

Sport and Leisure Histories

Edited by Dave Day

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Teaching Swimming (Courtesy of Brickett Family Papers)

Healing Landscapes: Psychology and the Outdoor Movement in the 1920s

Melanie Tebbutt

Introduction

A large scholarly literature has encouraged a familiar narrative about the development of the British outdoor movement in the inter-war years. Harvey Taylor's pioneering work on the movement's history, *A Claim on the Countryside*, which illustrates the deep historical roots of popular attachment to the countryside, has highlighted the diversity of the outdoor movement in the inter-war years, when cheap fares and railway excursions helped democratize relationships with the rural, as better transport systems and roads opened up areas which had previously been exclusive to the better-off.¹ Freedom, exploration and the romance of the open road, long identified with the English countryside, became key motifs of inter-war tourism, as visitors tramped, camped, trespassed and claimed places that, geographically, would once have been far beyond their reach.²

This well-known story tends to neglect, however, how rural engagement was nuanced in very different ways across the 1920s and 1930s. The existing focus tends, understandably, to be on the 1930s, when the 'open-air recreational lobby' became a national movement and the politics of popular rambling became most pronounced.³

¹ Harvey Taylor, *A Claim on the Countryside: A History of the British Outdoor Movement* (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997). For transport developments and motoring in the inter-war years, see: D. Jeremiah, 'Motoring and the British countryside', *Rural History*, 21, 2 (2010), 236; D. Jeremiah, 'Filling up: the British experience, 1896-1940', *Journal of Design History*, 8, 2 (1995), 97-116; D. Jeremiah, 'Cars and the pleasure of the countryside: the weekend tour, rediscovery of the by-ways, popularizing the beauty spots, and the "See Britain First" campaign', paper delivered at the British Agricultural History Society conference, 'Approaches to the history of the rural landscape', London, 15 December 2007; D. Jeremiah, *Representations of British Motoring* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

² C. Brace, 'Rural mappings', in P. Cloke, *Country Visions* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 51.

³ Harvey Taylor, 'Footpath protection societies in mid-nineteenth century textile Lancashire', *Manchester Region History Review*, 9 (1995), 30.

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Hiking, camping, caravanning, cycling, and youth hostelling all expanded in the 1930s, when the Youth Hostels Association and the Ramblers' Association were established and access campaigns intensified; the Kinder mass trespass took place in 1932. But what about the earlier part of this inter-war narrative, the immediate post-war years and the 1920s, when open air activities were certainly expanding, yet had not achieved either the scale or cultural prominence of the 1930s? What is their place in this historical story of the outdoor movement? This quieter period has certainly attracted much less attention from scholars, and it is my purpose here to redress this relative neglect by offering something of a speculative overview and taking an approach which is rather different from usual interpretations of the period. My aim is to explore the therapeutic value and meanings of different kinds of recreational engagement with the countryside, and to ask how such activities may have helped mediate some of the psychological and emotional after-effects of the First World War.⁴ In so-doing, I hope to encourage interest in how the emotional and psychological effects of the First World War helped shape individuals' engagement with the healthy open-air activities of the British outdoor after the cessation of hostilities and across the 1920s.

The beneficial effects of certain types of environmental setting on the sick and distressed have been perceived throughout history and across cultures.⁵ The 'rest cure' was a treatment for neurasthenia in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods, and the value of recuperating outdoors was a recognized part of the sanatoria movement, which emphasized convalescence in hospital gardens and landscaped grounds.⁶ Since the 1980s, however, commonplace assumptions about the value of the rural in physical and mental rehabilitation have received growing academic attention in a large number of studies which have explored the positive and negative effects that particular types of landscape may have on psychological health. Studies by environmental psychologists have highlighted the role that

⁴ John Walton, 'Rambling and working-class leisure in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain', Lecture, Working-class Movement Library, Salford, 17 November, 2012.

⁵ M.A.D. Velarde, G. Fry, M. Tveit, 'Health effects of viewing landscapes - landscape types in environmental psychology', *Urban Forestry and Greening* 6 (2007), 199-212.

⁶ Edward Stevens, 1918, cited in C.C. Marcus and M. Barnes, *Healing Gardens: Therapeutic Benefits and Design Recommendations* (Danvers, MA: John Wiley and Sons, 1999), 15.

engagement with particular kinds of physical environment can play in healing and recovery, while research has become increasingly sensitive to links between landscape, health and the 'psychological value' of open space.⁷ In the early 1990s, for example, the health geographer, Wil Gesler, introduced the conceptual device of 'therapeutic landscapes' to explore the relationship between healing and nature, and between place identity and 'health and well-being'. Since the early 1990s, the notion of the therapeutic landscape has expanded from associations with places of pilgrimage, spas and sacred sites to encompass more domestic settings, such as homes, gardens and imagined landscapes.

