

The Great War and The People of Wirral,  
Cheshire, c. 1910-1925

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Cheshire, c. 1910-1925

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## **Statements**

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Figures 2 and 4 were drawn by David Silcock and originally published in S.J. Roberts, *A History of Wirral* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2002).

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the impact of the Great War upon the people of Wirral during the period 1910-1925. It deepens our understanding of the history of a region within the United Kingdom during the early twentieth century and starts to rectify the historiographical imbalance between Wirral and its neighbour, Liverpool, which has so far received far more scholarly attention. A small portion of the British population is here placed under a microscope, so that the impact of the Great War on British society as a whole might better be understood. In order to produce balanced judgements on such topics as reactions to war, recruitment, resilience, patriotism, commemoration and remembrance, the arguments of the national historians are compared with local data and, where possible, comparisons made with other parts of the United Kingdom.

An integrated and 'bottom up' approach has been pursued. Primary sources (such as newspapers, oral interviews, personal papers and service records) have been analysed using the methods of the family, local, regional and military historian and a range of interesting stories and numerical data brought to light.

It is argued that the Great War exerted a conservative and reactionary influence on society. The beliefs, structures and attitudes of the pre-war world enabled people to cope with the challenges of total war and were, therefore, still firmly in place by 1925. If twentieth century British history is viewed teleologically as a progression towards a more democratic, equitable, inclusive and peaceful society, the data from Wirral herein expounded does not support the view that the Great War, at least within the decade of its conclusion, was a catalyst within this progression. The labour and women's movements enjoyed limited political and

social success in the immediate post-war years and pacifist views became slightly more acceptable in some circles, but, in general old loyalties and beliefs remained unshaken. In this regard, Wirral was more conservative than districts with stronger Nonconformist traditions (such as South Wales), higher proportions of industrial workers (such as Bolton) or who were represented by pacifist MPs (such as Leicester).

It is also shown that the home and fighting fronts were much more strongly linked than has previously been supposed and that, despite their surprisingly detailed knowledge of its horrors, civilians remained committed to the war. The people of Wirral should, therefore, be seen not solely as recipients of the war's impact, but as prosecutors and moulders of the conflict – active agents instead of passive victims.

The thesis contributes to debates about the role of the Great War in British history and about the value of regional studies in advancing historical knowledge. Britain is shown to have been a highly complex and diverse society about which it is difficult accurately to generalise, although certain themes (such as the importance of Christianity, patriotism, commitment to monarchy and empire and Germanophobia) are identifiable in most parts of the country. The work is a provocation for further regional studies which focus on the impact of war on society and for further analysis of Merseyside in wartime.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Finally, I wholeheartedly thank The Western Front Association and Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire for their generous financial contributions towards the project's costs.

Dedicated to the memory of my beloved Grandmothers, Mrs Annie Hadwin (née Cookson, 1909-1974) and Mrs Gladys Roberts (née Yoxall, 1906-1993) who, via memories both happy and sad, taught me so much about the impact of war on their families.



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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ASC = Army Service Corps

BA = *Birkenhead and Cheshire Advertiser and Wallasey Guardian*

BN = *Birkenhead News and General Wirral Advertiser*

BNA = British Newspaper Archive

BNVS = *Birkenhead News Victory Souvenir*

CC = *Chester Chronicle*

CGW = Comrades of the Great War

CO = *Chester Observer*

CR = Cheshire Regiment (Battalions are denoted thus: 1/CR = First Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment; 1/4/CR = First/Fourth Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment etc.)

CWGC = Commonwealth War Graves Commission

DA = *Deeside Advertiser*

DH = Denbighshire Hussars (Yeomanry)

EPA = *Ellesmere Port Advertiser*

GWR = Great Western Railway

HFP = *Hoylake Free Press*

HSLC = Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire

ILP = Independent Labour Party

IWGC = Imperial War Graves Commission

IWM = Imperial War Museum

KLR = King's (Liverpool Regiment) (Battalions are denoted thus: 1/KLR = First Battalion of the King's (Liverpool Regiment); 1/10/KLR = First/Tenth Battalion of the King's (Liverpool Regiment) etc.)

LC = Liddle Collection

LDP = *Liverpool Daily Post*

LNW = London and North-Western Railway

LE = *Liverpool Echo*

MP = Member of Parliament

NADSS = National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers

NCO = Non-commissioned Officer

NFDDS = National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers

NUDL = National Union of Dock Labourers

NUWSS = National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies

OTC = Officers' Training Corps

PHMA = People's History Museum Archive

RAMC = Royal Army Medical Corps

RN = Royal Navy

RNB = Royal Naval Brigade

RNR = Royal Naval Reserve

RE = Royal Engineers

REPS = The Royal Engineers Postal Section

RFA = Royal Field Artillery

RGA = Royal Garrison Artillery

RWF = Royal Welsh Fusiliers

SSFA = Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association

THSLC = *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*

TLC = Trades and Labour Council

TNA = The National Archives

TUC = Trades Union Congress

UDC = Union of Democratic Control

WN = *Wallasey News*

WKN = *West Kirby News*

WSS = Wirral Soldiers' Sample



## **INTRODUCTION**

### **I.1 Rationale, Questions and Structure**

This project results from my long standing fascination with local, family and military history. I wrote two full length works in 1992 and 2002.<sup>1</sup> The first focused on three small coastal townships in Wirral and was based on primary sources, while the second was based upon secondary sources and a selection of published primary sources.<sup>2</sup> During the 1990s, as a result of teaching the history of the Great War to key stage four students in a British comprehensive school, an enduring fascination with that conflict was generated. I later led tours of the Great War Battlefields in Flanders. At the age of ten, I had also become aware of north-western Wirral's most prominent War Memorial. It commemorates First and Second World War dead from West Kirby, Hoylake and surrounding region and was initially explained by my father and maternal grandmother.<sup>3</sup> The latter pointed out the names of certain 'uncles' who had died in the Great War. Only in 2009 did research reveal that they were in fact my great great uncle, Thomas Holmes (1877-1915) and my first cousins thrice removed, George (1882-1915) and William (1882-1916) Holmes of Hoylake. As the Great War's Centenary approached, I began to research all 334 names on the memorial and to publish them on a dedicated website called *An Imperishable Record*.<sup>4</sup> Concurrently with the above experiences,

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<sup>1</sup> S.J. Roberts, *Hoylake and Meols Past* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1992) and *A History of Wirral* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> See A. Everitt, 'Country, County and Town: Patterns of Regional Evolution in England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 29 (1979), pp. 79-108.

<sup>3</sup> A plaster maquette of the memorial's most prominent figure – the soldier called 'Wipers', designed by Charles Sargeant Jagers is held by the IWM, Art.IWM ART 6484.

<sup>4</sup> The name is derived from a feature about the dedication of the Memorial which appeared in the *Deeside Advertiser* (DA) of 22/12/1922: [Grangehill1922.wordpress.com](https://grangehill1922.wordpress.com). The Holmes Soldiers' biographies can be seen here: <https://grangehill1922.wordpress.com/2013/11/19/george-thomas-and-william-holmes/> Most of the biographies on the website were written by the author; other authors are attributed where necessary.

I have lived in Wales, taught Welsh History and acquired a working knowledge of the Welsh Language, which has proved useful when studying Wirral's Welsh community and the story of the Eisteddfod of the Black Chair which appears in Chapter Five. In addition, I have taught Irish History to GCE Advanced Level for over ten years, thereby gaining an interest and expertise in the subject which has heightened my awareness of the importance of Irish immigration into north west England.

In 2012 I attended a conference at Manchester Metropolitan University and afterwards realised that a study of Wirral during the Great War was both desirable and feasible. <sup>5</sup> It was feasible due to the range of available primary sources and desirable because it would increase our knowledge both of the impact of the Great War on British society and about the history of Wirral in the twentieth century. Indeed, *A History of Wirral* had been criticised for relying too heavily upon secondary sources; here was an opportunity to carry out a major study of Wirral based on primary sources.

The project's main aim is, by means of analysing primary sources, to investigate the impact of the Great War upon the people of Wirral. It aims to determine whether the war was transformative or conservative: whether it fostered continuity or change. Subsidiary questions include: How did people react to the outbreak of war? To what extent were the home and fighting fronts intertwined? How did the war affect women and the working-class? Why were people able to cope with disruption, stress and grief? How was the war commemorated?

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<sup>5</sup> The conference was organised by Drs. Craig Horner and Nick Mansfield (now Professor) and was entitled *The Great War: Localities and Regional Identities*.

These questions are addressed thematically throughout the enquiry as well as specifically in dedicated chapters. The work increases our understanding of the war's impact on the wider north-west region and on the United Kingdom as a whole. Wirral possessed a representative cross-section of British society, but was not a microcosm. Its interactions with the Great War were similar to some districts and dissimilar to others. Where possible, comparisons are made with other localities and reasons for similarities and differences explained. Britain's diversity is thereby expounded.

