365A/C/64; Highways, Buildings and Housing Committee Minutes, Jan. 4, 1927, DRO, Seaton Urban District Council, R7/6-0/C/36; Sanitary and Housing Committee, Jan. 5, 1925, DRO, Okehampton Municipal Borough Council, R3/3-0/41/21. For information on the social impact of the housing crisis in Britain see Gordon Phillips, "The Social Impact", in Stephen Constantine *et al.*, eds., *The First World War in British History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), 129-31.

Devon forced local authorities to respond to calls for change, even under wartime conditions. The willingness of local residents to insist on reforms publically and consistently between 1914 and 1918 demonstrates that Devonians, while generally supportive of the war effort, refused to accept government policies that they believed were detrimental to their families, communities, and nation. The housing issue was re-elevated during the war and it was the reality of social unrest that encouraged local government, largely unenthusiastic and uninspired after 1914, to adopt costly and ill-timed housing reform.

# ROMAN CATHOLIC ARMY CHAPLAINS AND CLAIMS OF A WORKING-CLASS “ADVANTAGE” IN THE GREAT WAR

MARTIN PURDY

The Great War has often been referred to as “a ‘good’ war for British Catholicism”,<sup>1</sup> with Cardinal Bourne, the head of the Catholic Church in Britain, ultimately claiming that while Catholic soldiers never accounted for more than 15 percent of the army’s fighting force, their chaplains never accounted for less than 25 percent of the clergy in military service.<sup>2</sup> In addition to this higher profile in the armed forces, the Roman Catholic Church in Britain enjoyed an increase in membership both during the years of fighting and after the guns had fallen silent.<sup>3</sup> This was particularly true in traditional Catholic strongholds such as urban areas: for example, the figures for church attendance in Hulme in Manchester show a rise in worshippers from 47 percent to 60 percent in the years immediately following the armistice (though worth noting that ongoing Irish immigration may have played a part in this).<sup>4</sup> This situation was, however, by no means inevitable; while there was a large increase in the number of people attending churches of all denominations at the outbreak of the First World War – as they prayed for peace, victory or the safe deliverance of loved

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<sup>1</sup> M. Snape, “British Catholicism and the British Army in the First World War”, *Recusant History*, 26, no. 2 (2002), 314.

<sup>2</sup> O. Rafferty, “Catholic Chaplains to the British Forces in the First World War”, *Religion, State & Society*, 39, no. 1 (2011), 36.

<sup>3</sup> M. F. Snape and S. G. Parker, “Keeping Faith and Coping: Belief, Popular Religiosity and the British People”, in J. Bourne, P. Liddle and I. Whitehead, eds., *The Great World War 1914–45: The People’s Experience* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), 398.

<sup>4</sup> S. Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity: Irish Catholics in England 1880–1939* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), 50.

ones – Roman Catholicism is among a minority of faiths that sustained this upward trend throughout.<sup>5</sup>

One of the reasons traditionally given for this “success” is the part played by the RC chaplains themselves: for example, the Catholic newspaper the *Tablet* estimated that the chaplains, either as the result of pro-active recruitment or more indirectly because of the example they set on the field of combat, had a hand in 40,000 conversions to their faith on the Western Front across the course of the conflict.<sup>6</sup> One of the main reasons given for this is the suggestion of a “working-class” advantage.

The majority of historians who make even passing reference to the army chaplaincy in the Great War usually refer, often without recourse to substantiation or footnote, to the Roman Catholic clergy as having not only had more experience of working with the poorer classes but usually sharing a common working-class background with the average British soldier or “Tommy”. Such references are usually at the expense of their Anglican counterparts, and respected academics are as likely to be culpable as commercial popular history writers. It is a mantra which has been repeated so often that it has become all but engraved in the history books: Wilkinson wrote, “Roman Catholic chaplains almost wholly came from a working-class background, unlike the Anglican clergy, but like the majority of the soldiers”.<sup>7</sup> Loudon has added, “it was understandable that Catholic chaplains at the Front were more readily accepted by the Tommy than their Anglican opposite number. The working-class origins of Catholic chaplains meant that there were fewer of the barriers separating them from the average Tommy than their public school orientated Anglican counterpart”.<sup>8</sup> And Burleigh has written, “Chaplains (CoE) were separated from most of the soldiers by education and class. They came out poorly from any comparison with Roman Catholic priests, who were from a similar social background as the men”.<sup>9</sup> Schweitzer adds an ethnic dimension to the mix, by stating: “In contrast to the Oxford-educated Bere, Roman Catholic chaplains, many of whom were recruited in Ireland or

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<sup>5</sup> R. Currie, A. Gilbert and L. Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles Since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 31–2.

<sup>6</sup> J. Leonard, in D. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Catholic Chaplaincy in Ireland and the First World War* (Dublin: Trinity History Workshop, 1986), 13.

<sup>7</sup> A. Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SPCK, 1978), 130.

<sup>8</sup> S. Loudon, *Chaplains in Conflict: The Role of Army Chaplains since 1914* (London: Avon Books, 1996), 51.

<sup>9</sup> M. Burleigh, *Earthly Powers* (London: Harper, 2005), 451.



were of Irish descent, were drawn almost entirely from the working classes and therefore experienced little social awkwardness".<sup>10</sup>

Such claims about the social background of the RC chaplains provide an important aspect of their legacy, not least because the inference is that they enjoyed a substantial advantage over their counterparts from other denominations as a result. It is not my intention to prove or disprove claims about the Anglican chaplains and their backgrounds as there is already plenty of material on this subject.<sup>11</sup> Instead I intend to look at the working-class credentials of the Roman Catholic clergy and their flock, both in the run-up to the war and during the conflict. The aim will be to see if it is possible to determine the RC chaplains' class backgrounds and validate the prevailing literature. In addition, the issue of ethnicity also becomes relevant as a result of high levels of Irish migration and the large number of Catholic chaplains who were of Irish stock. It is therefore important to address whether or not ethnicity is a reliable marker for class in terms of the Catholic Irish and their chaplains.

### Working-Class Assumptions

Before looking specifically at individual priests it is necessary to recognize the wider social, political and religious contexts that may have resulted in the "working-class" label being apportioned to the Catholic chaplains. Roman Catholicism was unquestionably thriving in Britain's working-class districts at the time of the Great War, with the Industrial Revolution having created a new underclass drawn to towns and cities by the prospect of labour in factories, mills and associated trades.<sup>12</sup> Poor living conditions coupled with the temptations of urban life, including alcohol, gambling, petty theft and prostitution, resulted in the Christian faiths of all denominations becoming increasingly active in the slums of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain.

Catholic commitment to domestic missionary activities can be traced back as far as the seventeenth century, but certainly grew in strength in the industrial era with the establishment of such organizations as the Society of St Vincent de Paul (launched in the 1840s to help the poor in their own homes). However, it was possibly the high-profile stance of the Vatican in

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<sup>10</sup> R. Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt among British and American Great War Soldiers* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 174.

<sup>11</sup> Among the more recent works see L. Parker, *The Whole Armour of God: Anglican Army Chaplains in the Great War* (Solihull: Helion, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> J. Cox, *English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

the latter part of the nineteenth century that was to leave a more indelible mark. In particular, the 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* from Pope Leo XIII provided acknowledgement from the highest level of the church that it could not hope to re-connect society with Christianity if it was identified too closely with established political and privileged traditions. This was a clear doctrinal commitment to a new social order, and it has been argued that publicity surrounding it played a major part in cementing the image of the Catholic Church as the main friend to the poor at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> High-profile campaigns, such as Cardinal Manning’s successful mediation in the London dock strike of 1889, are also likely to have helped consolidate the public perception of the Catholic faith as a defender of working-class rights.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to think that other denominations were inactive in the same field. Recognition of the need to make contact with the working classes was strong in many quarters of the Church of England and a younger, more politicized, Anglican clergy were keen to “adapt the church to take into account working-class reality”.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the evangelical efforts of all of the churches that came as a result of the challenges presented by the new industrial realities, particularly when it came to education and church building, were generally successful. It is also worth noting that by the middle of the nineteenth century one major problem that the Church of England had faced, in providing sufficient clerical cover for the urban areas, had been successfully addressed and an enormous programme of church building undertaken. In addition, by the 1840s the national religion was consecrating eight new churches per month and had added more than a million new sittings by 1851.<sup>15</sup> So, while celibate Roman Catholic clergy had distinguished themselves as “slum priests” in areas where genteel Church of England clerics and their families may not have previously wanted to be posted, it is hard not to accept Burleigh’s claim that: “Nothing can be further from the truth that the Church of England somehow eschewed social responsibilities, although Nonconformists liked to depict it”.<sup>16</sup> If this is the case, it is

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<sup>13</sup> Wilkinson, *Church of England*, 134; and M. Marty, *Modern American Religion*, vol. 1, 1893–1919 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 182–4.