These ideas are potentially a very useful entry into exploring the emotional and psychological significance of landscape and outdoor activities after the First World War, particularly in relation to the personal meanings of such engagement, which have tended to be neglected in comparison with the attention paid to therapeutic places established by the authorities, such as hospitals and convalescent homes. Researchers into the therapeutic aspects of contemporary engagement with the natural world have identified three main types.⁸ These are: viewing nature, as through a window, or in a painting; being in proximity to nature, which may be incidental to some other activity, such as walking or cycling to work, reading on a garden seat or talking to friends in a park; active participation and involvement with nature, such as gardening or farming, trekking or camping, cross-country running or horse-riding. All of these are worth attention when examining emotional survival and resilience in the post-war years, when many people in a deeply traumatized society were still attempting to process the social and psychological implications of the war. The intention here, however, is to focus largely on the third type, active participation, particularly outdoor activities such as climbing and walking, what John Walton has described as 'pedestrianism for pleasure', and camping, with occasional asides to the idea of viewing nature.⁹

Cultural resonance of shell shock

The war's psychological impact has received much scholarly attention but this has largely been in relation to the medical treatment of trauma

⁷ J. Pretty, M. Griffin, R. Hine, M. Sellens and N. South, *A Countryside for Health and Well-Being: The Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Green Exercise. Report for the Countryside Recreation Network* (Colchester: University of Essex, 2005).

⁸ Pretty et al., *A Countryside for Health and Well-Being*.

⁹ Walton, 'Rambling and working-class leisure'.

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or to shell shock,¹⁰ something of a catch-all term, which was first used in a medical paper by the psychologist, Charles S. Myers, in 1915.¹¹ Shell shock described a range of symptoms, which included disorientation, nightmares and hallucinations, paralysis, inability to speak and uncontrollable shaking. Sufferers did not need to have been at the battlefield to experience these disturbances and some were shot for malingering, many were forced back into battle and others were hospitalized.¹² By the end of the war, army medical services had treated over 80,000 cases, although the real number of those needing treatment was probably much higher.¹³ Shell shock remained a source of controversy and ambivalence throughout the 1920s, when more than 100,000 ex-service men were said to be experiencing its 'long-term effects'.¹⁴ The considerable cultural resonance shell shock acquired during this period contrasted with its serious marginalization in terms of medical treatment. Shell shock subsequently became what Jay Winter has as described as 'a metaphor for war itself', exemplified over the past decade by the great expansion of scholarship which has taken place on the subject, including Peter Leese's *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (2002) and Ben Shephard's *War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914-1994* (2002). Those who feature less prominently in the story of shell shock and post-war rehabilitation are men who lived on into the post-war years, the marginalized many, those whom Fiona Reid has described as 'the mentally broken men who were, to one degree or another mended'.¹⁵ Many of these suffered the consequences of 'periodic or even chronic emotional disturbances' which never reached the attention of the medical authorities, although they continued to shape

¹⁰ J. Winter, 'Shell shock and the cultural history of the Great War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, 1 (2000), 11.

¹¹ C. Myers, 'A contribution to the study of shell shock', *The Lancet*, 1 (1915), 316-20.

¹² M. Stone, 'Shellshock and the psychologists' in W. Bynum, R. Porter and M. Shepherd, *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry* (London: Tavistock, 1985), Vol 2, 249; S. Cherry, *Mental Health Care in Modern England: The Norfolk Lunatic Asylum St Andrew's Hospital, 1810-1998* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2003), 19.

¹³ J. Bourke, 'Psychology at war, 1914-1945', in G.C. Bunn, A.D. Lovie and G.D. Richards, *Psychology in Britain: Historical Essays and Personal Reflections* (Leicester: BPS Books, 2001), 137.

¹⁴ F. Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914-30* (London: Continuum, 2011), 100, 168, 201; Wade Pickren and Alexandra Rutherford, *A History of Modern Psychology* (New York: Wiley, 2010) 201.

¹⁵ Reid, *Broken Men*, 100, 168.

how social and emotional relationships were negotiated throughout the inter-war period.¹⁶

Joanna Bourke has argued that 'the emphasis on emotional breakdown and psychiatric illness has obscured the fact that most men coped remarkably well with the demands being made upon them in wartime', while others have also argued that most men survived during the war by drawing on a range of coping strategies to help sustain their emotional resilience. Such arguments do, however, rather beg the question of exactly how these men readjusted to a post-war, civilian world, and the kinds of readjustment strategies they employed to ease their transition to very different peacetime circumstances.¹⁷ The assimilation and digestion of frequently traumatic war experiences took time, and the 1920s may be seen, in some respects, as a period of long convalescence, broken by the economic depression of 1929-1931. With no practical support available to them, how did these men and their families manage the transition to the post-war world and survive the repercussions of often 'strangely altered' mental attitudes and character?¹⁸