By focusing on a smaller area during a fifteen-year period, this study, by using more intimate data, reduces the amount of generalisation and enables assessment of the judgments of the historians of the nation. When analysing social and cultural change, problems can arise if data is collected from too wide a geographical area. An example of this occurs in D. Englander's, *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838-1918*: in a review of the work, Victor Batzel said:

Englander's decision to draw on evidence from all parts of England and Scotland adds another level of complexity. One bounces about the kingdom, for the most part ignoring the different economic, social and political circumstances and traditions of the urban centres from which examples are taken.<sup>6</sup>

This thesis aims to avoid such geographical 'bouncing' and to concentrate on the 'specific circumstances and traditions' of one region within the United Kingdom.

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<sup>6</sup> D. Englander, *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) and V. Batzel's review in *The Urban History Review*, 14(1) (June 1985), pp. 88-89.

The thesis is the first attempt at a rigorous academic investigation into the history of Wirral during the twentieth century. It aims to fill a gap which existing popular works of local and military history have failed to cover and to rectify the historiographical imbalance between Wirral and its neighbour, Liverpool, which has so far received far more scholarly attention.<sup>7</sup>

## **I.1 Historiography**

This section is a review of some of the most important writings pertinent to this enquiry. It begins with an evaluation of some of the most influential general Great War histories and is succeeded by a sub-section dealing with the texts about British social history during the era of the Great War, with particular reference to works which deal with gender and class. The next two sub-sections discuss Great War regional history in general and histories of Wirral in particular. It is shown that regional history is a respectable academic discipline which can contribute to a better understanding of the nation as a whole. In addition, it is argued that there are no academic studies of Wirral in the twentieth century and that this thesis fills the gap. The final sub-section reviews the literature which is concerned with commemoration and remembrance – a topic which has received detailed and innovatory study during the past two decades and which is covered in the final chapter of this thesis. The entire section places this enquiry in its historiographical context and describes how it makes a unique contribution to continuing historical debates about the impact of the Great War on British society.

### **General Great War History**

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<sup>7</sup> The details are explained below in the Historiography section.

It is probable that in Britain no subject has been written about more than the Great War. Its centenary inspired the publication of a great many books, adding to the existing mountain of volumes which was available before 2014.<sup>8</sup> For example, at that time, military history publishers Pen and Sword, had about 380 Great War titles in its catalogue. It now (July 2020) has over 1400. The majority of the titles follow traditional themes such as the causes of the war, soldiers' memoirs, biographies, regimental histories, accounts of battles and campaigns, battlefield guides, and discussions of weaponry, tactics and strategy. Indeed, amongst the publisher's twenty-four 'most popular' Great War books, only one is about the home front – *Canterbury in the Great War*.<sup>9</sup>

Many Great War researchers still focus on the conflict on the Western Front. Interest in the Home Front is growing, but still lags behind the popular fascination with 'the trenches'.<sup>10</sup> The origins and immediate consequences of the war receive some attention, but mainly on an international, political and diplomatic level.<sup>11</sup> It is necessary to understand the home front as much as the fighting fronts and to analyse the relationship between them. *Facing Armageddon* is an example of scholarly and integrated Great War history.<sup>12</sup> It is a collection of articles covering topics such as high command as well as the experiences of ordinary soldiers and civilians and the ways in which the war had been remembered and pictured in art.

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<sup>8</sup> Some of the best centennial publications are: M. Macmillan, *The War That Ended Peace: How Europe Abandoned Peace for the First World War* (London: Profile Books, 2014), D. Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014) and D. Olusoga, *The World's War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire* (London: Head of Zeus, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/> [accessed 23/9/2019]. S. Wynn, *Canterbury in The Great War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> A good example is P. Hart, *1918: A Very British Victory* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> See D. Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014) and R. Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> H. Cecil and P.H. Liddle, *Facing Armageddon* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996).

Items written by Peter Liddle on British loyalties, Keith Robbins on conscientious objection, John Bourne on the working man in arms and Gary Sheffield on officer man relationships are both inspirational and instructive, showing the possibilities for exploring topics outside the range of traditional military history.<sup>13</sup>

Dan Todman discussed myths, arguing amongst other things that soldiers had a range of experiences, 'including comradeship, boredom and even enjoyment' and then analysed the reasons for the emergence of the stereotypical 'disillusionment' view of the Great War which emerged in the 1930s and in which some people still believe.<sup>14</sup> His work is a good example of nuanced analyses of the Great War which is not just based on historical evidence, but on consideration of the ways in which history is understood and the past interpreted by the public. This work acts on some of Dan Todman's suggestions by considering the full range of human experiences and by being alert to preconceptions and myths.<sup>15</sup>

During the 1970s and 80s, Great War historiography was moving away from the prevailing 'disillusionment' angle to a more positive stance and history as a discipline was itself evolving.<sup>16</sup> The term 'new history' was coined to describe a growing interest in different topics and innovatory methodologies. There was a drift

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Liddle's chapter about the collection he created is particularly relevant to this enquiry, as he described the overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards the war which were expressed in ordinary British people's correspondence: P.H. Liddle, 'British Loyalties: The Evidence of an Archive' in H. Cecil and P.H. Liddle, *Facing Armageddon*, pp.523-538.

<sup>14</sup> D. Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (Hambledon: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Concerning the role of myth in shaping our understanding of history, see R. Samuel and P. Thompson, eds., *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990) is useful.

<sup>16</sup> The 'Disillusionment' or negative view of the Great War emphasises its futility. It started with such works as C.E. Montague's *Disenchantment* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1922) and was boosted by popular works such as A. Clark, *The Donkeys* (London: Hutchinson, 1961) and D. Winter, *Haig's Command A Reassessment* (London: Viking, 1991). Revisionist or 'positive' interpretations include G. Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The Great War: Myths and Realities* (London: Headline Review, 2002), G. Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (London: Cassell, 2003), P. Hart, *1918: A Very British Victory* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2008) and K.R. Gieves, 'C.E. Montague and the Making of "Disenchantment" 1914-1921', *War in History*, 4 (1997), pp. 35-59.

away from 'top down' political, diplomatic and military history to 'bottom up' approaches and an interest in social, psychological and cultural issues. Every kind of human experience became a valid field of enquiry, with the result that such groups as women, ethnic minorities, the poor and destitute, colonial peoples and children were studied properly for the first time. In addition, an increasing amount of history was being done by people from outside the academy in such areas as family, local and oral history. *History Workshop* (launched in 1976) became a leading voice for this approach and has inspired this author to adopt similar 'bottom up' methods, embracing all sections of society.<sup>17</sup>

Two classic works by Arthur Marwick and Gerard De Groot provided some of the hypotheses which are tested in this thesis.<sup>18</sup> Neither book is necessarily a great historical monograph and both are dated, but, especially because De Groot framed some of his arguments in direct contradiction of Marwick, the two books act as statements of the opposing ways of seeing the Great War: either as a force for change or for continuity. Adrian Gregory's work brings a nuanced perspective, suggesting that we should not view the Great War anachronistically because such a view 'can lead to unjustifiable wishful thinking based on little more than romantic nostalgia'.<sup>19</sup> His approach might be described as post-modern in that he views a variety of issues, almost impressionistically, without linking them to an obvious

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<sup>17</sup> An example of 'bottom-up history' is R. Samuel, *Village Life and Labour* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975). Articles used here: M. Blanch, 'Militarism in Britain Before the Great War', *History Workshop*, 3 (1977), pp. 199-200; L. Bryder, 'The First World War: Healthy or Hungry', *History Workshop*, 24 (1987), pp. 141-157; T. Hadwin, 'From the Lower Deck', *History Workshop Journal*, 4 (1977), pp. 247-249; M. Roper, 'Re-remembering the Soldier Hero: The Psychic and Social Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War' *History Workshop Journal*, 50 (2000), pp.181-204 and *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); A. Summers, 'Militarism in Britain Before the Great War', *History Workshop*, 2 (1976), pp. 104-123.

<sup>18</sup> A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London, Macmillan 1965); G.J. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Pearson, 1996) and *Back in Blighty: The British at Home in World War 1* (London: Vintage, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> A. Gregory, *The Last Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.1.

argument ('meta-narrative'), but in doing so, he covers important issues, such as religion and the language of sacrifice, labour and the demographic impact of the Great War, which provoke readers to test their ideas against further primary evidence. This study treats these works as hypotheses which it tests with data from a manageable sample of the British population.

Catriona Pennell's work is essential. She analysed the words of 441 people, including 'diarists, correspondents, authors, poets and élite figures' from all over the United Kingdom. She rightly concludes that: 'Amongst forty-million people there can be no single "experience."' One thing is certain: an entire population's feelings cannot be adequately described by the monolithic label of war enthusiasm.'<sup>20</sup> It is an inspiring piece of research which demonstrates the necessity to study many and varied contemporary sources in order to get a true understanding of how war affected people. This enquiry adopts some of Pennell's methods – especially in its analysis of a range of personal papers – in order to gain fresh insights into the impact of war on people.

Simon Heffer's *Staring at God* was published in 2019. It is the third volume in his intended series of four dealing with Britain in the period 1838-1939 – a century which he describes as 'transformative [...] surpassing even those after the Roman Invasion, the Norman Conquest and the Reformation.' He asserts that Britain 'saw a metaphorical revolution [...] to compare with the literal ones in parts of Europe and in Russia.'<sup>21</sup> The book does not, however, argue, along the lines of Marwick, that British society was transformed, but that the role of government changed as it took control of more aspects of people's lives. He also comments on the

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<sup>20</sup> C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.1.