<sup>14</sup> A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 160.

<sup>15</sup> Burleigh, *Earthly Powers*, 369.

<sup>16</sup> Burleigh, *Earthly Powers*, 379.

wrong to assume that only Roman Catholic army chaplains had an understanding and empathy with “the average Tommy”.<sup>17</sup>

As mentioned in the introduction, a further cultural and ethnic element is often drawn into this debate in relation to the influence of Irish immigration on Catholicism in mainland Britain during the nineteenth century. This influence, which some claim left Catholicism “buoyant to the point of triumphalism” in the run-up to the war, is well-established.<sup>18</sup> However, while the background of the majority of the migrants is generally accepted as having been religiously tied to Catholicism, assumptions about the economic make-up of this group can be dangerous. For example, in Liverpool 17 percent of the city’s population in 1841 was Irish, meaning that it already had 50,000 well established Irish residents before the potato famine, many of whom were wealthy middle- and upper-middle-class merchants.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the social mobility that resulted from the new industrial opportunities meant that the situation had become even more complex by the start of the twentieth century. Migrant communities may have started off as working class but if the right circumstances prevailed they could rapidly start to achieve their aspirations as members of a new white-collar workforce or self-employed commercial class.

This kind of social mobility provides good grounds to argue that while a large proportion of the native-born priests came from traditional, and often Irish, working-class stock, a significant number would have come from families who were already successfully scaling the social ladder and taking large steps towards, if not already having achieved, a form of middle-class “respectability”. So, there is an argument that while Roman Catholicism on mainland Britain had clearly been underpinned by continual and massive Irish immigration, it did not necessarily follow that all of the priests who originated from the migrant community were working class.

The Irish historian Rafferty goes even further in claiming that most of the Irish-born priests who came to serve on mainland Britain in the pre-war period “came not from the working classes but from the small farmer class”.<sup>20</sup> Essentially, while many of them may not have qualified as “gentlemen” under the more strict and elitist English class system, they

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<sup>17</sup> Nicholas Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism, 1900–1930* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 71–2; and Nicholas Mansfield, *Buildings of the British Labour Movement* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2013), chaps. 11–15.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory, *The Last Great War*, 158–9.

<sup>19</sup> M. Royden, “The World In One City: Liverpool”, *Who Do You Think You Are?* (BBC Magazine) (2011), 18.

<sup>20</sup> Rafferty, “Catholic Chaplains to the British Forces”, 42.

were certainly not “working class” under the traditional terms of that self-same system.

### **Clerical Backgrounds**

In 2010 the Catholic historian John Davies attempted to carry out a study into the family backgrounds and social class of Roman Catholic priests who had been born in Liverpool between 1850 and 1900.<sup>21</sup> The study is of particular interest to this paper as many of the clerics would have been the ideal age for serving as military chaplains in the Great War. Davies conceded that he found it difficult to identify and label the social backgrounds of the clerics, with their obituaries in both local and national Catholic directories and publications rarely providing a rounded picture of the individuals whose personal histories only appeared to begin after they had decided to take holy orders. Indeed, even a cursory review of the clergy lists at Salford Diocesan Archive (one of the largest Catholic communities in Britain at the time of the war) and the monthly Catholic newspaper serving that congregation, the *Harvest*, support this claim. The obituaries do not make any mention of parents or upbringing prior to investiture into the Church.<sup>22</sup>

The above is a problem exacerbated by the common practice of boys who expressed a “calling” often being taken away from their families at a relatively early age. While such a situation would clearly have a tendency to subjugate the influence of class background, for historians it has made it even harder to determine the actual birth-roots of individuals whose “family” had now become “The Church”. Such a lack of clarity does not, of course, validate the common presumption about the working-class backgrounds of priests any more than it disproves it but it does give pause for thought.

When looking at the social backgrounds of Catholic chaplains, the aforementioned factor of social mobility has to be considered, not least as it had already resulted in a number of new Catholic parishes appearing in the 1870s and 1880s in more socially affluent areas. Indeed, in the latter part of the nineteenth century there was something of a battle for the education of the children of these middle-class Catholics. St Joseph’s

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<sup>21</sup> J. Davies, “Catholic Families produce Catholic Priests: Roman Catholic Priests, Social Class and Family Background in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries”, paper presented to a joint conference of the Preston branch of the Institute of Local and Family History and the North West Catholic History Society, Nov. 20, 2010, University of Central Lancashire, UK.

<sup>22</sup> Clergy Lists Salford Diocesan Archive 1914–1919; *Harvest*, 1914–1919.

College in Beulah Hill, London, was set up by the Brothers of the Christian Schools with the specific aim that “from the first the Brothers intended their college at Clapham for boys of middle-class parents”.<sup>23</sup> The Jesuit and Benedictine orders, who were perhaps most closely associated with the old English Catholic traditions, were particularly active in middle-class education. Indeed, the first Jesuit Day School and middle-class Catholic school in England was established at St Domingo House in Liverpool in the late nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the sons of older English Catholics (usually from the commercial or middle classes) would often be educated by Benedictines or Jesuits and, if they became priests, would usually become Benedictine or Jesuit priests rather than diocesan priests. Neither the Jesuits or Benedictines were known for their recruitment among the working classes:<sup>25</sup> a factor that cannot be ignored when looking at Catholic army chaplains as such a large proportion came from either Jesuit or Benedictine backgrounds. For example, sixty-five Benedictine monks from abbeys of the English Benedictine Congregation and from English houses of continental Congregations served as military chaplains during the war.<sup>26</sup> Also, as will be seen, many Jesuits came from privileged Irish as well as English backgrounds.

Of course, there is another side to this argument and it would be wrong to suggest that the Catholic church was solely interested in middle-class education. Diocesan schools, or those run by teaching orders with more of a history of working with the poorer classes (such as the De La Salle Brothers)<sup>27</sup> were far from uncommon. Nevertheless, even with the aid of scholarships, higher levels of education still came with financial commitments: whether this be the need for families to pay for uniform and books or simply shoulder the loss of the extra income that a working sibling would bring into the household. There is as such a viable argument to suggest that children from poorer families would have faced far more of a struggle in seeing their child achieve the kind of education associated with becoming a member of the priesthood. More to the point, there does appear to be ample evidence to suggest that Catholicism crossed class

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<sup>23</sup> W. Battersby, *St Joseph's College 1855–1955* (London: Burns & Oates, 1955), 8.

<sup>24</sup> Davies, “Catholic Families produce Catholic Priests”.

<sup>25</sup> A. Marrin, *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1975), 17.

<sup>26</sup> J. H. Hegerty, “Benedictine Military Chaplains in the First World War” (paper presented to the English Benedictine Congregation History Commission Symposium, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> For a good example see W. Battersby, *The De La Salle Brothers in Great Britain* (London: Burns & Oates, 1954).

divides and that the background of the military chaplains was therefore far from one-dimensional.

### Chaplains and Public Schools

In a biography of the Great War military chaplain Father William Doyle, Michael Moynihan claims that with the Catholic army chaplains “there were none of the barriers that separated the average Tommy from the most well-meaning of public-school-orientated Anglicans”.<sup>28</sup> This is an unusual statement given that Father Doyle was himself a product of the fee-paying Ratcliffe College in Leicestershire. Furthermore, it can be seen when looking at a number of specific chaplains that there is evidence of attendance at private schools and leading universities. In fact, there are numerous examples of Catholics attending elite educational establishments. When Henry Dundas, a junior officer and product of Eton, looked around the mess of the Scots Guards in 1917 he was relieved to see that it was dominated by public schoolboys, including an old boy of the influential Roman Catholic facility at Belmont.<sup>29</sup>

Large numbers of public, fee-paying schoolboys (including both former and existing pupils, staff and chaplains) signed up from the leading Catholic colleges, with many having had experience in military leadership courtesy of the Officer Training Corps (OTC) movement that so many public schools (of all religious denominations) had embraced. For example, at Stonyhurst the whole college trained on two afternoons each week and members of the OTC regularly took part in exercises with soldiers from the professional garrison at Preston.<sup>30</sup> The archive at Stonyhurst reveals that just two years into the war more than 700 pupils were serving with the forces in the Great War, and a number were operating as RC army chaplains. The Cambridge University Catholic Chaplaincy department reported that due to war service its numbers had dropped by October 1914 to just thirty. By Easter of 1915 the figure had fallen to twenty students and by autumn of the same year the numbers were down to “only two or three English or Irish added to which was a handful of Catholics, no more than six, from India and the Empire”.<sup>31</sup> It

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<sup>28</sup> M. Moynihan, *God on our Side: The British Padres in World War I* (London: Leo Cooper, 1983), 175.