Several recent scholarly works, which have moved away from emphases on the medical treatment of trauma to examine how ordinary soldiers developed their own survival strategies on the Western Front, can, I think, help us to look in different ways at the meanings which were ascribed to nature and the natural world, not only during the war, but also after. Michael Roper's *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, is particularly impressive for its use of personal narratives, such as the letters, diaries and memoirs of combatants to explore how these sustained emotional ties with home. Roper's work gives important insights into how emotional dislocation on the Western Front was mediated by imaginative relationships sustained through parcels and correspondence with families, particularly mothers. The powerful motif of the mother is strongly associated with wartime propaganda, yet Roper skilfully evokes the personal meanings of mothering for men in the trenches, not only

¹⁶ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 247.

¹⁷ Joanna Bourke, 'Effeminacy and the end of trauma: the sufferings of shell-shocked' men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-39', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, 1 (2000), 57; Alex Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-18* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁸ S. Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 232.

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through relationships sustained with home, but in the domesticated ways that men often nurtured each other. George Mosse suggested that the war encouraged acute sensitivity to nature and the natural world, an identification which has often been viewed as a nostalgic trope of national identity.¹⁹ Roper's approach to the importance of 'mothering' among men in the trenches is, however, a prompt for us to re-think the meanings of remembered rural landscapes under wartime conditions, and to use similar personal sources as an entry into how these may have shaped emotional engagement as another strategy for psychological survival.²⁰

Landscape and English national identity

The countryside has played an important part in how English national identity has been constructed over the past two centuries, and this has tended to overshadow its meanings for ordinary people, especially as they began to gain access to it in greater numbers after the war. Industrialization and urbanization in the nineteenth century contributed to the growing cultural power of a 'pastoral impulse' in English culture, which encouraged medical professionals and politicians to see the countryside as an important source of moral regeneration, a healthy and invigorating antidote to the pollution of urban life.²¹ Various influences helped shape these ideas, which ranged from the transcendental and poetic to a militarized rhetoric which reflected the influence of social Darwinism and the new imperialism, although these were not confined to patriotic visions but embraced radical and regional traditions and alternative class-based versions of the rural, well-expressed in rambling's history as a campaigning identity.²² Paul Fussell argued that the war intensified the well-established cultural resonance of rural imagery and the countryside. Officers had *Country Life* sent out to them, as a comforting reminder of rolling southern landscapes and communities.²³ Pastoral motifs and rural imagery, especially located in the southern English countryside became a common focus for an elite literature of war

¹⁹ George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 107.

²⁰ See also, J. Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (London, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

²¹ A. Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside since 1900* (London and New York, 2003), 8.

²² Cf. J. Walton, 'Rambling and working-class leisure'; J.A. Mangan and J. Walvin, *Manliness and Morality: Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (Manchester, 1987), 1-5, 185, 194.

²³ P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 292.

poetry by writers ²⁴ such as Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, Charles Sorley, Edward Thomas, Wilfred Owen and Robert Graves, many of whom had suffered shell shock.²⁵

The universalization of these works of high culture tends, however, to obscure the extent to which class and regional background inflected the meanings of the rural during the war. Soldiers from working-class districts in northern England, for example, took copies of their *Clarion Ramblers Handbooks* with them to the trenches, which nourished reveries, sustained a sense of community with those left behind and maybe drew them back into the everyday pleasures of familiar walks and upland settings. Indeed, a useful exercise would be to map the other kinds of rural mementoes that those who had grown up the country kept as memories of their former lives. The evocative power of the English country garden even gave rise to soldiers attempting to recreate it in their trenches. One soldier, in 1915, for example, described how his trench had within it, a 'square garden with diagonal lattice wood paths with quite a profusion of old-fashioned flowers, marsh marigold, mignonette, snapdragon, convolvulus, nasturtium, all flourishing right under the parapet'.²⁶

The fractured character of the natural world at the Western Front could both intensify and dislocate the meanings of space, nature and the landscape in ways which Jeremy Burchardt has suggested, were 'hugely variable' and deserving of their own study.²⁷ Mosse suggested that 'heavy shelling destroyed not only men, but nature, a devastation that would haunt the imagination of those forced to live in the trenches', an observation which raises many questions about how survivors mediated these memories after the war.²⁸ Soldiers at the Front, living below ground in 'cold' and stinking trenches, inhabited a subterranean, disorientating world of what Santanu Das has described

²⁴ J. Winter, 'Shell shock and the cultural history of the Great War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, 1 (2000), 11.

²⁵ Daniel W. Hipp, *The Poetry of Shell Shock: Wartime Trauma and Healing in Wilfred Owen, Ivor Gurney and Siegfried Sassoon* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2005); G. Bennett, 'English folklore and the land of lost content', *The Folklore Historian* 8 (1991), 28-9.