<sup>21</sup> S. Heffer, *Staring at God: Britain in the Great War* (London: Penguin Random House, 2019), p.1.



importance of Irish independence in 1922. The work is essentially a 'top down' study, which focuses on high politics rather than social and cultural history.

### **Class, Gender, Citizenship and Religion**

As has been shown, there is a wide range of useful texts relevant to social history. The works of E.P. Thompson and Alan MacFarlane are both inspirational, even if the respective scholars' work did not focus on the Great War and even though their methodologies have not necessarily been copied during the production of this thesis.<sup>22</sup> The extremely thorough and classic works of G.D.H. Cole have proved to be pertinent to this enquiry, especially in relation to the study of class and of the labour movement and the trades unions.<sup>23</sup>

The working-class is well served by a variety of studies which discuss the role of patriotism, military service, trades unions and the Labour Party. David Swift's work on patriotic labour has proved to be one of the most useful in this area.<sup>24</sup> A recent volume of essays edited by Lucy Bland and Richard Carr which contains pertinent contributions by Marcus Morris, Matthew Kidd and others is similarly valuable.<sup>25</sup> Again, such nuanced accounts resonate with the findings presented in this thesis, which finds no evidence of widespread working-class disaffection with the Great War nor of a sudden surge in the popularity of socialism or the labour movement.

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<sup>22</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* and A. MacFarlane, *Reconstructing Historical Communities*. See p.17 above.

<sup>23</sup> G.D.H Cole, *Studies in Class Structure, The World of Labour* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1913), *Labour in Wartime* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1915), *A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement 1789-1927* (London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1927), *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948), with R. Postgate, *The Common People 1746-1946* (London: Routledge, 1965).

<sup>24</sup> D. Swift, *For Class and Country: The Patriotic Left and the First World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> M. Morris, 'Peace but not at any Price: British Socialists' Calls for Peace on the Eve of the First World War' and M. Kidd, 'Labour and Socialism During the First World War in Bristol and Northampton' in L. Bland and R. Carr, eds., *Labour, British Radicalism and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018) Amazon kindle e-book, Loc. 2540-3113.

Two autobiographies of local trades union leaders – Walter Citrine and Sir James Sexton – shed light on working-class lives and struggles, partially compensating for the absence of grass roots working-class memoirs.<sup>26</sup> As will be highlighted in the next two sections, however, the otherwise excellent studies of Liverpool and ‘Merseyside’, fail to give due attention to Wirral, mentioning occasional, brief examples from Birkenhead and little more.<sup>27</sup> This thesis attempts to give the whole of Wirral commensurate attention.

Concerning women’s history, in addition to the texts mentioned above, Kate Adie’s popular work, *Fighting on the Home Front*, is useful as it summarises many of the arguments made by specialist historians since the 1990s, that pre-war women were heavily involved in the provision of welfare and active in local civic affairs.<sup>28</sup> Such findings correspond with arguments presented in this thesis. Discussions about women’s wartime work and uniformed service are also highly relevant as are treatments of female heroism and sacrifice which find parallels in this study.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> J. Sexton, *Sir James Sexton, Agitator, the Life of the Docker’s M.P., An Autobiography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936) and Lord W. Citrine, *Men and Work: The Autobiography of Lord Citrine Volume 1* (London: Hutchinson, 1964).

<sup>27</sup> For example, S. Davies, *Liverpool Labour: Social and Political Influences on the Development of the Labour Party in Liverpool 1900-1939* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996) mentions Birkenhead twice, while H. Hikins in *Building the Union: Studies in the Growth of the Workers’ Movement on Merseyside 1756-1967* (Liverpool, Toulouse Press, 1973) mentions it only eight times and then only as an adjunct to events in Liverpool.

<sup>28</sup> K. Adie, *Fighting on the Home Front: The Legacy of Women in World War One* (London: Hodder Paperbacks, 2014); G. Bock and P. Thane, eds., *Maternity and Gender Politics: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s-1950s* (London: Routledge, 1991); P Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State* (London: Longman, 1998); J. Lewis, ‘Gender, the Family and Women’s Agency in the Building of Welfare States: The British Case’, *Social History*, 19 (1994), pp. 37-55; K. Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother: Women in Merseyside’s Political Organisations 1890-1920* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> H. Donner, ‘Under the Cross: Why V.A.D.s Performed the Filthiest Task in the Dirtiest War: Red Cross Women Volunteers, 1914-1918’, *Journal of Social History*, 30, No. 3 (1997), pp. 687-704; D. Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War 1* (London: Taurus, 1998); S.R. Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); K. Robert, ‘Constructions of "Home," "Front," and Women’s Military Employment in First World War Britain: A Spatial Interpretation’, *History and Theory*, 52 (2013), pp. 319-343.

The term 'gender history' is not a synonym for 'women's history'; the concept of 'masculinity' is in need of as much historical attention as is 'femininity'. Ana Carden-Coyne's, Joanna Bourke's and Jessica Meyer's full-length works are important and their observations are cited in the following discussions about youth movements, soldiers and heroes.<sup>30</sup>

The history of the idea of citizenship in Britain is a relatively new field of scholarship, probably due to the British bias against Gallic idealism. Some of the most important articles are mentioned below. Others include those by Biagini, Roberts and Bellamy.<sup>31</sup> It is shown throughout the thesis that women and the working-class were trying to be recognised as full citizens during the early twentieth century and that the war had an impact upon this quest.

Recent theological and historical enquiries have argued that spirituality did not decline either during or immediately after the Great War. Several regional studies broadly agree with arguments presented in this thesis, that both formal and diffuse Christianity as well as superstition and folk religion all helped to sustain people during trying times.<sup>32</sup> Analysis of related primary material from Wirral, which sheds further light on this debate, appears in Chapter Five.

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<sup>30</sup> A. Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism and the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), *Gender and Conflict Since 1914: Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and *The Politics of Wounds: Military Patients and Medical Power in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century History* (London: Granta, 2000) and J. Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> E.F. Biagini, *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals and Collective Identities in the British Isles 1865-1931* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), N. Roberts, 'Character in the Mind: Citizenship, Education and Psychology in Britain 1880-1914', *History of Education*, 33 (2004), pp. 177-197 and R. Bellamy, *Citizenship: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> A. Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SPCK., 1978); R.W. Davis and R.J. Helmstadter, eds., *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society* (London: Routledge,

## Regional and Local Studies

Works about other regions have been consulted for two reasons: firstly, in order to compare the methodologies and sources employed by other historians and secondly in order to make comparisons between Wirral and other parts of the United Kingdom. Comparisons, of necessity, however, will always be superficial, as it is not possible within the scope of a PhD thesis about Wirral, to carry out an equal amount of research into the districts, such as Westmorland, Bolton, Bury, Hull or South Wales, which are mentioned herein. Such places are compared with Wirral either because the author has carried out some archival research (as in the case of Westmorland) or because other historians have published works related to those regions. In this thesis comparisons with other regions are made thematically. For example, in Chapter Two, recruitment meetings in Wirral are found to have been similar to an example in Essex which was recorded by a local clergyman. The point is thereby made that it is likely that such patterns were common throughout Britain. Conversely, in Chapter Three, regarding ex-servicemen's organisations, the experiences of Birkenhead are compared with Luton and found to be dissimilar, leading to the conclusion that such phenomena were moulded by specific local circumstances and that Wirral was rather more unique in this respect. The reasons for its uniqueness are explained.

The first local civilian histories of the Great War appeared in the 1920s and 30s. Examples include those about Birkenhead, Hyde, The Hartlepoons, Todmorden

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1992); R. Beaken, *The Church of England and the Home Front: Civilians, Soldiers and Religion in Wartime Colchester* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015); G. Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism and the Church of England 1850-1939* (Martlesham: Boydell and Brewer, 2010); O. Davies, *A Supernatural War: Magic, Divination and Faith During the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

and Leicester.<sup>33</sup> Such works reflect the attitudes of contemporary local establishments, being uncritical and triumphalist. They are the official chronicles of their respective areas' contributions to the allied victory. They have, however, acted as starting points for new local enquiries, because they contain facts about who was doing what, where, why and when. In fact, one often finds them being used as primary sources in some of the more up-to-date regional studies, such as those being published by Pen and Sword.

Gerald Gliddon's *Norfolk and Suffolk* is a regional study with articles by Nick Mansfield, about recruitment, farmworkers and the land.<sup>34</sup> Nick Mansfield's other works about working-class patriotism and veterans in the Marches are relevant not only for regional and local history but to labour history, which is discussed above.<sup>35</sup> Geoffrey Moorhouse's book about Bury, where memories of the war shaped the town's post-war identity is important. His use of personal stories as well as general perspectives is invaluable and an example of what can be achieved when the researcher combines imagination with rigour. It is also a powerful study of the role of myth in shaping local identities.<sup>36</sup> A section in Chapter Two below compares Bury's Great War myth with those of Wirral. Dave Craddock's '*Where they Burned the Town Hall Down*' about Luton's Peace Day Riots is an excellent piece of forensic local history, which disentangles the threads leading up to a violent

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<sup>33</sup> *The Birkenhead News Victory Souvenir* (Birkenhead: Willmer Bros., 1919) (BNVS); G.F. Higham and R. Sidebotham, eds., *Hyde in War Time* (Hyde: The North Cheshire Herald, 1916); F. Miller, *The Hartlepoons and the Great War: A Record of Events in the History of the Hartlepoons During the Great War 1914-19* (Hartlepool: Chas. A. Sage, 1920); J.A. Lee, *Todmorden and the Great War 1914-1918* (Todmorden: Waddington and Sons, 1922); and F. Armitage, *Leicester 1914-18: The War Time Story of a Midland Town* (Leicester: Edgar Backus, 1933).