<sup>29</sup> From J. Lewis-Stempel, *Six Weeks: The Short and Gallant Life of the British Officer in the First World War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2010), 59.

<sup>30</sup> Snape, “British Catholicism and the British Army”, 316.

<sup>31</sup> P. Gregory-Jones, *A History of the Cambridge University Catholic Chaplaincy 1895–1965* (privately published, 1965), 64–5.

was a similar story at other elite Catholic establishments such as Ampleforth in Yorkshire, where 375 old boys and staff served with the military, including four monks who acted as army chaplains,<sup>32</sup> and St Ignatius College, in Enfield, Middlesex, which had 451 old boys and staff fighting. Among the list of fatalities at St Ignatius are two former masters who were both killed while serving as army chaplains: Father Robert Monteith and Father Cuthbert McGinty.<sup>33</sup> Most of the men who fought from these elite Catholic establishments were said to be serving as commissioned officers, and none would have had any problem identifying the soup spoon during silver service in the officers' mess.



Father William Doyle, an Irish Jesuit priest who was killed while serving on the Western Front. The son of a magistrate, he attended the fee-paying Ratcliffe College in Leicestershire as a child

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<sup>32</sup> A. Marett-Crosby, *A School of the Lord's Service: A History of Ampleforth* (Somerset: Butler and Tanner Ltd, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> P. Pankin, *St Ignatius College 1894–1994* (Middlesex: St Ignatius College Press, 1994).

When talking about the officer class it should also be remembered that the chaplains were officers by rank in the military machine. Like any other officer they were given a number and commission and their appointment would be published in the supplement to the *London Gazette*. They were now among the higher tiers of a strictly rank-ordered society, entering a whole nine ranks above the private soldier. As Loudon states: “It is an undeniable fact and the universal experience of army chaplains that for the greater part of their ministry they will have disproportionately more contact, ecclesiastically, administratively and socially with fellow officers than they will with non-commissioned ranks”.<sup>34</sup> There is, as such, no escaping the fact that most of a chaplain’s time away from his duties would be spent in the company of officers. In the early part of the war the vast majority of these officers were public-school educated and generally from the wealthier classes. Grammar school boys and –even more latterly – those with elementary school backgrounds, only started to be promoted from the ranks to the role of commissioned officers when rising level of casualties forced such a change.

The British army was polarized by class at the outbreak of war; this was not an army of conscription, as in France and Germany, where the middle classes served in the rank-and-file alongside the labourer.<sup>35</sup> Even the Territorial Army tended to be run on class lines, with “the ‘other ranks’ from the terraced streets and their officers from the leafy avenues”.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the “Service” or “Pals” battalions set up in 1914 by Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, were often highly selective in a bid to allow volunteers from the middle classes to step forward safe in the knowledge that they would be able to fight alongside men of equal social stature.<sup>37</sup> The *Scotsman*, for example, carried an advert in December 1914 about plans for a new battalion of “university men, public school boys and sportsmen”,<sup>38</sup> the point being that while the majority of the “Pals” battalions may have been primarily of working-class stock, there was nevertheless considerable middle-class representation.<sup>39</sup> As such, it does not automatically follow that chaplains who came from a working-class

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<sup>34</sup> Loudon, *Chaplains in Conflict*, 33.

<sup>35</sup> R. Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front* (London: Harper Collins, 2004), 102–3.

<sup>36</sup> K. W. Mitchinson, *Amateur Soldiers* (Oldham: Jade Books, 1999), 11.

<sup>37</sup> P. Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army: The Raising of the New Armies 1914–1916* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), chap. 3.

<sup>38</sup> *The Scotsman*, Dec. 19, 1914.

<sup>39</sup> See for example Brig E. A. James, *British Regiments 1914–1918* (London: Samson Books, 1978).



background were automatically conferred an advantage. While the majority of the men fighting in the British army were unquestionably from the working classes, significant numbers were not, particularly among the officers who would have the ultimate say on how and where the chaplains operated.

As a further example of the wide demographic of the flock that a Catholic chaplain may be faced with while serving on the battlefields of the Great War, at the same time that hundreds were signing up from the elite schools and colleges, St Joseph's Home in Lancashire (which dealt with boys from a high-poverty area) had seen more than 200 of its former occupants enlist within the first two years of the conflict.<sup>40</sup> Catholicism was "a broad church" and it is possible that priests from the diocesan parishes may have held the real advantage (even over members of their own faith from more closeted religious orders and teaching positions) in that they would have dealt on a daily basis with parishioners from a wider mix of social backgrounds. This, of course, could form the basis of a study in its own right, but it is worth raising the issue as another example of how sweeping generalizations about social class, army chaplains and the war are dangerous.

### Some Catholic Chaplains

Putting the latter issue aside and returning to the principal focus of the debate, perhaps the most obvious way of addressing the claim that the Catholic chaplains were all "working class" is to look at some specific individuals. In his book about First World War army chaplains Moynihan looked at just the one Catholic chaplain, Father William Doyle. The author found that the Irish-born Jesuit and son of a senior civil servant did not fit the historical stereotype, but was happy to claim that this priest was "an exception" who was clearly unlike "most" of his Catholic counterparts who did come from working-class backgrounds.<sup>41</sup> Even a cursory look at some of the most commonly quoted of Catholic chaplains (that is, those whose names appear regularly in Great War literature by virtue of memoirs or letters published for mass consumption both during and after the conflict) does not appear to support this.

For example, another Irish Jesuit priest who was to become highly decorated by the military (winning both the Distinguished Service Order and Military Cross for bravery) and who was to achieve subsequent

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<sup>40</sup> Diocese of Salford, "Catholic Protection and Rescue Society Report" (1915), 3.

<sup>41</sup> Moynihan, *God on our Side*, 175.

acclaim, was Father Henry Vincent Gill. Born into a well known and landed Dublin family who had a publishing and printing business, Gill was a professor of science who got his MA at Cambridge. According to *Irish Life* magazine he remained an academic after taking holy orders and gave up important research work into electricity in order to join the army chaplaincy service in the war.<sup>42</sup> Father Gill was to ultimately gain the rank of major. Father Benedict Williamson, who penned a highly popular memoir about his war service, received a late religious calling having worked as a successful architect prior to becoming a Catholic priest.<sup>43</sup> While architects were apprenticed tradesman, they are not generally associated as being working-class artisans. Father Matthew Forster Burdess (who was killed in action) was a descendant of the wealthy Forsters of Bamburgh, Northumberland, and had an ancestor who had led the Jacobite rebellion of 1715. Father Charles Whiteford (who died of his wounds) was a former pupil of the top public school at Rugby and had gone on to study at Merton College in Oxford before joining the priesthood, while Father Marshall, who was serving with the 21st Division, was an Oxford graduate who worked as the Roman Catholic Oxford University chaplain after the war was over. The wealthy Devases family, brought up as Catholics after the head of the household (Charles Stanton Devas) converted while studying at Eton, had three sons serving as RC army chaplains.<sup>44</sup>

To go into more detail, Father Henry Day, a Jesuit who had also been public-school educated, served as a chaplain with a socially elite cavalry formation – the 2nd South Midland Mounted Division of yeomanry – and was not ashamed to reveal that he was very much at home in such refined company. Indeed, it is worth repeating some of Day’s accounts of his comrades and experiences from the first of two successful memoirs that he was to have published (and reprinted due to popular demand): “With the members of the regiment I passed the remaining period in England. They were a delightful set to live with [...] the absence of class distinction favoured this. The HAC (Honorable Artillery Company) is a club as well as a regiment and one of the qualifications for membership is a public school education. The men I was with, like their officers, belonged for the most part to the well-to-do class”. Day continued: “The social latitude allowed me, from time to time, to hold little evening parties in my room

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<sup>42</sup> *Irish Life*, Sept. 24, 1915.

<sup>43</sup> B. Williamson, *Happy Days in France and Flanders* (London: Harding & More Ltd, 1920).