²⁶ IWM Brown Lieutenant P A. Letter of 8.10.1915, 26, cited in Alex Watson, 'Fear in combat and combating fear: British and German troops in endurance warfare, 1914-1918', www.inter-disciplinary.net, 6 (accessed November 2012).

²⁷ Melanie Tebbutt, 'Landscapes of loss: Moorlands, manliness and the First World War', *Landscapes* (Autumn 2004), 114-127; Jeremy Burchardt, personal communication, November 2012.

²⁸ Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 102.

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as 'slimescapes', in his book *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, 2005.²⁹ Some experienced this mix of claustrophobic trench life and the agoraphobic, menacing immensity of the sky above as a constant threat of 'enclosure', 'exposure' and 'entrapment', feelings intensified by the sense of powerlessness from trench warfare, which involved long periods of not being involved in active fighting.³⁰ Anxieties, exacerbated by immobility, noise and lack of control over the physical environment, were magnified by waiting for something to happen. It was their 'enforced passivity that was emotionally incapacitating', and which gave rise to a 'terrifying impotence'.³¹

A letter that the painter, Paul Nash, sent to his wife, in 1917, encapsulated his own sense of a toxic, unnatural environment and personal dread:

No pen or drawing can convey this country...Sunset and sunrise are blasphemous, they are mockeries to man, only the black rain out of the bruised and swollen clouds all through the bitter black of night is fit atmosphere in such a land. The rain drives on, the stinking mud becomes more evilly yellow, the shell holes fill up with the green-white water, the roads and tracks are covered in inches of slime, the black dying trees ooze and sweat and the shells never cease...It is unspeakable, godless, hopeless.

David Conradson has emphasized the diverse responses to which specific environments can give rise, 'from enjoyment, to ambivalence and even anxiety', and it is easy to see how the extreme edges of such reactions might be intensified under war conditions, depending, of course, on where the soldier was located.³² For some, the small space of the dugout could become a contained and constrained world whose confinement helped magnify the little scraps of nature which survived in the abnormal landscape. Soldier, Hugh Quigley, for example, mused in his wartime diary how 'the beautiful in nature, even in the bleak horror of shell-holes, seemed the essence of life to me, the only thing worth seeking in the misery of this war'.³³

²⁹ Das, *Touch and Intimacy*; Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 41-2, 51.

³⁰ Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, 76.

³¹ Bourke, 'Effeminacy and the end of trauma', 58-9.

³² D. Conradson, 'Landscape, care and the relational self: therapeutic encounters in rural England', *Health and Place*, 338.

³³ Hugh Quigley, *Passchendaele and the Somme: A Diary of 1917* (London: Methuen, 1928), 174.

Given the intensity of such proximity to the ravaged natural world, to what extent were these experiences of wartime landscapes translated into post-war engagement with the rural and the countryside? There is certainly evidence of contemporaries musing on how various types of outdoor activities might mediate the strains of what was described as adjustment to a post-war world of 'new beginnings and of general "reconstruction"'. In 1920, for example, the noted climber, G. Winthrop Young, observed in his address to members of the mountaineering, climbing and rambling clubs of Great Britain, how:

We are all scrutinising our former and long dormant activities, and selecting only those for revival by our returning energies whose importance to our lives justifies the expenditure.

A sense of mountain climbing's potential in alleviating mental distress was clear in his description of it as 'an interest which may be made incalculable to many lives besides our own during these years of rather shadowy stress', 'the finest, sanest tradition which we possess'.³⁴ (Winthrop Young had been a special war correspondent in France and Belgium in 1914, was subsequently in command of the Friends' Ambulance Unit on the Western Front in 1914 and 1915, and in command of the first British Ambulance Unit for Italy until January 1919. His papers are in the Imperial War Museum.³⁵)

This belief that emotional equilibrium might be obtained through physical engagement with nature is also discernible in some of the commemorative initiatives which took place after the war, as Keith Grieves has argued.³⁶ Grieves has focussed on C.E. Montague, chief leader writer of the *Manchester Guardian*, another former soldier and keen hill walker, who was a strong advocate that memorials in Lakeland to local volunteers who had died should have both 'practical utility and emotional appeal'.³⁷ Montague promoted the National Trust's acquisition of Scafell Pike in 1919 as a memorial to the men of

³⁴ G. Winthrop Young, 'To the members of the mountaineering, climbing and rambling clubs of Great Britain', *The Journal of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club of the English Lake District*, 5, 2 (1920), 209, 2011. http://www.frcc.co.uk/frcc_journals.asp (accessed November 2012).

³⁵ Private Papers of G. Winthrop-Young, Imperial War Museum, www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1030013925 (accessed November 2012).