<sup>34</sup> G. Gliddon, ed., *Norfolk and Suffolk in the Great War* (Norwich: Gliddon Books, 1988).

<sup>35</sup> N. Mansfield, *English Farm Workers and Local Patriotism 1900-1930* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2001) and 'The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Soldiers and Sailors 1917-1921: A View from the Marches', *Family and Community History*, 7 (2004), pp. 19-31.

<sup>36</sup> G. Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations: A Town, Its Myths and Gallipoli*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992).

protest by ex-servicemen.<sup>37</sup> It is mentioned in Chapter Five where Luton is compared with Birkenhead and the importance of peculiar local conditions is highlighted.

A number of books about military units have been studied. They include John Hartley's account of 6/Manchester Regiment, John Hutton's analysis of the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment, Andrew Jackson's book about the Accrington Pals and Mark Connelly's about the Buffs. All are outshone by Helen McCartney's *Citizen Soldiers*.<sup>38</sup> It is an historiographical landmark because it explores the social background, culture and relationships of the men of two Liverpool territorial units and then discusses how these factors enabled them to cope with the stresses of war. It demonstrates the way in which good history is rigorous, but at the same time humane and sympathetic. Indeed, it explores the fascinating singularity, diversity and dynamism of Merseyside and invites further study of local soldiers and civilians and as such was an indispensable work for this enquiry.

Two articles about the north-west of England appeared in the 1980s and early 2000s – the first was by G.J. Bryant and dealt with Bolton's reaction to the outbreak of war in 1914; the second was by Mike Finn who discussed the role of the Merseyside press in moulding local attitudes.<sup>39</sup> Both articles offered new lines

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<sup>37</sup> D. Craddock, *'Where they Burnt the Town Hall Down': Luton, the First World War and the Peace Day Riots of July 1919* (Dunstable: The Book Castle, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> J. Hartley, *6<sup>th</sup> Battalion The Manchester Regiment in the Great War ('Not a Rotter in the Lot')* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2010); J. Hutton, *Kitchener's Men: The King's Own Royal Lancasters on the Western Front 1915-1918* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2008); A. Jackson, *Accrington Pals: The Full Story* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2013); M. Connelly, *Steady the Buffs: A Regiment, A Region and the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); H.B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> G.J. Bryant, 'Bolton and the Outbreak of the First World War' THSLC, 138 (1988), pp. 181-199; M. Finn, 'The Realities of War', *History Today*, 52(8) (2002) pp. 26-31 and 'Local Heroes: War News and the Construction of "Community" in Britain, 1914-18', *Historical Research*, 83 (2010), pp. 520-538.

of enquiry. However, neither example of subtle, rigorous analysis of local primary sources (particularly newspapers) was followed in any depth until Catriona Pennell's *A Kingdom United*. Since then, Michael Reeve's excellent 'The Darkest Town in England', about Hull, has been published and is mentioned as a comparative local case study in this thesis. Reeve's arguments relating to local patriotism and to the persecution of Germans following the *Lusitania* outrage are similar to those which are made here.<sup>40</sup>

Works by 'amateur enthusiasts' have not been overlooked. Graham Maddocks in his *Liverpool Pals* used battalion war diaries, service records, private correspondence and memoirs in order to analyse the recruitment, training and war experiences of the four Liverpool Pals' Battalions. Military topics are given priority, but Maddocks's investigation has a personal touch and soldiers are treated as individuals; some reference is made to their social and economic backgrounds as well as to the experiences of their families and neighbourhoods.<sup>41</sup> Due to his interest in local history, Mike Stedman has researched the Salford and Manchester Pals.<sup>42</sup> His works have a human quality, as he enables readers to see the combatants as civilians in uniform who had to learn the art of war and later to return to life in peace time. Even though Maddocks's and Stedman's books do not quite achieve the goal of integrating military experiences with civilian in the way in which this project aims to do, they demonstrate how 'bottom up' history can be achieved.

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<sup>40</sup> M. Reeve, "'The Darkest Town in England': Patriotism and Anti-German Sentiment in Hull, 1914-19'.

<sup>41</sup> G. Maddocks, *Liverpool Pals: The 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th Battalions of The King's Liverpool Regiment 1914-1919* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> M. Stedman, *Salford Pals: A History of The 15th, 16th, 19th and 20th Battalions Lancashire Fusiliers 1914-1919: A History of The Salford Brigade* (London: Leo Cooper, 1993); and *Manchester Pals: 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th 20th, 21st, 22nd and 23rd Battalions of the Manchester Regiment: A History of the Two Manchester Brigades* (London: Leo Cooper, 1994).

Pen and Sword publishers, in their series entitled 'Your Towns and Cities in the Great War', have produced ten titles about places in the north-west of England.<sup>43</sup> The Wirral volume represents the style and format used in all the other titles and reveals that these books are brief, well-illustrated, accessible and based on a limited range of sources.<sup>44</sup> At best, they can act as introductions to some of the main events and issues, but they are not academic monographs and do not produce any insights relating to current debates about the impact of the Great War on British society. This enquiry is the first academic work, based on primary sources, about Wirral in the Great War.

There are several interesting works dealing with wartime local dissent and protest. A good example is Roger Smalley's *Agitate!* which discusses the paternalistic role of the local aristocracy, gentry and businesspeople in holding Westmorland society together and the beliefs, actions and fates of local pacifists, socialists and Quakers. One of his more interesting observations concerns the way in which, during the 1930s, when disillusionment with the Great War was beginning to take root and Westmerians were highly supportive of the Peace Ballot, some of the pacifists who had been vilified during the Great War were now being rehabilitated and even respected as local politicians.<sup>45</sup> Another example is Elliott's *Opposition*.<sup>46</sup> This thesis bears these examples in mind whilst searching for equivalent phenomena in Wirral, finding them to be few in number, for reasons which are discussed.

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<sup>43</sup> Ashton Under Lyne, Barrow in Furness, Carlisle, Chester, Crewe, The Isle of Man, Liverpool, Manchester, Preston and Wirral.

<sup>44</sup> S. McGreal, the author of *Wirral in the Great War*, cites a total of ten published titles and two newspapers in his bibliography; indeed, the entire work is heavily reliant upon the *Birkenhead News Victory Souvenir* (BNVS).

<sup>45</sup> R. Smalley, *Agitate! Educate! Organise! Political Dissent in Westmorland, 1880-1930* (Kendal: Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 2013).

<sup>46</sup> M. Elliott, 'Opposition to the First World War: The Fate of Conscientious Objectors in Leicester' *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 77 (2003), pp.83-92.



The June 2012 Conference at Manchester Metropolitan University showed that many people are interested in studying the impact of the Great War upon specific geographical areas. In 2014, the *Manchester Region History Review* was published with the title *The Great War in the Northwest*.<sup>47</sup> It is another example of good practice, as it contains articles about local patriotism, the Liberal and Labour Parties, women, reactions to the Gallipoli Campaign, community identities and memorialisation. All of these topics are here explored in the context of Wirral.

Regional approaches to the study of the impact of the Great War on British society are seen as valid and interesting. There are several examples of good practice and introductions to certain areas which have inspired me to work on a variety of sources which have enabled the writing of this thesis, which aims to increase our knowledge of a unique and yet representative region which has not so far featured prominently in national historical debates and about which there is no existing serious work focusing on the early twentieth century.

## **Wirral History**

It is impossible to understand Wirral's experience without reference to its neighbour and moulder of most of its recent economic and social history – Liverpool. Indeed, there are far more books about Liverpool's history than there are about Wirral.<sup>48</sup> They have been read for two reasons – firstly to gain an insight into what was happening on Merseyside and secondly in order to discover events,

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<sup>47</sup> N. Mansfield, ed., *The Great War in the North West* (Manchester: Manchester Centre for Regional History, 2014). See also N. Mansfield and C. Horner, eds., *The Great War: Localities and Regional Identities* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> Examples include J. Belchem, ed., *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History 1790-1940* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992); *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character and History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); and *Liverpool City of Radicals* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

themes and developments which have been compared to what happened in Wirral. An example of this phenomenon is the labour unrest which occurred both before and during the Great War and is discussed by Eric Taplin, Ron Bean and others.<sup>49</sup> All these works have been searched for references to events in Wirral and in order to find interpretations which were compared to data collected from Wirral's contemporary newspapers.