<sup>44</sup> T. Johnston and J. Hegarty, *The Cross on the Sword: Catholic Chaplains in the Forces* (London: Chapman, 1996), 176.

after Mess. At these familiar reunions we indulged in due moderation in smoking, wine, cakes and coffee, accompanied with social chat, songs, recitations and stories. These cheery parties are amongst my happiest recollections of five years in the Army".<sup>45</sup> In Egypt, while billeted with the Berkshire Regiment, Day wrote of the officers' mess: "Iced coffee, iced lemonade, to say nothing of drinks stronger than coffee or minerals – vermouths, cocktails, John Collinse, American straw drinks, British Bass, shandy-gaff and the rest – all could be had. No wonder then that whatever the bedevilmments of the day, we were all reconciled to life when we met of an evening. Fun and chaff and rags approached the limits at times". The Catholic chaplain was even given an exploding cigarette as part of a "jape" involving one of the junior officers.<sup>46</sup>

The senior Catholic chaplain Monsignor Bickerstaff-Drew was born the son of an Anglican priest but ended up taking up holy orders with the Catholic faith. His missives to his mother from the Western Front certainly suggest that he was very much at ease, if not happier, in the company of the higher classes. Bickerstaff-Drew regularly reported home about the "types" that he was coming into contact with while serving in France and Belgium, and in March 1915 he wrote of one posting that he clearly deemed below himself. "So far as I can judge there is no French aristocracy here; you hardly ever meet anyone in the streets who looks like a real lady, and the few gentlemen are officers who don't belong to the place", he penned.<sup>47</sup> The preceding September, in a somewhat typically class-conscious exchange, he wrote: "Next we met General Forestier-Walker: I don't mean the ghost of our old friend Sir Frederick, but his cousin who was at Salisbury and whose wife was Lady Mary Liddell, daughter of the Lord Ravensworth whom Athol Liddell succeeded".<sup>48</sup>

Using material from the modern diocese of Brentwood in Essex it is possible to put together a small case study into the backgrounds of its chaplains who served in the Great War. Brentwood has eleven priests in its archives who served as military chaplains and by the use of historical records, such as the census, it has been possible to identify the areas where they were born, what their parents and families did for a living and where they were educated. In some cases the evidence appears far more conclusive, but where this has not proved the case caution has been exercised by lowering rather than raising social status. While clearly a limited

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<sup>45</sup> H. Day, *A Cavalry Chaplain* (London: Heath Cranton Ltd, 1922), 37–8.

<sup>46</sup> Day, *A Cavalry Chaplain*, 75.

<sup>47</sup> F. Bickerstaffe-Drew, *John Ayscough's Letters to his Mother 1914–1916* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1919), 88.

<sup>48</sup> Bickerstaffe-Drew, *John Ayscough's Letters*, 31.



A sketch of the Jesuit priest and army cavalry chaplain Father Henry Day. He was serving in the Salford diocese at the time of the outbreak of war and was very happy to be placed with an elite unit principally made up of former public school boys

study, the findings are nevertheless interesting in that they show that while the majority of the chaplains came from upper-working-class backgrounds, nearly a quarter came from middle-class or upper-class families:<sup>49</sup>

Father Thomas Adkins was born in Herne Hill, south London, as the son of a newspaper canvasser. His parents originated from Birmingham and he appears to have been from the upper-working classes or lower-middle classes; Father John Bloomfield was born in military barracks in Ireland and was the son of a sergeant-major. In his teens he was listed as living at an orphanage and it seems likely that he was working class; Father Basil Booker was born in Willesden, north-west London, and his father was a stained-glass window and ecclesiastical artist. His family tree includes Catholic bookmakers and educationalists and it appears safe to assume that he was middle class or higher; Father Vincent Cameron was born at Highgate and his father was a bookbinder. He was educated at St Wilfred's (Cotton College) in Staffordshire, suggesting he was upper-working class; Father Thomas Clarke was born in Colchester and his father a boot-maker and his mother a domestic servant. The evidence points to a working-class upbringing; Father Bernard Clay was born in a military camp at Folkestone, Kent, and the son of a quartermaster from an old military family. He appears to have been from the middle classes; Father Arthur Cowd's parents were working as hall porter and assistant housekeeper at the Archbishop of Westminster's house, suggesting they were upper-working class; Father Michael Healy was born in London and his parents managed a hotel in Sidmouth, making it likely that they were lower-middle class; Father Wilfred Thompson was born at Mortlake, Surrey, and his father gained his MA from Cambridge University before being offered a lecturing post at the Catholic University College. The implication is that he came from an upper-class- or higher-middle-class background; Father William Toft was born at Grays and his father was a boilermaker. He was working class; Father Joseph Whitfield was born in Hackney, London, and his father a salesman and his mother a box worker, suggesting they were upper-working class.

It is also worth noting that the Brentwood case study suggests that less than half of the eleven priests who served as military chaplains were part-Irish (a total of five out of the eleven had one parent or more from Ireland). Of the chaplains who did have a first-generation link to Ireland, two appear to have been working class, one upper-working class, one

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<sup>49</sup> This study was carried out by the author of this paper by using material provided by the Brentford Diocesan Archive, including private research carried out by the diocesan archivist, as well as material from the Roman Catholic clergy lists of 1914–1923.

lower-middle class and the other upper-middle class. This would seem to support the argument against the “one-size-fits-all” approach to the class backgrounds of the RC chaplains and suggests that it may be as contentious in the case of the Irish chaplains as it is with the other British nationals.

As an addendum to the Brentwood study, the records show that two men who served with distinction with the infantry during the war subsequently went into the priesthood in this diocese. These men were Father Eustace Dudley (the son of a Church of England vicar, whose mother was the daughter of an Anglican clergyman) and Father Brian Reeves (the son of a commodore with the P&O Line who, after studying at the University of London, had worked for the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank). Both of these men could safely be labelled “gentlemen”.

However, regardless of class, not all chaplains were gentlemen. Gerald Burgoyne (a wealthy individual who was serving as the senior officer in charge of an Irish infantry battalion) noted in a veiled reference to the background of his Catholic chaplain in January 1915 that he was “a jolly good parson, probably, but a shocking bad Bridge player”.<sup>50</sup> The junior Catholic officer Edwin Campion Vaughan wrote contemptuously of his uncouth Catholic chaplain following a drunken gathering in the mess in March 1917 in which “after a long singsong, a violent rag started in which the enormous and disgusting padre offered to fight six subalterns. He knocked them about for a long time before he was de-bagged and spanked”.<sup>51</sup>

While all of the priests mentioned above amount to little more than a mere handful taken from the hundreds who served, it is nevertheless hoped that it has been demonstrated that generalizations about the backgrounds of the Catholic chaplains are unsound.

## Conclusion

While there is strong evidence to show that the Catholic church had a long history of working with the poor and that this was a commitment that had only grown as a result of the Industrial Revolution, it is wrong to believe that Catholics were acting exclusively. It is undoubtedly true that the Catholic Church in Britain had a longer tradition of social, or slum, ministry and that many clergy could trace their roots back to less-affluent

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<sup>50</sup> G. Burgoyne, *The Burgoyne Diaries* (Bath: Harmsworth Publishing, 1985), 82.

<sup>51</sup> E. Campion Vaughan, *Some Desperate Glory* (London: Warne, 1981), 108.

families. Nevertheless, even limited studies by the likes of Davies<sup>52</sup> and the author of this paper suggest that it is dangerous to make sweeping judgements about the social class and experiences of Catholic chaplains. The social make-up of Catholics in the British Isles was far from clear cut: while Irish migration resulted in a massive increase in the working-class quota of Catholics on the mainland, as Rafferty points out, it is also true that Catholicism had a strong and existing tradition among the middle and upper classes in both Ireland and Britain as a whole. In addition, upward mobility in urban centres only served to confuse the social stereotype. As Moynihan's claims about the "exception" of the well educated and middle-class Father William Doyle showed, it is highly dangerous to make generalizations about Irish-born chaplains.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, it is quite possible that being "working class" may not have always proved advantageous in a military establishment that was (particularly in the earlier stages of the war) polarized by class. While it is true that the majority of the infantry were from poorer communities, it should not be forgotten that the army of the Great War crossed social divides, not least with the advent of the "Service" or "Pals" battalions, some of which were aimed specifically at boosting levels of volunteering among the middle classes. Louden is surely right in his claim that "chaplains are commissioned officers and closely identify with that group both by inclination and status".<sup>54</sup> Quite simply, chaplains of all faiths would generally spend more time in the company of their fellow officers (most of whom would be from the middle and upper classes). In addition, if they wanted to gain favours, such as permission to move more freely among the men and at the sharp-end of the battlefield they would need to be on good terms with their fellow officers.