³⁶ K. Grieves, 'C.E. Montague, Manchester and the remembrance of war, 1918-25', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 77, 2 (Summer, 1995), 94.

³⁷ Grieves, 'C.E. Montague', 94-6.

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the Lake District, and supported the presentation, in 1923, to the National Trust, of between 3,000 and 4,000 acres in the centre of the Lake District by the Fell and Rock Climbing Club as a memorial to its fallen members.³⁸ It was a memorial that, for some at least, connected lost comrades with an idea of the immutability of certain types of landscape, as was clear in the terms which the *Yorkshire Ramblers' Club Journal* used to mark its inauguration:

Monuments crumble and fall, but the everlasting hills stand fast
and give inspiration to all who lift up their eyes to them until
the end of time.³⁹

There is also evidence to suggest how involvement in climbing and walking seems to have eased psychological adjustment not only after the war but also during it, for men who did not go to the Front. G.H.B. Ward, for example, described how rambling in the moorland districts of northern England helped to pacify what he described as 'wound up batteries of jumping nerves'. Handbooks of the *Clarion Rambling Club* declared it was 'patriotic to walk and keep well', while Montague's description of 'upland areas in general and the Lake District in particular as a great "delousing station"' suggests their purifying appeal to those who had been at the Front.⁴⁰

Walking, climbing and cycling are perhaps particularly notable for their capacity to control stress through a kinetic relationship with the landscape. Motion and physical exertion helped restore a sense of control which, for former combatants, had not only been denied by battlefield conditions but, after the war, by the subordination of personal memories to public, official commemoration.

Surviving the peace

Many contemporaries continued to view shell-shock through a pre-war lens which saw mental distress in men as unmanly and a sign of weakness. Soldiers who survived returned to a society in which masculinity continued to be defined by reticence and restrained emotions, 'a world in which it was unacceptable to broadcast nervous collapse', or to express intense personal feelings.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Yorkshire Ramblers' Club Journal*, 5, 16 (1924), 146.

⁴⁰ Grievess, 'C.E. Montague', 94.

⁴¹ Reid, *Broken Men*, 4.

These traditional assumptions were reinforced by public expectations of grieving after the war. Public forms of commemoration were intended, in part, to expunge personal memories and contribute to a process of forgetting, an expectation, which, perhaps, reinforced the difficulty that returning soldiers experienced in articulating their feelings. Leed points out how quickly 'the experience of the war was consciously forgotten in 1919 and throughout the 1920s', as books and press articles about it became 'unfashionable'.⁴² It was not until the end of the decade that eye-witness accounts started to reveal the horrors which many men had experienced; it was in the more 'disillusioned' 1930s that 'the ex-soldiers at last could speak and out came tumbling the flood of wartime reminiscences in every country that had sent soldiers to the war'.⁴³

The war, in the 1920s, was 'officially forgotten by not being talked about', although, Fiona Reid has pointed out how 'forgetting the war was not remiss', it was also 'vital for psychological survival'.⁴⁴ Armistice Day attendances tended to decline in the mid-1920s, and continued to do so until the late 1930s. Emotional reticence had immense implications for many families which had to live with the changed fathers, husbands and brothers who returned home. Pat Jalland's research on attitudes towards bereavement in Australia after the First World War, has suggested that the scale of losses helped shape a 'new model of suppressed, privatized grieving' which 'deeply constrained the next two generations', a reminder that rambling and cycling might also have had therapeutic implications for some young people.⁴⁵ One woman recalled the enjoyment her great-aunt experienced as a keen cyclist, because it helped free her from a family atmosphere made tense by her brother-in-law's drunken, violent behaviour, after he returned, much changed by the war.⁴⁶

Talking therapies, or quiet recuperation

Medical personnel, on the whole, supported a repressive response to soldiers' mental distress. Ben Shepherd has suggested that 'The dominant view was that patients needed to learn "not the indulgence but a forgetfulness of their feelings, not the observation but the

⁴² Eric Leed, 'Fateful memories: industrialized war and traumatic neuroses', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, 1 (2000), 89.

⁴³ Leed, 'Fateful memories', 87.

⁴⁴ Reid, *Broken Men*, 86.

⁴⁵ Pat Jalland, 'A private and secular grief: Katharine Susannah Pritchard confronts death and bereavement', *History Australia* 2, 2 (2005), 42-1.

⁴⁶ Lesley MacCrann, personal correspondence.