There are two books about Wirral during the Great War – *The Birkenhead News Victory Souvenir* (BNVS) and Steven McGreal's *Wirral in the Great War*. Neither is an adequate study of the topic – the first due to its celebratory function and the second due to its brevity and absence of primary sources. Indeed, McGreal's main source of information was the BNVS itself, ensuring that his work barely mentions anywhere outside Birkenhead at the north-eastern end of the peninsula. However, both books have been useful for this enquiry because they contain basic facts, which are the skeleton for any research project. But, overall, the following thesis aims to fill some of the obvious gaps in popular understandings of the impact of war on Wirral society.

Wirral's local enthusiasts have been and are becoming increasingly active in Great War Studies. McGreal's and David Horne's books are useful.<sup>50</sup> Again, they are brief, accessible and based on research into such sources as local newspapers,

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<sup>49</sup> E. Taplin, *Near to Revolution: The Liverpool General Transport Strike of 1911* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Press, 1994); R. Bean, 'Police Unrest, Unionisation and the 1919 Strike in Liverpool' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15 (1980), pp. 633-653, H.R. Hikins, 'The Liverpool General Transport Strike 1911', THSLC, 113 (1961), pp. 169-195, S. Davies and R. Moon, 'The Rank and File in the 1911 Liverpool General Transport Strike', *Labour History Review*, 79 (2014), pp. 55-81.

<sup>50</sup> S. McGreal, *Moreton and District Patriots 1914-1919* (Birkenhead: Countyvise, 1999); *The Zeebrugge and Ostend Raids* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2002); *The Cheshire Bantams: 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the Cheshire Regiment* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2006); and *Wirral in the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014); D. Horne, *Higher Bebington's Heroes 1914-1919* (Birkenhead: Countyvise, 2012); and *Lower Bebington's Fallen 1914-1919* (Birkenhead, Countyvise, 2013).

service records and battalion war diaries and they bring past generations' war experiences to the public's attention. The Great War Centenary has inspired a number of community history projects, such as the West Kirby Museum Research Group, which, along with this author, is publishing online the biographies of every local Great War casualty.<sup>51</sup> The project encompasses the townships in the north-western corner of Wirral and has unearthed knowledge about popular culture, class, gender and the family. This enquiry uses some of the group's methodologies and discoveries in exploring the rest of the peninsula, including people such as the industrial employees of Port Sunlight and Ellesmere Port, which appear in Chapter Four.

There are not many serious works about Wirral in the twentieth century. This inquiry aims to fill the gap. But there is a smattering of works which have proved useful. The best examples are by Eric Rideout, Paul Booth and Geoffrey Place.<sup>52</sup> The classic history of Wallasey by Percy Culverwell-Brown and Cuthbert Woods and the analysis of the development of Ellesmere Port by Peter Aspinall contain few, if any, references to the Great War, but do discuss contemporary social and economic developments and refer to primary sources which were followed up.<sup>53</sup> The many lighter, descriptions of Wirral which were written in the early twentieth century, such as that by Norman Ellison provide insights not only into the landscape, environment and traditions of Wirral, but also into how these things were viewed and interpreted by contemporary antiquarians.

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<sup>51</sup> [www.westkirbymuseum.co.uk](http://www.westkirbymuseum.co.uk) [Accessed repeatedly].

<sup>52</sup> E.H. Rideout, *The Growth of Wirral* (Liverpool: E.A. Bryant, 1927); P.H.W. Booth, ed., *Burton in Wirral: A History* (Burton: Burton and South Wirral Local History Society, 1984); and G. Place, ed., *Neston 1840-1940* (Burton and South Wirral Local History Society, 1996).

<sup>53</sup> E.C. Woods and P. C. Brown, *The Rise and Progress of Wallasey* (Wallasey: Wallasey Corporation, 1960); P.J. Aspinall et. al., *Ellesmere Port: The Making of an Industrial Borough* (Ellesmere Port: Ellesmere Port, Neston and South Wirral Borough Council, 1982).

## Remembrance and Commemoration

Geoff Dyer's *Missing of the Somme* is relevant to this discussion because Dyer did not try to propound a monolithic view of the Great War, but to seek understanding of the conflict which had haunted the British people and his family for the previous eighty or so years. In the process, he exposed myths and thereby made some interesting points about communal memory and remembrance.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps because he is not officially an 'historian', Dyer's work exhibits humility – he does not claim fully to understand, but honestly explores and leads us on a journey of discovery. That kind of approach and attitude continue to be necessary when dealing with such a momentous and complex issue as the impact of the Great War. The author has attempted to emulate Dyer's approach by looking at local primary sources with an objective eye in order to allow an un-mythologised analysis to emerge.

Jay Winter's *Remembering War* provokes deeper thought about this aspect of the enquiry. In it the author discusses such issues as 'shell shock', which he calls 'a theatre of memory out of control' and the role of war memorials, which he says, '[...] tended to fail. The dead were forgotten; peace did not last; memorials faded into the landscape. It is a moot question, at the very least, as to whether healing at the personal level followed.'<sup>55</sup> These reflections can be compared with Mark Connelly's work on London's East End and Bob Bushaway's work on Great War

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<sup>54</sup> G Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995). The main myth was that his grandfather had lied about his age and served as an underage soldier, when in reality, he was in his early 20s when he signed up.

<sup>55</sup> J. Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War and Historical Memory in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 56 and 140 and *Sites of Memory Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Commemoration in general.<sup>56</sup> Michael Roper's analyses of the psychologies of memory and survival offer a partially scientific approach to the subject, whereas Paul Fussell, and Juliet Nicolson, take a more literary and cultural angle.<sup>57</sup> These varied approaches have inspired the nuanced analysis of first-hand accounts of human suffering which appear in the following enquiry.

Clearly, an immense amount of material about the Great War is already in print. The majority of it, however, deals with conflict on the Western Front during the period 1914-1918. Issues relating to the home front and to the broader impact of the Great War on British society have been studied most notably by Marwick, Winter, De Groot and Gregory and two broad schools of thought are apparent – one that says that the conflict was a radical force which transformed society completely and the other that says it was a conservative or reactionary force which reinforced traditional institutions and values. The following enquiry bears these two extremes in mind, but attempts to look at the issues objectively and in a fresh light in order to reach a balanced conclusion about a certain place at a specific time in order that knowledge about the impact of the Great War on British society might be extended. After discussing the nature of local society before 1914, analysing the way in which the war was received during its first two years, the thesis then analyses the experiences of two key groups – the working-class and women – before discussing the physical and psychological/spiritual factors

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<sup>56</sup> M. Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual Commemoration in the City and East London 1916-1939* (Boydell and Brewer, 2001 and The Royal Historical Society, 2015), pp.136-167.

<sup>57</sup> M. Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); J. Nicolson, *The Perfect Summer: Dancing Into Shadow 1911* (London: John Murray, 2006) and *The Great Silence 1918-1920: Living in the Shadow of the Great War* (London: John Murray, 2009).

which undergirded a remarkably high degree of resilience. It will be noticed that the enquiry broadly agrees with the main findings of the most recent Great War historiography by arguing that the conflict exerted a conservative influence on society. The thesis's unique contribution is its detailed exemplification and explanation of the apparent unassailability of the conservatism which pervaded all aspects of local life, using hitherto unexplored data from a neglected but important British region.

## **1.2 Concepts and Definitions**

### **Change and Impact**

Historians study people in time. Things change over time. At certain periods, change occurred more rapidly and more fundamentally than at others. Such occasions can be called, “, ‘defining’, or ‘decisive’ moments – ‘turning points’, ‘watersheds’, ‘crossroads’ or ‘revolutions’. The Great War was an unprecedented event – the first ‘total war’: it killed and injured more people from a greater collection of countries than any other war before 1914; it expended more wealth than any other war to that date and generated a pandemic which killed more people than the conflict itself; it provoked technological and medical innovation and vast movements of peoples; it has captured the imaginations of subsequent generations and provoked historical debate. A turning point it clearly was, but the degree to which it transformed every sphere of human life is open to question. Despite their apparently all-encompassing nature, great events do not necessarily change everything. Furthermore, when they do change things, they do so in such a way as to make them the same – they can hinder or halt the processes of progression or evolution which were preceding them. The Great War is an

example of such a phenomenon. Despite its responsibility for so much disruption and trauma, the Great War also solidified traditional societal structures, beliefs, hopes, moralities, loyalties, behaviours and attitudes. Indeed, it can be argued that it was these familiar phenomena which enabled people to deal with such a deeply shocking event.<sup>58</sup>

In this thesis the term 'impact' is used – always in a metaphorical sense, as, in its literal sense, the word refers to a collision between two solid objects or more specifically to the effects of such a collision. In an historical sense 'impact' refers to the effects of big events on people. In the context of this thesis, it refers to the Great War's social effects within a geographical region. In 1995 Gordon Phillips defined 'social change' as follows:

'Social change' is thus embodied in a vast and manifold process of human decisions and responses, choices and acceptances, enterprises and adjustments. Historians can never grasp more than a fraction of these. They must select what aspects of past behaviour seems to them most significant and make sense of the record of others' behaviour as best they can.<sup>59</sup>

This enquiry accepts the above definition. Only a tiny fraction of the 'vast and manifold processes' can ever be discovered and only certain aspects of 'past behaviour' have been selected for study. The latter are partially dictated by the availability of evidence and partly by judgements of what appear to be the most

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<sup>58</sup> This topic is discussed with great clarity and concision in the Introduction to S. Constantine, M.W. Kirby and M.B. Rose, eds., *The First World War in British History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), pp. 6-8.