In the case of the military chaplains featured in this study, many have been shown to come from the middle classes or families of "means", to have studied at public schools and to have been quite at home when mixing with the elite. Most of the most famous memoirs by Catholic chaplains are from men who were clearly from privileged backgrounds. Memoirs have, of course, traditionally been written by people from the middle or upper classes, but even if such men were a minority among the ranks of the Catholic chaplains they were still there and playing an important role. In addition, many of these men went on to win plaudits for their ministry and to gain medals for bravery, suggesting that class was

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<sup>52</sup> Davies, "Catholic Families Produce Catholic Priests".

<sup>53</sup> Moynihan, *God on our Side*, 175.

<sup>54</sup> Loudon, *Chaplains in Conflict*, 1.

irrelevant to both their worth as men of God and as members of the military machine.

Although this is a limited case study, there would nevertheless seem to be enough exceptions to challenge the “working-class” assumptions so commonly repeated by large numbers of writers and academics. While it is accepted that the evidence here presented is not without its limitations, there would appear to be enough evidence to suggest that common assumptions about the backgrounds of the RC chaplains need to be re-evaluated. As such, the “working-class” label so liberally applied to the Catholic chaplains may not only be wrong but also misleading in terms of the wider legacy of the Roman Catholic Church during the Great War.



# LABOUR PATRIOTISM IN LANCASHIRE AND LONDON, 1914-1918

DAVID SWIFT

Amongst the mountainous literature on the Great War composed over the past hundred years, and indeed amongst the fresh scholarship occasioned by the centenary of the conflict, the relationship between the British left and the war has been rather overlooked. This oversight is understandable: the virulent support for the war amongst the working-class generally and the labour movement specifically is rather awkward for social or labour historians, while political or military historians have often taken patriotism for granted without questioning the reasons behind it and the implications of it. Yet not only did the war receive near-unanimous support from the trade unions, the Labour Party, and various socialist societies; labour patriotism during the war was vital to securing support for the Labour Party in the post-war world, and had a considerable impact on the type of labour movement which developed after the armistice. This was especially true in the two localities examined here: large parts of Lancashire and London were Labour deserts, dominated by the Liberal party or working-class Toryism; nationalistic sentiment and support for the war was particularly high in both areas; and both regions witnessed Labour breakthroughs in the years after the war. It is almost redundant to state that both areas were considerably politically, economically, socially and culturally heterogeneous: as Martin Pugh has observed, in the East End of London Labour was effectively two parties, with George Lansbury bearing the standard for radical-socialism in Bow and Bromley, and Will Thorne employing a populist patriotism in West Ham.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, whilst it will be argued here that a patriotic, pragmatic, reform-minded socialism was the key to Labour's success across most of the capital after the war, that did not prevent the white working-class voters of Battersea from returning the Indian-born communist Shapurji Saklatvala in 1922.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Pugh, "The Rise of Labour and the Political Culture of Conservatism, 1890–1945", *History*, 87 (2002), 529.

Similarly, here “Lancashire” is taken to mean the historic county of Lancashire, incorporating such diverse entities as the religiously-divided, strongly Tory portside city of Liverpool; the industrial powerhouse of Manchester; the radical and Nonconformist cotton towns of Oldham, Burnley and Blackburn; and mixed mining and industrial constituencies such as Wigan and Bolton. Again, not only do we find a great deal of diversity across the area, but also within specific cities and towns. After 1918 the Labour Party needed to reflect this diversity, and appeal to Liberal Nonconformists and working-class Tories, teetotalers and pub-goers, the football, racecourse and music-hall crowds and the church and chapel attendees, Catholics and Anglicans, co-operators and casual labourers. This it did with a great deal of success, aided by its new constitution and the establishment of district Labour parties, and its success in Lancashire and London serves as a case study for its post-war success more generally: for as in those two areas, nationally the Labour Party had to appeal to Liberal working men and women, trade unionists, working-class Tories, and middle-class radicals. Across Britain at large, as in Lancashire and London, Labour patriotism during the war was a crucial ingredient to the success of this multi-faceted appeal. The first section of this chapter examines support for the war amongst the labour movement in Lancashire and London; the second considers the waning of support for the conflict and the sporadic strikes which characterized the last two years of the war; the third section examines how various labour organizations may have “gained” from the war, whilst the fourth and final section deals with the war as a motor of support for Labour in Lancashire and London after the armistice.

As Adrian Gregory and others have argued, there was no great clamour for war in the days of late July and early August 1914. Indeed, the labour movement set itself against it, threatened strikes to prevent it, and convened a Peace Emergency committee to co-ordinate efforts against the conflict. Yet after war had been declared the pacifist position became untenable: there was an outpouring of patriotic sentiment to which the labour movement had no choice but to acquiesce. Almost immediately the peace committee became the War Emergency: Workers’ National Committee (WNC), vital for protecting the interests of the vulnerable and ensuring labour cohesion over the course of the conflict; a political and trade union truce soon followed; and eventually Labour MPs were brought into the government. In the early years support for the vigorous prosecution of the war was near universal; Keir Hardie was chased off stage in his own constituency on August 6, 1914, due to his association with the anti-war movement, and while some branches of the labour

movement – most notably those associated with the Pleb’s League and the Independent Labour Party – continued to defiantly call for peace, these were very much minority positions. Indeed, even some branches of the ILP supported the war, as in Manchester.<sup>2</sup> Amongst the most patriotic were the “new”, or unskilled unions. In Liverpool, 8,000 dockers, the majority of whom were members of the National Union of Dock Labourers, joined the services between August 1914 and January 1915. In addition, the Mersey docks saw the establishment of a “dockers’ battalion”, where normal trade union conditions were suspended and the men organized into a labouring unit along army lines, with strict discipline, in exchange for a guaranteed 35s per week. Far from being wary of this subjection of trade union rights, the new units were wildly oversubscribed, although whether this was due to patriotism or the desire for regular work and guaranteed wages is debatable; most likely both concerns played their part.<sup>3</sup> The ugly side to patriotism was also frequently exposed in Liverpool, with events such as the *Lusitania* sinking prompting violent anti-German rioting, and a menacing undercurrent remained throughout the conflict, and many Britons of German descent attempted to hide their heritage. The WNC papers contain a letter from Wright Robinson of the Liverpool ILP, writing on behalf of a concerned German-born Liverpoolian called Mr Doviack, who was looking to change his name. WNC secretary Jim Middleton put Doviack in touch with Labour Party counsel H. H. Slessor (who had himself changed his name from Schloesser), and soon enough Mr Doviack became Mr Denton.<sup>4</sup>

The union journals paid tribute to Lancastrian trade unionists who had enlisted: the *Railway Review* of January 29, 1915 told of Private Jones of the No. 4 Manchester branch of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR): “a very active and loyal member of the branch [...] if he proves as good a soldier as he was a Trade Unionist the Germans will not land in England yet. We are proud of our comrade and wish him God speed and a safe and glorious return to his country, wife and children”.<sup>5</sup> Later in the war they carried stories of union men who had distinguished themselves, such as Corporal Lodge of the Rifle Brigade and NUR No. 5 Manchester

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<sup>2</sup> Pugh, “The Rise of Labour”, 526.

<sup>3</sup> K. Grieves, “The Liverpool Dock Battalion: Military Intervention in the Mersey Docks, 1915–1918”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 131 (1982), 141–3.

<sup>4</sup> WNC.2/3/5/7–11 – correspondence between Wright Robinson, Jim Middleton and H. H. Slessor on subject of Mr Doviack.