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renunciation of self, not introspection but useful action”'.⁴⁷ W.H.R. Rivers (1864-1922) pioneered the use of Freudian ‘talk therapy’ among shell-shocked soldiers. Training in psychology was, however, still in its infancy, and only a minority were treated with these new psychoanalytical techniques, which were more likely to be addressed to officers than to ordinary serving soldiers.⁴⁸ Psychological approaches did, in any case, arouse considerable hostility from many medical professionals, who were unsympathetic to what they perceived as cowardice or malingering and stressed the organic origins of such symptoms, a paralysis of nerves which could be remedied by rest, diet and possibly electric shock treatment.⁴⁹

Doctors such as Frederick Mott, a convinced eugenicist, believed like many medical colleagues, that most war neuroses were due to ‘inborn psychopathic’ tendencies.⁵⁰ A pioneer of research into shell shock, Mott viewed the new psychiatric therapies of talking or hypnosis as undesirable and ineffective, and promoted the restorative effects of the rural, which was a well-established eugenics solution to combat the nervous debilitation and degeneracy associated with urban life. He believed that a ‘quiet and recuperative environment’, in which the mind could be diverted from dwelling on terrible memories, was ‘sufficient to enable servicemen to forget their traumatic experiences’ although, as Edgar Jones points out, it was an approach which also protected Mott from having to listen to his patients’ distressing histories.

The uncertainty of both doctors and civilians about the origins of shell-shock helped reinforce a broader post-war belief in the therapeutic value of the rural.⁵¹ The government encouraged a ‘rural system of

⁴⁷ Ben Shepherd, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 19.

⁴⁸ E. Showalter, *The Female Malady Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 167-94; Rivers’ approach was promoted by the Tavistock Clinic, founded in 1920 to support shell-shocked soldiers, and which played a central role in the development of psychoanalytic treatment in the inter-war years. Pickren and Rutherford, *A History of Modern Psychology*, 106.

⁴⁹ In 1916, for example, Craiglockhart Military Hospital, near Edinburgh, opened for officers who were experiencing psychiatric problems as a result of being at the front. E. Jones, ‘Doctors and trauma in the First World War: the response of military psychiatrists’, in Grey, K. Oliver, *The Memory of Catastrophe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 97.

⁵⁰ *Eugenics Review*, 19, 1 (April 1922), 17.

⁵¹ Jones, ‘Doctors and trauma’, 94, 98.

treatment' during the war and into the post-war period, when the countryside's restorative qualities became a 'common sense' solution to the war's psychological and physical legacies.⁵² Fiona Reid has described 'commitment to a rural system of treatment' as central to 'government plans for the post-war care of shell-shocked men', when 'the creation of a rural idyll' was intended as a potential cure for the effects of 'a brutal industrial war'.⁵³ Work in the open air was promoted for its therapeutic worth in preparing injured men to return to the workplace, and there were schemes to establish 'village centres' to help recovery, all of which drew on long-established perceptions of the rural as a recuperative alternative to urban life. Survivors of gas attacks, for example, were 'urged to get out of London' into the countryside; 'others, terribly disfigured' took to a more rural life 'to avoid the daily encounters of city living'.⁵⁴

Both physical and mental ailments were believed to benefit from such environments, which became a backdrop for broader arguments about the treatment of psychiatric symptoms. Sir John Collie, Chief Medical Officer of the Metropolitan Water Board and an 'expert' on 'malingering', was a strong advocate of the value of outdoor work for the shell-shocked, who encouraged them to take up 'light horticultural work' and 'outdoor employment' on their return to civilian life.⁵⁵ At Seale Hayne, a military hospital in the Devon countryside, near Newton Abbott, Arthur Hurst, an ex-army major, introduced more innovative treatments, which combined agricultural work with 'intensive therapy sessions'.⁵⁶

The institutionalization of rural remedies for war trauma should not over-shadow the ways in which former soldiers not so severely afflicted acted on their own behalf in managing adjustment to post-war society through engagement with the countryside. Most who suffered the after-effects of harrowing military experiences had little or no access to professional support, and were forced to develop their own self-help measures. Contemporaries described the powerful appeal that rural peace and stillness had to soldiers whose senses had

⁵² Reid, *Broken Men*, 77; Michael Roper, 'Between manliness and masculinity: The "War Generation" and the psychology of fear in Britain, 1914-1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 44, 2 (April 2005), 343-4.

⁵³ Reid, *Broken Men*, 75.

⁵⁴ D. Hardy and C. Ward, *Arcadia for All: The Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 1984), 192.

⁵⁵ *British Medical Journal*, April 13, 1935, 807; Reid, *Broken Men*, 76.

⁵⁶ www.bbc.co.uk/devon/news_features/2002/shellshock (accessed November 2012).