<sup>59</sup> G. Phillips, 'The Social Impact' in M.W. Kirby and M.B. Rose, eds., *The First World War in British History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), pp.106-140 (p106).

important topics. They are: people's responses to the outbreak and development of the war, the war's effects on class and on the working-class in particular, its impact on women, the economic and spiritual reasons for resilience and ways in which the war was remembered and commemorated.

## **Class**

When talking about social change in Britain, it is impossible to proceed without mentioning class. Selina Todd averred that it is 'a quintessentially British fact of life', not 'a romantic tradition', but a divisive force.<sup>60</sup> Joanna Bourke agreed when she said that 'the British have always thought of themselves in terms of class.'<sup>61</sup> According to G.D.H. Cole, for Marxists, class is not 'merely a social reality, but *the* great social reality which transcends all others and constitutes a great moving force in history.'<sup>62</sup> In Stephen Brooke's words, Marxists see history as a struggle between 'those who owned and those who worked.'<sup>63</sup> For many, due to its focus upon economics, Marxism is too prescriptive.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> S. Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class 1910-2010* (London: John Murray, 2014), Amazon Kindle e-book, Loc. 101. See S. Todd, *Snakes and Ladders: The Great British Social Mobility Myth* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2021), in which she argues that there has been very little social mobility in Britain during the last century. According to Stephen Brooke in 'Class and Gender' in F. Carnevali and A. M. Strange, eds. *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 42-57 (pp.42-44), in 1900 10% of Britain's population held 90% of its wealth; in 1990 10% of the population held 51% of the nation's wealth.

<sup>61</sup> J. Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London, Routledge, 1994), p.1.

<sup>62</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *Studies in Class Structure* (London: Routledge, 1955), p.10.

<sup>63</sup> S. Brooke, 'Class and Gender', p.42.

<sup>64</sup> For example, A. Curthoys, 'Labour History and Cultural Studies' *Labour History*, 67 (November 1994), pp. 12-22; J.H. Goldthorpe and D. Lockwood, 'Affluence and the British Class Structure', *The Sociological Review*, 11(2) (1963), pp. 133-63; E. Faue, 'Community, Class, and Comparison in Labour History and Local History', *Labour History*, 78 (May 2000), pp. 155-162.



In 1963, it was the Marxist historian, E.P. Thompson, who began an historiographical revolution with his *Making of the English Working Class*.<sup>65</sup> His definitions of class were seminal and have been used by historians ever since:

By class I understand a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness. I emphasise that it is an *historical* phenomenon. I do not see class as a 'structure', nor even as a 'category', but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships. More than this, the notion of class entails the notion of historical relationship. Like any other relationship, it is a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment and anatomize its structure.<sup>66</sup>

In other words, as David Featherstone and Paul Griffin put it, 'Class was a process, not a thing.'<sup>67</sup> They also said that E.P. Thompson 'was foundational to the historical and intellectual movement which became characterised as "history from below"' and that Thompson recognised working-class 'agency' – the working class's ability to determine its own identity and destiny and not simply to be defined by 'radicals and reactionaries alike'. By doing so, Thompson forced an 'unmistakable rupture in the historical literature.'<sup>68</sup> It was a rupture which

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<sup>65</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p.9.

<sup>67</sup> D. Featherstone and P. Griffin, 'Spatial Relations, Histories from Below and the Makings of Agency: Reflections on "The Making of the English Working Class" at 50', *Progress in Human Geography*, 40(3) (2015), pp. 375-393 (p.376). See N.M. Coe and D.C. Jordhus-Lier, 'Constrained Agency? Re-evaluating the Geographies of Labour', *Progress in Human Geography*, 35(2) (2010), pp. 211-233.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*. pp. 376-377. Also see S. Scalmer, 'Experience and Discourse: A Map of Recent Theoretical Approaches to Labour and Social History', *Labour History*, 70 (May 1996), pp. 156-168 (p.157).

profoundly influenced our understanding of class as a 'cultural practice' and in turn generated a distinctive way of doing history 'from the bottom up', which is explained in more depth in the methodology section below and performed throughout this enquiry.

Stephen Brooke expanded upon these points, stating that class is 'never monolithic', is 'fluid', is 'an uneven and shifting landscape' and is 'an important category for identifying social and economic differences and inequalities.' In short, it is 'a clear organising concept for talking about society.'<sup>69</sup> In view of this judgement, class features prominently in the ensuing enquiry, as it would be impossible to evaluate the effects of war on a society without considering it.

As it was the largest single class in British society during the early twentieth century, it is important to explain what is meant by 'working-class'. In the words of G.D.H. Cole, it is '*not* necessarily a body of persons cut off by impassable barriers from others; it is *not* necessarily hereditary or legally defined.'<sup>70</sup> E.P Thompson said what it *is*:

[...] class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.<sup>71</sup>

Remembering that we are no longer thinking of class as a monolithic and immutable categorisation, a definition of 'working-class' should not be sought, but its characteristics can be delineated. Firstly, it was the largest single class in

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<sup>69</sup> S. Brooke, 'Class and Gender', pp. 42-43.

<sup>70</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *Studies in Class Structure*, p.9.

<sup>71</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p.9.

British society at the time of the Great War. Secondly, its members received lower incomes than members of the higher classes. Thirdly, the consequences of its lower incomes were poorer diet, lower life expectancy, inadequate housing and limited educational opportunities. Fourthly, its most common source of income was manual work.<sup>72</sup> And fifthly, its members shared cultural outlooks and had a common identity.

Of course, these descriptors are subject to further qualification and a working-class person would not necessarily possess all of the above characteristics. For example, as was increasingly the case during the Great War, some manual workers began to earn more money than their middle-class counterparts. This development on its own, however, was unlikely to turn its beneficiaries into members of the middle-class, as the other aspects of their lives remained distinctly working-class. In addition, the ways in which incomes were earned and how strongly they were guaranteed also determined their recipients' class. For example, some dock labourers enjoyed higher incomes and more regular work due to increased demand for their services in wartime, but as soon as this ended, their wages returned to pre-war levels and many workers lost their jobs altogether. They did not benefit from employment contracts, wage guarantees or company pensions. In contrast, many middle-class employees enjoyed guaranteed employment, regular wages and company insurance schemes which provided greater financial security.<sup>73</sup>

A further complication is the diversity which existed within the working-class, causing some commentators to suggest the term 'working-classes' would be more

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<sup>72</sup> In 1911 a third of Britain's working-class was employed in manufacturing, S. Brooke, 'Class and Gender', p. 44.

<sup>73</sup> J. Goldthorpe and D. Lockwood, 'Affluence and the British Class Structure', p.137.

appropriate.<sup>74</sup> One of the most obvious divisions within the working-class was between skilled and unskilled workers. Other distinctions were between the employed and the unemployed or between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor or between 'respectable' and 'rough' families. As Elizabeth Faue argued, a regional study can help us to perceive the 'social, cultural and political history' of the working-class by taking into account 'place, space, locality and political unit' and thereby 'to start to disentangle the levels, dimensions, meanings and metaphors of "community".'<sup>75</sup>

G.D.H. Cole suggested that the middle-class is the hardest to define. It was and is as diverse and as complex as the working-class and contains its own internal stratification from lower to upper.<sup>76</sup> 'Embourgeoisement' is the process by which working-class people became middle-class.<sup>77</sup> It is evident in nineteenth and twentieth century British society, especially on Merseyside, where the port of Liverpool provided job opportunities in tertiary industries such as shipping, banking, insurance and commodity broking (especially cotton).<sup>78</sup> Such employment, with its higher status and wages, relative financial security, opportunities for career progression, increased leisure time and lack of physical labour, raised people's standards of living and enabled expenditure on consumer goods, services and leisure activities, which in turn generated more middle-class employment opportunities in retailing, catering, entertainment, transport and

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<sup>74</sup> For example, B. Waites, *A Class Society at War*, (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1984), p.171.

<sup>75</sup> E. Faue, 'Community, Class, and Comparison in Labour History and Local History', pp.155, 159 and 160. Also see N. Castree, 'Labour Geography: A Work in Progress', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 31(4) (2007), pp. 853-862.

<sup>76</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *Studies in Class Structure*, p.7.

<sup>77</sup> S. Brooke, 'Class and Gender', p.44.

<sup>78</sup> F.E. Hyde, B.B. Parkinson, and S. Marriner, 'The Cotton Broker and the Rise of the Liverpool Cotton Market', *Economic History Review*, 8 (1955), pp. 75-83.

communication.<sup>79</sup> Again, this phenomenon is evident on Merseyside during the era of the Great War and features in the ensuing enquiry.