<sup>5</sup> *Railway Review*, Jan. 29, 1915.

branch, who won the Military Medal.<sup>6</sup> Indeed in January 1918 the journal of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) was delighted to report that Sergeant Harry Coverdale, who left a secure job in engineering for the Manchester Regiment in September 1914, had won a Victoria Cross to go with the Military Medal won earlier in the war.<sup>7</sup> Soon enough the patriotism of Lancastrian trade unionists began to be reflected in grim notices in the labour newspapers: the *Clarion* in April 1915 carried a letter from the mother of John Selkirk, a private in the Liverpool Scottish who had been killed in action. In her missive she criticized the pre-war anti-socialist critics of the *Clarion* editor Robert Blatchford: “The British politicians may have the souls of hucksters, they may have lied – they did lie – about Robert Blatchford, but they have proved that they can rise above their meaner selves; they can be finely touched to fine issues; and once more Britain stands for the rights and liberties of the world against the tyrant. I hold my head up proudly, citizen of no mean city”.<sup>8</sup>

The trade unionists of London were no more adverse to the fight than their Lancastrian counterparts. The war record of the Amalgamated Society of Watermen, Lightermen and Bargemen of the Thames shows that 656 members of the union served with the colours – with thirty-one losing their lives – and this was in keeping with the actions of most of the various unions, large and small, operating in the capital.<sup>9</sup> In July 1916 the London Trades Council reaffirmed its support for the war, passing a resolution describing the conflict as a defensive crusade against Prussian militarism, while an amendment calling for international working-class solidarity was defeated.<sup>10</sup> The July 16, 1915 edition of the *Post* (organ of the Fawcett Association, a postmen’s union) featured a photograph of the Post Office Maxim Gun section of the 8th (Post Office Rifles) Battalion, City of London Regiment, with several proud trade unionists standing sternly beside their gun.<sup>11</sup> In addition to river workers and post men, the clerks of the capital also rushed to the colours: Ernest Thurtle of the National Union of Clerks – later to become a Labour MP and prominent campaigner for ex-servicemen’s rights – joined the London Territorials and many other head-office staff signed up.<sup>12</sup> Indeed many clerks were to die during the

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<sup>6</sup> *Railway Review*, June 8, 1917.

<sup>7</sup> *ASE Monthly Journal and Report*, Jan. 1918.

<sup>8</sup> *Clarion*, Apr. 9, 1915.

<sup>9</sup> MSS. 126/WL/X/32–51 – War Record of Amalgamated Society of Watermen, Lightermen and Bargemen of the River Thames.

<sup>10</sup> B. A. Waites, *A Class Society at War* (London: Berg, 1987), 190.

<sup>11</sup> *Post*, July 16, 1915.

<sup>12</sup> *Clerks*, Dec. 1914.

course of the war: tribute was paid to a Mr J. R. Bray of the North London branch: "Always to the fore in NUC matters, he was to the fore in desiring to serve his country in the Great War".<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the *Clarion* of November 5, 1915 carried the sad news: "Clarionettes in South London will be grieved to learn that our dear comrade Jack Reed has been killed in action. His genial kindness and serenity endeared him to all, and there are some who knew him intimately who will learn of his death with a dreadful pang".<sup>14</sup>

The Boilermakers Report of April 1918 carried the news that Corporal Andrews, a stretcher-bearer of London No. 11 Branch and the Royal West Kent had been awarded the DCM and the Belgian *Croix-de-Guerre*.<sup>15</sup> Nor was it only the working men of London who came forward in great numbers: the *Co-operative News* of July 24, 1916 reported the site of thousands of women protesting for the right to work in war industries; according to the paper this "showed up" the conscriptionists by demonstrating that there was no lack of volunteers, but rather a lack of organization and leadership.<sup>16</sup> T. E. Naylor was president of the Islington Trades and Labour Council, president of the London Society of Compositors from 1906 to 1938, one of the founders of the *Daily Herald* and MP for South East Southwark from 1920, and he supported the war but opposed conscription.<sup>17</sup> Fred Montague was the London organizer of the ILP, and joined the army, served in France, was commissioned in the Army Education Department, and addressed recruitment meetings in his lieutenant's uniform. He was to become the MP for West Islington from 1923 to 1931 and 1935 to 1947.<sup>18</sup>

The *Co-Partners' Magazine* was the organ of the London Gas and Electric Light Company, a path-breaking co-operative between workers and the corporation. In July 1915 it carried a letter from a soldier in the trenches signed "F. C. B.". He claimed that:

I would rather risk it all again than be a slacker. I rejoice to think I am not that. We are at present resting in a dear little village; as I write I am sitting in a comfortable room, with a full belly and a nice cigar; and if it was not for the thoughts of my dear old pals we have left behind I would be perfectly happy. I understand some of the boys of East Ham are knocking

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<sup>13</sup> *Clerks*, Jan. 1917.

<sup>14</sup> *Clarion*, Nov. 5, 1917.

<sup>15</sup> *Boilermakers Reports*, Apr. 1918.

<sup>16</sup> *Co-operative News*, July 24, 1916.

<sup>17</sup> K. Weller, *Don't be a Soldier!* (London: Journeyman, 1985), 27–8.

<sup>18</sup> Weller, *Don't be a Soldier!*, 28.

things about. It would be better for everyone if they came out here. If I had a brother, and he was a slacker, I would never speak to him again.<sup>19</sup>

This neatly encapsulates the attitude of many working-class people generally and trade unionists specifically: that those who dodged the services or took unofficial industrial action were shirkers or slackers, failing to pull their weight in their nation's hour of need. Very often such people were compared to blacklegs and treated with the same contempt. This was exacerbated by the fact that most conscientious objectors claimed exemption from conscription for religious reasons – only a tiny percentage of them gave political reasons in their claim for exemption – and this resulted in a high proportion of middle-class liberals and radicals remaining in the United Kingdom while their compatriots who did not have the privileged background and education to cause them to object to the war for moral reasons were shipped off to the slaughter. To be sure, in areas such as the West Riding of Yorkshire, south Wales and the Durham coalfields, there were a high proportion of working-class Nonconformists and radicals who strenuously objected to the war. Yet West Lancashire and London were largely devoid of such people: here the working-class culture was based on the pub and music hall and tended towards a slight nihilism, the result of casual employment and a week-by-week existence, in stark contrast to the co-operative, abstemious, self-improving culture which sustained the labour movement in other parts of the country. Similarly the sporadic strikes by craft unionists from 1915 to 1918 drew a great deal of ire from unskilled workers who did not have the luxury of the skilled worker's exemption from the trenches. This spawned the famous ditty about the ASE:

Don't send me in the Army, George,  
I'm in the ASE.  
Take all the bloody labourers,  
But for God's sake don't take me.  
You want me for a soldier?  
Well, that can never be –  
A man of my ability,  
And in the ASE!<sup>20</sup>

Will Crooks neatly captured this attitude in a speech he gave to the Co-Partnership Committee on November 2, 1915:

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<sup>19</sup> *Co-Partners' Magazine*, July 1915.

<sup>20</sup> T. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 654.

To begin with I am known as Bill Crooks. I have never risen from the ranks; I remain in the ranks still, and I do not intend to get out of them, either. We will get to close quarters, and ask ourselves what this war has to do with us.

After ruminating on the travesties and inequities of Imperial Germany for some time, he continued:

I do not expect men to do something for nothing. You work for all you can get; I am not going to deny that. But when I was in the trenches and at the base, where I saw hundreds of thousands – literally hundreds of thousands, and I know what I am saying – of your brothers, of your sons, and of your nephews, we talked about things at home. Some of the men think about home and how they are doing at home, as this little story will illustrate. On the last night I told them: “I attended a school where the little children are who give you the greatest anguish given to anyone – the physically deficient; and I said: ‘Now I am going to see your daddies and your big brothers; shan’t I tell them something from you?’ And one little piping voice said ‘Tell them, Mr Crooks, we can sing *God Save the Queen* as good as they can’”. Tommy cheered it to the echo; it brought him home.

They are our people. You are working and toiling, sometimes too hard, and you want to lose a quarter, and you want to lose half a day. I know you are working for wages, you are working for your daily bread – but there is sometimes a little more to be done – another turn for love.

Crooks then rhetorically asked what he had done so that a wounded soldier, who had been left out for four days, should shed blood for him:

Work too hard? Sugar too dear? Tea too much? Taxes too high?