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been flooded by 'primitive instincts' during the war.⁵⁷ Many sought 'a period of quietness', which Ben Shepherd has suggested could last from 'a year, to ten years – to never'.⁵⁸ Shepherd gives several examples of rural recuperation, such as the 'nerve-tangled' Ford Madox Ford, who found respite by 'hibernating' in the Sussex countryside and committing his wartime experiences to paper. Joseph Milne, in one of the rare working-class accounts of shell-shock, published in 1918, described 'his own form of self-therapy', which comprised gentle walking, warm baths, mental games, and stooping exercises.⁵⁹ Michael Roper gives examples of ex-soldiers who moved to the country after the war, seeking its 'space and quiet', and similar instances occasionally appear in working-class recollections from the period.⁶⁰

Salford-born Jack Preston, who had been a keen cyclist in his youth, recalled pitching his tent outside a wooden bungalow in the country near Chester, which was occupied by a married couple: 'The husband had taken a terrible battering on the Somme during the First World war, had been invalided out through epilepsy'. They had bought the bungalow 'with their meagre savings so that they could end their days in the peace and tranquillity of the countryside'.⁶¹ Purchases such as these were not unusual; many demobilized soldiers put their post-war gratuities towards a new life in the country, to settle into a different, quieter, less stressful kind of living.⁶²

The popularity of various kinds of camping in the 1920s may also be seen, for some, as a similar kind of restorative strategy. Camping under canvas recreated a small, 'restrictive', 'safe' place similar to that of the dugout, although these experiences were varied and contradictory, shaped by desires both for solitariness and comradeship, for the psychological benefits of the outdoor movement also included those which stemmed from social interaction. Not all could move permanently to the countryside, but some achieved their ambition of a temporary rural week-end retreat by constructing semi-permanent holiday structures from ex-army huts, army surplus 'bell

⁵⁷ J. Bourke, 'Fear and anxiety: writing about emotion in modern history', *History Workshop Journal*, 55, (2003), 120.

⁵⁸ Shepherd, *A War of Nerves*, 144.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 145.

⁶⁰ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 203.

⁶¹ Jack Preston, *Memoirs of a Salford Lad* (Manchester: Neil Richardson, undated), 15. Preston was born in 1910.

⁶² Hardy and Ward, *Arcadia for All*, 192.

tents' and old railway carriages, DIY initiatives like the makeshift plotland developments so disliked by countryside preservationists and very different from the dominant masculine expectations of the pre-war years.⁶³ Domesticated holidays under canvas or in caravans enabled men to experience environments in which they could enjoy a more relaxed form of masculinity.⁶⁴ Where men would never have been involved in cooking at home, many described the simple pleasures of camping in the countryside, where they could recreate some of the domestic tasks in which they had been forced to engage at the Front.⁶⁵ Assumptions remained that women should take on the lion's share of domestic tasks, although war experiences helped justify a temporary blurring of gender boundaries; as one writer observed, the husband should 'give a hand with the domestic work of camp life just as he had to do in the Army'.

The relationships between war and outdoor experiences are not always easy to discern, but understated allusions to wartime experiences do occasionally punctuate even the most anodyne articles about the pleasures of outdoor living, as in *Open Air*, part of the same publishing stable as *Country Life*, in which city worker, Sidney Howard, described his experiences as a weekend country-dweller, having pitched his tent on land which friends owned. His wife regularly left London on Saturday morning for what they described as their 'cottage in the country'. Howard followed late in the evening, revelling in the fact that after a twelve hour day in the city he was 'following a walk across the fields': 'I am "down to it" - as we used to say in the Army - in the tent, lulled to slumber', 'free' until late on Monday. He described the luxury of finding himself in such roomy camping accommodation, after sleeping twenty-one to a tent during the war, army allusions which often appeared in descriptions of camping in the 1920s, when jocular references perhaps helped dilute the bad associations of unpleasant memories by incorporating them into everyday pleasures.⁶⁶

The bell tent, as another writer observed, was very familiar to many readers,

⁶³ S. Barton, 'Vernacular erections: Lincolnshire coastal development and conservation before 1940', in R. Snape and D. Smith, *Recording Leisure Lives: Holidays and Tourism in 20th Century Britain* (Eastbourne: Leisure Studies Association, 2011), 9.

⁶⁴ *Open Air*, July 1923, 58-59.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Open Air*, September 1923, 227.

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...doubtless, it has its painful associations. If so, now is the time to redeem its character. Believe me, it is a grand thing to wake up in the morning and realise that orderly officers are practically extinct; and when such a tent holds two or three companionable comrades, it is very different from the days when it contained a dozen discontented soldiers'.⁶⁷

The feelings evoked here of wartime experiences are of discomfort, rather than trauma. Nevertheless, they suggest a certain self-consciousness and agency in how new meanings were being layered onto even the most mundane of wartime experiences.