Above the working- and middle-classes were (and are) the gentry and aristocracy. Traditionally, the former were country landowners who had roots in the local area. During the early twentieth century, some of them enjoyed a 'symbiotic relationship' with the military establishment via their local Territorial Associations.<sup>80</sup> As will be shown in this enquiry, however, this group was largely absent from Edwardian Wirral, their place having been taken by members of the upper middle-class – the beneficiaries of the regional mercantile economy. The aristocracy was made up of 'nobles' who owned more land than the gentry, wielded more power and were often involved in national government via the House of Lords.<sup>81</sup> This class was virtually unknown in Edwardian Wirral, although, during the Great War, the Seventeenth Earl of Derby earned more recognition as a regional figurehead in consequence of his recruitment campaigns and service in Lloyd George's War Cabinet.<sup>82</sup> In addition, the former middle-class Lancashire grocer, Sir W.H. Lever, was ennobled in 1915 and, from his base at *Thornton Manor*, acted as Wirral's feudal lord.<sup>83</sup> Lever is an example of the trend towards dilution of the aristocracy

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<sup>79</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-71.

<sup>80</sup> K. R. Grieves, 'Lowther's Lambs: Rural Paternalism and Voluntary Recruitment in the First World War', *Rural History*, 4 (1993), pp. 55-67.

<sup>81</sup> E. Bujack, *English Landed Society in the Great War: Defending the Realm* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018). Also See: M. Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (London: Yale University Press, 1978).

<sup>82</sup> A. Ponsonby, *The Decline of Aristocracy* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1912), R.S. Churchill, *Lord Derby, King of Lancashire* (London: Heinemann, 1959).

<sup>83</sup> A. MacQueen, *The King of Sunlight: How William Lever Cleaned Up The World* (London: Corgi, 2011); B. Lewis, *So Clean: Lord Leverhulme, Soap and Civilization* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

via ennoblement – a phenomenon commented upon by G.D.H. Cole and which led to trades unionists such as Walter Citrine becoming lords in later life.<sup>84</sup>

The nature and importance of class in British history has been introduced and definitions of the classes which appear in this thesis have been offered. These concepts are further developed within the ensuing analyses of local society's responses to the Great War.

## **Gender**

E.P. Thompson's definitions are dated in one obvious respect – they use the term 'men' when referring to people. It was common practice at the time and symptomatic of the way in which labour history focused on males. Men were thought of as the 'bread-winners' – the trades unionists, the campaigners and the figureheads of the labour movement. Women were either ignored or assumed to have had a secondary role. Thompson and others highlighted working-class male agency, but neglected the female experience. In its broadest sense gender history aims to redress the balance and to focus more on the interactions between men and women. As Ann Curthoys said, 'class differences were not the only forms of social division, since race, ethnicity, and gender play an important part in determining economic opportunities, and access to power.'<sup>85</sup> Theodore Koditschek developed the point:

'E.P. Thompson was inherently dismissive of the domestic and labour experiences of working-class women [...] gender is a serious analytical category [...] without an adequate grasp of the operations and

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<sup>84</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *Studies in Class Structure*, pp. 68-69 and W. Citrine, *Men and Work: An Autobiography of Lord Citrine* (London: Hutchinson, 1964).

<sup>85</sup> A. Curthoys, 'Labour History and Cultural Studies', p.15.

complications of gender, we cannot possibly hope to comprehend the true dynamics and possibilities of class.’<sup>86</sup>

Stephen Brooke said that gender is a ‘crucial mark of social difference’ and ‘as categories of social identity [gender and class] have not only been shaped by historical events, but have, admittedly in ambiguous ways, also shaped those events.’<sup>87</sup>

However, there is more to it than that, because gender history is also about masculinity and femininity as phenomena in their own right. Furthermore, masculinity is in need of as much scholarly analysis as is femininity, especially in the context of the history of war. The point was made by Alison Fell:

In the last ten years, gender has been proved to matter when it comes to war studies [...] the recent trend towards a consideration of gender issues within broader historical and cultural studies of war suggests that this will no longer be the case in future decades. Perhaps the time has come for ‘gender studies’ to no longer be seen as the domain of specialist, feminist scholars, but to be integrated into the mainstream of war and culture studies.<sup>88</sup>

## Citizenship

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<sup>86</sup> T. Koditschek, ‘The Gendering of the British Working Class’, *Gender and History*, 9(2) (August 1997), pp. 333–363 (p.357). Also see R. Crompton, ‘Class Theory and Gender’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 40(4) (December 1989), pp. 565- 587.

<sup>87</sup> S. Brooke, ‘Class and Gender’, pp. 43-44.

<sup>88</sup> A. Fell, ‘Gendering the War Story’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 1(1), (August 2007), pp. 53-58 (p.55); also see A. Carden-Coyne, ‘Masculinity and the Wounds of the First World War: A Centenary Reflection’, *The French Journal of British Studies*, 20(1) (2015), pp.1-8; S. Dudink, K. Hagemann, and J. Tosh, eds, *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004) and C. Hämmerle, O. Überegger and B. Bader Zaar, eds., *Gender and the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

It will be shown in this thesis that, even though the word ‘citizenship’ was not commonly used in early twentieth century Britain, it is an important term to define before trying to explain the effects of war on contemporary society. Martin Pugh argued that the British tended not to like the term due its association with the French Revolution and with French ‘idealism’, as opposed to British ‘pragmatism’, but that people who could be described as citizens were those who had ‘a stake in the community’ and that the ‘chief criterion of citizenship’ was the right to vote in parliamentary elections. In this regard, by 1914, British women and many working-class men were not full citizens.<sup>89</sup> Julia Stapleton developed the point by arguing that ‘citizenship and patriotism were two co-equal sides of the same coin’, but that ‘nationhood’ was taught as ‘a surrogate for full citizenship’ in British schools – in other words that the citizen was equated with the ‘English patriot’.<sup>90</sup> For many, this was unsatisfactory, as they believed that there was ‘a symbiosis between citizenship and democratic inclusion in its widest sense’ and that many British people were not enjoying the full benefits of this symbiosis, due to not having voting rights and were unable fully to participate in the body politic.<sup>91</sup> In this sense, citizenship was something to which many British people were aspiring.

In another, complementary sense, citizenship was, according to Brad Beaven and John Griffiths:

‘[...] an amorphous concept shaped by cultural imperatives of the day [...]  
in effect, citizenship defined desirable patterns of behaviour in both public

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<sup>89</sup> M. Pugh, ‘Suffrage and Citizenship’ in F. Carnevali and A. M. Strange, eds. *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 97-110 (p.99).

<sup>90</sup> J. Stapleton, ‘Citizenship versus Patriotism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century England’, *The Historical Journal*, 48(1) (March 2005), pp.151-178.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p.160. This point had been argued by Bernard Bosanquet in *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (London: Macmillan, 1899).



and private life that interlocked with the cultural norms of a burgeoning liberal democracy.<sup>92</sup>

The word 'citizenship' described a collection of virtues whose possession by British people was believed to be necessary in order for society to function well. As Beaven and Griffiths argued, these virtues included public spiritedness, duty, discipline, patriotism, Christianity and even imperialism and militarism. This thesis argues that the promotion of such virtues by the establishment via such channels as the local press, was an essential aspect of local life during the era of the Great War. It not only smoothed the transition from peace to war, but also encouraged resilience and eventually re-drew 'the boundaries of citizenship in a gendered sense when women were enfranchised in 1918.'<sup>93</sup>

### **I.3 Methodology**

As a result of research carried out over three decades, it was apparent that revisionist historians of the Great War were holding sway: the 'disillusionment' or 'disenchantment' interpretation of the conflict, along with its attendant myths such as 'lions led by donkeys' and 'the lost generation' had been disproved by such authors as John Terraine, Gary Sheffield and Gordon Corrigan.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, the thesis propounded by Arthur Marwick in *The Deluge* of 1965, which said that British society had been transformed by the Great War has also been challenged

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<sup>92</sup> B. Beaven and J. Griffiths, 'Creating the Exemplary Citizen: The Changing Notion of Citizenship in Britain 1870–1939', *Contemporary British History*, 22(2) (2008), pp. 203-225 (p.204).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p.211.

<sup>94</sup> The 'disillusionment', pessimistic or negative view of the Great War emphasises its futility. It started with such works as C.E. Montague's *Disenchantment* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1922) and was boosted by popular works such as A. Clark, *The Donkeys* (London: Hutchinson, 1961) and D. Winter, *Haig's Command A Reassessment* (London: Viking, 1991). Revisionist works include J. Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire: Myths and Anti-Myths of War 1861-1945* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980), G. Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The Great War: Myths and Realities* (London: Headline Review, 2002) and G. Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (London: Cassell, 2003).

by historians such as Gerard De Groot, Jay Winter and Adrian Gregory.<sup>95</sup> In theory, it was already known that the Great War had exerted a reactionary or conservative influence on British society and not, as Marwick had claimed, a radical or transformative one. In order to carry out an objective study, however, it was necessary, as far as possible, to expunge this preconception and to let the primary sources tell their own story. It is the historian's duty so to do, but this approach also produces a fresh view of what the impact of the Great War on British Society actually was. In short, the enquiry aims to employ 'bottom-up' historical methods, which focus on a coherent and representative British region, in order better to understand the experiences of the whole nation, as well as to learn more about that region in its own right.