The war is no business of us working folk? I do not want to test it beyond saying that I do not call this a capitalists’ war: I do not call it a Government war. By the living God that created me I believe it is a people’s war for the liberty and virtue of our own homes.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the official trade union truce, 1915 saw the beginning of a series of sporadic, unofficial strike actions across various industries around the country, often led by factory shop stewards in the teeth of opposition from the union leadership. It is crucial to understand that these strikes were not “revolutionary defeatist” in nature, but rather desperate attempts to raise wage levels in step with the cost of living. Transport workers in London walked out in May 1915 in an attempt to win a war bonus to make up some of the shortfall; the county council responded by sacking everyone

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<sup>21</sup> *Co-Partners’ Magazine*, Dec. 1915.

of military age and telling them to volunteer, in a cynical attempt to use the war and popular patriotic sentiment to force workers to accept their inadequate wages. Yet the authorities eventually relented: by August 1915 the LCC had conceded a 3s- per-week war bonus, and a similar strike in May 1916 won an additional bonus.<sup>22</sup> Nor was it just manual workers who felt the pinch of the increase in the cost of living: May 1916 witnessed the first clerks' strike at the Wigan Coal and Steel Works, although this was resolved rather more amicably, with the company conceding a pay increase after only two days. The *Clerks* magazine chided the government for their lack of good faith; the trade unions had voluntarily declared a truce, and they were rewarded with the government's obstinate refusal to control price increases, thus forcing the unions to return to "business as usual", only for the government to plead with them not to call for wage increases and use the war and the patriotism of the average worker as a means of blackmail.<sup>23</sup>

Further price increases and the inadequate response from the government increased the industrial tension: there was a series of unofficial strikes in London in April and May 1917, although it was agreed that those working on anti-submarine devices at Crayford Works in Bexley should not down tools with the others.<sup>24</sup> Nationally, however, the workers were not as stoic: the shop stewards of the ASE, against the express orders of their executive, led a nationwide walkout in May 1917, with up to 200,000 engineers out on strike. Although these strikes were responses to the irresistible pressure on living standards, the government and the right-wing press portrayed the actions as revolutionary and unpatriotic, and a harsh crackdown followed, with a police raid of the ASE offices in Manchester on May 18, 1917.<sup>25</sup> The engineers' strike continued to wax and wane across the country until August 1917, but that was not to be the end of the strike actions. January 1918 saw a walkout by 4,000 munitions workers in Manchester; there were two large cotton stoppages in the autumn of 1918, and the Co-operative Wholesale Society witnessed strikes by its workers at the end of 1918.<sup>26</sup> It is important to understand that wartime strikes were not "unpatriotic" in nature, even in such apparently "revolutionary" areas as south Wales and the Clyde; when disaster threatened the British army in March 1918 virtually all strike action immediately ceased; low wages and

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<sup>22</sup> Weller, *Don't be a Soldier!*, 29–31.

<sup>23</sup> *Clerks*, Jan. 1916.

<sup>24</sup> Waites, *A Class Society at War*, 208.

<sup>25</sup> A. Seipp, *The Ordeal of Peace* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 73.

<sup>26</sup> Seipp, *Ordeal of Peace*, 47, 73.



dreadful conditions were outrageous but tolerable; defeat for Britain was simply unthinkable.

Despite the suspension of trade union practices, the cancelling of bank holidays, and exorbitant price increases, the WNC co-ordinated the labour movement's response to the war so as to protect the most vulnerable from the worst of the excesses engendered by the conflict. One of the most important areas for the WNC was controlling food prices. To this end, food vigilance committees were set up by local labour organizations across the country. The London food vigilance committee was established with the help of NUR members.<sup>27</sup> The London Labour Emergency Committee circulated a leaflet alerting parents to the free school meals for the children of the unemployed now available:

If you are out of work, not only can your children be fed by the school authorities on the school days (Monday to Friday), but they can also be fed by them on Saturday and Sunday. You ought not to allow your children to go hungry, and if you are unable to feed them, tell the children to ask the Teachers for BREAKFAST AND DINNER ON SATURDAY AND SUNDAY (as well as the other days of the week), and if necessary see the Teacher yourself.<sup>28</sup>

Not only did the actions of the WNC and its subordinate committees and local bodies protect the most vulnerable from the worst effects of the war, the war also resulted in some gains for the labour movement, most notably through trade union recognition, minimum wages, nationalization, and restrictions on working hours. The war record of the Amalgamated Society of Waterman, Lightermen and Bargemen of the Thames, for example, stated their new conditions of employment, as applicable from April 22, 1919: working hours had been lowered from ten hours before the war to eight hours; pay had almost doubled to 11s 4d per day; all work done between 5pm and 8pm and 6am and 8am counted as overtime and was paid at 1s 8d per hour; and travelling to work was paid for at 10d per hour or part of an hour – although this was subject to arbitration – along with many other improvements.

Whether or not the experience of the war led ex-servicemen to be “radicalized” and move towards the labour movement is debatable. In Liverpool early in 1919 naval petty officers led 700 sailors in a protest at

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<sup>27</sup> Waites, *A Class Society at War*, 212.

<sup>28</sup> WNC.26/1/2 – London Labour Emergency Committee leaflet: MEALS FOR SCHOOLCHILDREN ON SATURDAY AND SUNDAY.

demobilization delays.<sup>29</sup> The left-leaning National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers fielded nineteen candidates in the December 1918 general election: eleven of these came last in their polls, whilst two came second to last, and twelve lost their deposits. However in straight fights they tended to do much better: at Liverpool Everton, A. Brooksbank came within 592 votes of victory.<sup>30</sup> While many thousands of soldiers did not vote in 1918, and the post-war years did not see any great upheaval by former servicemen, many did find their way into the labour movement, and many of the prominent MPs in Lancashire and London were former patriots. Robert Toothill, future Labour MP for Bolton, was a previous vice-president of the right-wing British Workers' League,<sup>31</sup> and in Manchester the Labour patriots had their wartime actions endorsed at the polls: J. R. Clynes was returned in Miles Platting; Ben Tillett was easily re-elected in North Salford; and John Hodge won a three-cornered contest in Gorton with a Socialist and an Independent.<sup>32</sup>

We have seen how the broad spectrum of the labour movement in Lancashire and London supported the war effort, and very often made advances in terms of recognition, pay or conditions due to the conflict. In this final section we shall examine the extent that labour patriotism acted as a means of recruitment to the Labour Party. This was particularly significant in these two areas for large numbers of the working classes, including union members, habitually voted Conservative, and in order for Labour to make real electoral advances in these areas it was not enough to pick up the votes of disenchanting Liberals; they needed to win over some of the Tory working class as well.<sup>33</sup> Duncan Tanner has estimated that up to 40 percent of ILP activists in Blackburn were former Tories, and in towns such as Blackburn, Barrow, Preston and Liverpool the ILP built on Tory political culture to further its aims.<sup>34</sup>

If the central challenge for Labour after the war was to move beyond the radical artisans and highly unionized skilled workers which had

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<sup>29</sup> D. Englander, "Jack, Tommy, and Henry Dubb: The armed forces and the Working Class", *Historical Journal*, 21 (1978), 614.

<sup>30</sup> G. Wootton, *The Politics of Influence: British Ex-Servicemen, Cabinet Decisions And Cultural Change (1917-57)* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 133.

<sup>31</sup> J. O. Stubbs, "Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour", *English Historical Review*, 87 (1972), 733.

<sup>32</sup> Seipp, *Ordeal of Peace*, 137.

<sup>33</sup> M. Pugh, *Speak for Britain! A New History of the Labour Party* (London: Vintage, 2011), 35, 45.

<sup>34</sup> D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 141.

previously provided the bulk of their support, and capture groups hitherto unsupportive of Labour, then a constituency which served as a microcosm for Labour's cultural appeals to the wider electorate was that of the Irish Catholic diaspora in England. For many Catholics (and, for that matter, Anglicans) – unlike Nonconformists – religion was a public, rather than a private issue. Whereas for most Nonconformists, faith was a deeply personal matter, involving private reflection and reading of scripture, for many Catholics it was a highly public issue based around attending weekly mass, regular confessions, significant feast days and ostentatious ceremonies. In this respect, Catholicism in England was more analogous to the ancient Roman concept of religion – which was entirely concerned with public displays of faith rather than personal belief – than the doctrinaire religiosity of the Nonconformists. As with the politics of much the wider working class, popular Catholicism was more about identity (“socially grounded loyalties”, in the words of Steven Fielding) than doctrine and ideology – hence few Catholics took anti-socialist pulpit sermonizing seriously.<sup>35</sup> As Fielding had it, “it had been on the level of culture, rather than explicit ideology, that the [Labour] party had made its most powerful appeal to Irish Catholic loyalties”.<sup>36</sup> That is to say, Labour appealed to Catholic immigrants in towns such as Liverpool through cultural identity, rather than “class” identity or doctrinaire socialism. Thus in the words of Joan Smith, whereas “Glasgow men were good socialists but lousy rioters; Liverpool working men were quite the reverse”.<sup>37</sup>

In cities such as Liverpool and other towns without either a strong craft union movement or a radical Nonconformist tradition, we may have seen a Labour “evolution” largely without a labour movement. Thus Labour's appeal to culture was successful: Catholics' political allegiances were won over to Labour after the war, and throughout the inter-war period the Irish were amongst the most consistent Labour supporters within the working class.<sup>38</sup> In his forward to Eric Taplin's study of the dockworker's union, Jack Jones paid tribute to James Sexton, “a man who came out of the Fenian stable but over the years became a pillar of society”.<sup>39</sup> Yet men like James Sexton, who saw no contradiction between Catholicism, patriotism, and trade unionism were by no means exceptional in the post-war Labour

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<sup>35</sup> Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, 109.