Both rambling and camping continued to encompass many different meanings and identities, just as they had done in the nineteenth century, but the many different opportunities which outdoor pursuits provided for 'rest, recovery and rehabilitation' made them a different source of psychological refreshment in a war-weary world.⁶⁸ Writers in *Open Air*, described recreational walking as a 'rare tonic',⁶⁹ but also urged the 'mental benefit' of 'moments of idleness' on young men whose 'very active minds' and sensitivities made them particularly attuned to the quieter potential of rural life.⁷⁰ Greater cultural acceptance of 'softer' kinds of masculinity was also clear in many contemporary literary works, where the emergence of a 'new kind of male literary protagonist', characterized by 'vulnerability rather than virility' testified to the more fragile forms of masculinity, which were identified with 'that dread disease of modern times – nerves in some form or another'.⁷¹ Dorothy L. Sayers's fictional detective, Peter Wimsey, himself a survivor of shell-shock, is an interesting example of the 'flawed', empathetic personalities who were depicted as turning to the countryside for relief and comfort in the 1920s.⁷² These examples are, of course, merely suggestive and schematic. Connections with a rich pre-war engagement with nature and the countryside undoubtedly remained in the 1920s, but what I have argued here is

⁶⁷ *Open Air*, B, April 1924, 244.

⁶⁸ Jeffrey S. Reznick, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain during the Great War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 10.

⁶⁹ *Open Air*, July 1923, 51.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Gail Braybon, *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2004).

⁷² A. Freedman, 'Dorothy Sayers and the case of the shell-shocked detective', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 8, 2 (2010), 365-387.

that the meanings of open-air pursuits and the natural world were shaped in new ways as part of a process of personal and social healing.

As has been suggested, a substantial academic literature on the value of therapeutic landscapes has made scholars more sensitive to the physiological and psychological benefits of passively viewing natural environments, as well as to the role of physical exercise in restoring a sense of personal control.⁷³ This chapter argues for the value of such studies, in helping to draw attention to the process of psychological readjustment in post-war society and to how this may have worked to accentuate beliefs in the countryside's restorative potential.⁷⁴ How soldiers adjusted to civilian life varied, and was greatly eased with the help of family, friends and employment. Yet even for individuals and families who seemed to settle to post-war conditions, 'coping' could be a very solitary experience, especially in a period when the range of acceptable emotions for men was still narrow; when showing any kind of mental distress was unacceptable and 'getting on with life' was a strong cultural expectation. Even those who had the symptoms of shell shock sought, as Reid suggests, to present themselves as 'ordinary recovering' soldiers.⁷⁵

Rural revivalism and idealization of the organic village community have been seen as an aspect of a broader right-wing conservatism, an inward-looking, privatized, nostalgic middle-class response to progress and modernity. What is suggested here is that responses to the countryside and the natural world in the 1920s had many personal meanings shaped by the war, which expressed a need for emotional healing set in the present rather than in the past. Links between emotions and health were articulated in novel ways after the war, when even oblique references, such as those described earlier, suggest how contemporaries were attempting to process their experiences into new narratives of recuperation. Both men and women were recovering from painful mental anguish, and we need to know more about the strategies they used to make 'sense of the impossibility of homecoming' by exploring these personal meanings through sources

⁷³ R.S. Ulrich, 'Visual landscapes and psychological well-being', *Landscape Research*, 4 (1979), 17-23; R.S. Ulrich, 'Natural versus urban scenes. Some psychological effects', *Environment and Behavior*, 13 (1981), 523-556; R.S. Ulrich, 'View through a window may influence recovery from surgery', *Science*, 224 (1984), 420-1; S. Verderber, 'Dimensions of person-window transactions in the hospital environment', *Environment and Behavior*, 18 (1986), 450-466.

⁷⁴ Nora J. Rubinstein, 'The psychological value of open space': <http://www.greatswam.org/Education/rubinstein> (accessed 4 October 2012).

⁷⁵ Reid, *Broken Men*, 165.

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such as diaries, letters, autobiographies, oral testimony and family histories.⁷⁶

An extensive body of research has, over the course of the last thirty years, connected activities in the natural environment or open spaces with a reduction in stress. However, few studies, either now or in the past, have attempted to categorize the different types of language and phrases which could identify the personal value of the ramble, climb or cycling expedition, or to reflect on how these helped mediate the psychological effects of adjustment to peacetime society. The meanings of involvement in the outdoor movement and engagement with the countryside were diverse, but such an attempt to map and understand them is part of a broader, as yet unwritten, history of how soldiers adjusted to civilian life after the war. It is also, potentially, a contribution to the under-researched history of civilian survivors and to a more nuanced appreciation of the relationship between emotional healing and the environment in the post-war period.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Cited in R. Hemmings, *Modern Nostalgia: Siegfried Sassoon, Trauma and the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 6.

⁷⁷ See Reviews in History, Tracey Loughran, 'Masculinity, shell shock and emotional survival in the First World War': <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/944#f19> (accessed November 2012).