<sup>36</sup> Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, 107.

<sup>37</sup> J. Smith, “Labour Tradition in Glasgow and Liverpool”, *History Workshop Journal*, 17 (1984), 50.

<sup>38</sup> Davies, *Liverpool Labour*, 225; and Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, 105.

<sup>39</sup> Foreword by Jack Jones in E. Taplin, *The Dockers' Union* (Leicester: Continuum, 1986), xiv.

Party. The success of this strategy is personified in Jack Hayes – who became the first Labour MP to sit for a Liverpool constituency when he was returned in Edge Hill in 1923. Hayes was an Irish nationalist and a former Metropolitan policeman who was involved in the police strikes of 1918 and 1919, yet neither his Irish nationalist beliefs, nor his former career as a policeman were barriers to his involvement in the labour movement. It is through people such as Jack Hayes that we can see the success of the post-war party in presenting itself as a broad church welcome to all. As in Liverpool, at Wigan and Ince in Lancashire the Conservatives claimed that the Labour Party was tied to “teetotal”, “Nonconformist” Liberals, and so the prominence of Stephen Walsh, the MP for Ince and a patriotic English Catholic, was crucial to winning working-class support in the area.<sup>40</sup> In the words of Trevor Griffiths: “Even amongst the group which promised Labour its most consistent source of support through the period [Irish miners], political priorities were informed more by ethnic and religious influences than by a developing class consciousness”, and so it was essential for Labour to adapt to these ethnic and religious influences, which they did, doubling their councillors in Bolton in 1919.<sup>41</sup>

Very often a dividing line in working-class communities was not so much “religion” or ethnicity per se, but rather “culture”. For example, it could be argued that Irish Catholics who enjoyed the music hall, the football match and the racecourse, pub culture and gambling had more common ground with like-minded Protestants than with their more sober-minded, abstemious co-religionists. Issues such as community, neighbourhood, and patriotism could cut across old divides such as skilled/unskilled and Catholic/Protestant. In the East End of London, for example the 1889 Dockers’ Strike featured an unusual alliance between Irish Catholics and Methodists.<sup>42</sup> Similarly the committee established to oversee the Bethnel Green war memorial reflected the new coalition of the labour movement in the East End, consisting of representatives of the council, Christian clergy, a local synagogue, two benevolent societies, two hospital aids funds, the Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, the Rifle Club, and special constables.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> T. Griffiths, *Lancashire Working Classes* (Oxford: Oxford Historical Monographs, 2001), 287–9.

<sup>41</sup> Griffiths, *Lancashire Working Classes*, 292–4.

<sup>42</sup> R. Davis, *Tangled Up in Blue* (London: Ruskin, 2011), 10.

<sup>43</sup> A. King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 29.

As Gareth Stedman Jones has noted, there was a distinct lack of temperance tradition amongst the radical artisans in London, and the impression conveyed by Charles Booth's survey of the turn-of-the-century London poor "was of a working-class culture which was both impermeable to outsiders, and yet predominantly conservative in character: a culture in which the central focus was not 'trade unions and friendly societies, cooperative effort, temperance propaganda and politics' (including socialism) but 'pleasure, amusement, hospitality and sport'".<sup>44</sup> The Social Democratic Federation – the leading socialist society in London – never had more than 3,000 members out of a population of more than 6.5 million.<sup>45</sup> In London, Jones concluded: "The atheist, republican and international culture which had been such a characteristic feature of artisan tradition in the first three quarters of the century had all but died out by 1900". The persistence and popularity of working-class Toryism confounded and perplexed many on the Edwardian left. Many towns and cities seemed dominated by people who, though living in conditions of terrible squalor, being independent of mind and not averse to riots and general rowdiness, continued to loyally vote Conservative. Stedman Jones quoted a member of the Paddington Radical Club from the Boer War era: "When I ventured to point out to one member that the cost of the present war would have put old age pensions on a sound basis, the answer I received was 'to Hades with Old Age Pensions'".<sup>46</sup>

Dissecting the Edwardian working class in London, Stedman Jones pronounced that "fatalism, political scepticism, the evasion of tragedy or anger and a stance of comic stoicism were pre-eminently cockney attitudes". It was precisely these attitudes revealed by a letter to the *Clarion*, from a correspondent signing himself "A London Working Man", in February 1915:

The Sleepers Are Waking. Sir, – Your sensible remarks about the war have made me and my mates think more of your queer ideas about Socialism and Determinism. We think there's something in them as well, but what we cannot stand is the wishy-washy sentimentalism of some of your writers and readers about such things as pensions and coal and bread. We have got a big war on and we have got to pay for it. Well, we do not kick and you cannot make us kick. There is no unemployment worth speaking about, and, if the masters are making a bit, well, so are we. What

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<sup>44</sup> G. Stedman Jones, "Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870–1900: Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class", *Journal of Social History*, 7 (1974): 472, 479.

<sup>45</sup> Stedman Jones, "Working-Class Culture", 481.

<sup>46</sup> Stedman Jones, "Working-Class Culture", 480.

with full-time and overtime, there is more money about than there was before the war, and many of the poor widows with fifteen and twenty bob a week that you seem to want us to make a song about, are a long sight better off than they were when the old man took half his dibs to the pub. So me and my mates thinks you might draw it mild, and wait till there's more to kick about.<sup>47</sup>

This brief passage, with its acceptance of the class system as a natural phenomenon and its allusions to the pub give us an insight into the soul of the British working man who was untouched by either radical Nonconformity or trade unionism. Labour patriotism during the war – either from newspapers such as the *Clarion*, unionists like Ben Tillett, J. H. Thomas, John Clynes, Will Crooks and George Barnes, or politicians such as Will Thorne – caught the attention of some of these people, persuaded them that one could be a patriot and a left-winger, and drew them closer to the movement.

John Marriott has described how in East London after the war, local activists such as Thomas Kirk and J. T. Scouling stressed their service record and the practical benefits Labour could bring.<sup>48</sup> Marriott continued: “This tendency towards separation of trade union and political spheres was not averted by labourist discourses. Programmes launched by Labour candidates interpellated the electorate as industrial workers, as mothers, as citizens, as consumers and as tenants, but rarely as trade unionists”.<sup>49</sup> This portrayal is borne out by the testimony of Dame Mabel Crout, a Labour Party agent in Woolwich after the war, who noted that it was within the family context that political organization took place: “People would say ‘Oh, but we were always Labour you see’ and that unexplained ‘we’ was usually elaborated as ‘our family’ or ‘my father’”.<sup>50</sup> Dan Weinbren claimed that the Labour Party was nearly non-existent in London in 1914, had made “spectacular gains” by 1920 and by 1934 dominated the capital despite being in dire straits at the parliamentary level. “Across the metropolis”, wrote Weinbren, “and particularly before it attained power, the Labour Party offered distinctive local versions of socialism in different

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<sup>47</sup> *Clarion*, Feb. 19, 1915.

<sup>48</sup> J. Marriott, *The Culture of Labourism: The East End between the Wars* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 32–6.

<sup>49</sup> Marriott, *Culture of Labourism*, 98.

<sup>50</sup> D. Thom, “Tommy’s Sister: Women at Woolwich in World War I”, in R. Samuel, ed., *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 153.

areas and new roles to women, the Irish and the Jews”.<sup>51</sup> Thus across London, as across most of Lancashire, Labour after 1918 began to expand and win new voters; and the significance of the First World War to this expansion cannot be overlooked.

This chapter has tried to highlight the folly of neglecting the role of the British left in the First World War. We have seen how, rather than split the labour movement, the war served largely to unite the left; how the conflict benefited certain labour groups and organizations; and how labour patriotism during the war served as an important means of recruiting supporters and voters after the armistice.

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<sup>51</sup> D. Weinbren, “Social Capital: London’s Labour Parties, 1918–45”, in M. Worley, ed., *Labour’s Grass Roots* (London: Ashgate, 2005), 194.





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