Historians aim to 'bring the past to life' in as much detail as possible in order better to understand the human condition. During the 1970s, Alan Macfarlane and others explained their methods for reconstructing early modern communities.<sup>96</sup> They used parish records in order to collect references to individuals and thereby construct biographies and communal data which enabled an intimate understanding of the common people. These methods, although not always employed in the exact manner which Macfarlane described, have helped to frame my approach to researching social and military history. In addition, since the 1970s, information technology and the internet have made a multitude of regional, military and genealogical sources much more accessible and hastened analysis of

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<sup>95</sup> A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London, Macmillan 1965), G.J. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Pearson, 1996) and *Back in Blighty: The British at Home in World War 1* (London: Vintage, 2014), J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983) and A. Gregory, *The Last Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>96</sup> A. Macfarlane, et. al., *Reconstructing Historical Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

the resulting data. This has made the process of 'reconstructing historical communities' more achievable than ever before.<sup>97</sup>

The following paragraphs analyse and explain the main sources and methods which have been employed in the production of this thesis. Methods of locating and accessing relevant sources are explained before each type of source is itemised and its strengths and weaknesses evaluated in relation to the enquiry. Methods used to synthesise and cross-reference the resulting data and how they were used to answer the enquiry questions are then discussed. It is hoped that efforts to be accurate, objective and thorough will thereby be made apparent.

This project is based upon analysis of as many primary sources as it has been possible to find. A key starting point in this quest was The National Archives (TNA) *Discovery* search engine.<sup>98</sup> Not only does it locate resources housed at TNA itself, but it also finds items in regional and local repositories. Searches are executed by inserting key words and dates.<sup>99</sup> In addition to TNA itself, the most fruitful repositories were Wirral Archives (WA), Liverpool Archives (LA), The Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London, The Liddle Collection at the University of Leeds (LC) and the People's History Museum Archive in Manchester (PHMA). Standard genealogical and military sources held by TNA are accessible and searchable via commercial family history websites, such as Ancestry.co.uk.<sup>100</sup> The latter was subscribed to and used in this project.

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<sup>97</sup> The Family and Community Historical Research Society (Founded in 1998 by former students and staff on a related Open University course) which publishes *Family and Community History* is a current manifestation of the phenomenon. <http://www.fachrs.com/> [Accessed 17/2/2021].

<sup>98</sup> <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/> [Accessed Repeatedly].

<sup>99</sup> The only item held by Cheshire Archives to be used was Wirral's Absentee Voters List (CCRg 1/409), which was scanned and donated by a member of the West Kirby Museum Research Group.

<sup>100</sup> TNA Genealogical and Military Records used in this enquiry: 1911 Census, RG14; 1939 Register, RG101; WW1 British Army Service records, WO363; WW1 British Army Pension

The main sources which were employed in this enquiry are discussed below:

### **Local and Regional Newspapers**

The main newspapers employed in this enquiry were the *Birkenhead News* (BN), the *Wallasey News* (WN), the *West Kirby News* (WKN), the *Birkenhead Advertiser* (BA), the *Deeside Advertiser* (DA), the *Ellesmere Port Advertiser* (EPA), the *Hoylake Free Press* (HFP), the *Liverpool Echo* (LE) and *The Liverpool Daily Post* (LDP). The files of the Wirral newspapers are held by the British Newspaper Archive (BNA), Wirral Archives and West Kirby Museum; the Liverpool papers are available online.<sup>101</sup> The two *News* titles were published by Willmer Bros. and Co. of Birkenhead and were Liberal, while the three *Advertiser* titles (published since 1861 by B. Haram and Co. of Birkenhead) adopted a more popular format and were Conservative.<sup>102</sup> However the two titles' political differences were usually (apart from during the 1910 constitutional crisis and with regard to female suffrage) undiscernible.<sup>103</sup> The *Hoylake Free Press* seems to have been published for a brief period during the Great War years and mainly consisted of advertisements. It contains some information about local families and their male members' war

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Records, WO364; WW1 Medal Rolls, WO329 and Index Cards, WO372. All of these are obtainable via Ancestry.co.uk and other commercial family history websites. Civil registration certificates of births, marriages and deaths are also obtainable on the latter sites and were used in this enquiry, especially in locating the births and deaths of the Wirral people with Great War Related names who are discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>101</sup> The BNA: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>. Other newspapers emerging from searches within the archive are cited in full. The BN, for most of the period in which the research was being carried out was only available at WA, but is now available online at the BNA.

<sup>102</sup> Co-owner of the BN, Arthur W. Willmer (1857-1940) was a prominent Liberal and sometime mayor of Birkenhead. See Appendix Four for details. Benjamin W.S. Haram (1832-1897) was a member of the Wirral and Birkenhead Conservative Association and Founder of the BA.

<sup>103</sup> When the BN expressed strong views against the House of Lords, accusing them of imposing a 'hateful tyranny' (2/12/1910 and 14/12/1910); this presaged a statement made by D.Lloyd George in 1914 when he said that if Germany was allowed to succeed in the war, 'liberty goes and democracy vanishes', M. Jones, 'War and National Identity' in F. Carnevali and A. M. Strange, eds. *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 79-94 (p.81). See p. 79 below. The *News* published pro-women's suffrage views, whilst the *Advertiser* did the opposite. See p. 86 below.

service. Its files are held by the BNA, but have not yet been digitised. The WKN is something of a mystery: no files exist in any of the usual repositories and it only came to light when the West Kirby Museum Research Group acquired copies of the publication and shared it in digital form.

The LDP was the older of the two Liverpool titles, the LE being published as a cheaper rival in 1879. By the time of the Great War, both titles belonged to professional journalist and businessman, Sir Alexander Jeans (1849-1924).<sup>104</sup>

Two Chester newspapers have also proved useful – the *Chester Chronicle* (CC) and the *Cheshire Observer* (CO). By 1914, both were Liberal and both are available online at the BNA.<sup>105</sup> Circulation figures for the period in question are not available, but it is clear that newspapers were the main means of disseminating accurate news amongst the people of Merseyside and therefore act as repositories of vital information, often unobtainable elsewhere.<sup>106</sup>

Early twentieth century British society was highly literate, bureaucratic and complex. Numerous local government bodies, charities, self-help societies, trades unions, pressure groups, political parties and a range of sporting, recreational, religious and cultural clubs flourished during the era of the Great War. All must have kept records, but few of these records can now be found. Reasons for the disappearance of so many valuable documents are not known, but the lack of any legal requirement for the above groups to archive their records, probably led to

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<sup>104</sup> Jeans was a Liberal and Chairman of the Liverpool Reform Club.

<sup>105</sup> [http://chester.shoutwiki.com/wiki/Newspapers\\_in\\_Chester](http://chester.shoutwiki.com/wiki/Newspapers_in_Chester) and <https://newspapers.library.wales/browse/4247635> [both accessed 15/2/2020].

<sup>106</sup> See A. Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town: The Provincial Press in England 1855-1900* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2018) and R. Matthews, *A History of the Provincial Press in England* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). Also see M. Reeve, "'The Darkest Town in England': Patriotism and Anti-German Sentiment in Hull, 1914-1919', *International Journal of Regional and Local History* 12(1) (2017), pp 42-63 for analysis of Hull's local newspapers and of how their owners' allegiances were not always apparent.

their casual disposal in later years. A tragic example of this phenomenon is the lack of extant documents relevant to the local labour movement, especially to the trades and labour councils (TLCs – effective forerunners of the Labour Party), to trades unions and to individual campaigners and politicians.

An example is William Henry Egan: the local newspapers make it clear that he was an important figure.<sup>107</sup> He was chairman of the Birkenhead TLC and a Birkenhead Borough Councillor, who made frequent speeches about the plight of local working people during the Great War. During the course of a career which spanned at least fifty years, Egan must have generated a good deal of documentation which should have been carefully archived. Thorough and widespread searches have failed to discover any such papers, making us dependent, once again, upon local newspaper articles, which describe his activities and give verbatim reports of his speeches and of audience responses.<sup>108</sup>

Newspaper articles are also useful for putting flesh on the bare bones of the few official records which do exist. A good example is local council proceedings, all of whose minutes have been properly archived and are accessible to the researcher.<sup>109</sup> But their accounts of council proceedings are minimal and dry, whereas the newspapers describe the atmosphere at meetings, tones of voices, and audience reactions.

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<sup>107</sup> William Henry Egan (1869-1943), Boilermaker at Cammell Laird's, M.P. for Birkenhead West 1923-1924 and 1929-1931, later Mayor of Birkenhead. Egan appears frequently on the following pages, especially in Chapter Three. See Appendix Six for a list of local general election results 1910-1935.

<sup>108</sup> Important items include his election speech and portrait in the BN of 7/12/1918 and his obituary in the LDP of 11/9/1943. Two notes written by Egan appear in the War Emergency Workers' National Committee papers at the PHMA, WNC/33/1/54 and WNC 2/5/20/1. See Chapter Three.

<sup>109</sup> For example: Birkenhead Council and Corporation Minutes and Proceedings 1880-1974, WA B/2180-2182; Wallasey Borough Council Records (no dates), WA W/700; Hoylake and West Kirby District Minute Books 1912-1924, WA H/001/6-9, Committees, H/003/14-19, Yearbooks 1910-1922, H/041.

Other local, regional and Great War historians, such as G.J. Bryant, Nick Mansfield and Michael Reeve have used local newspapers in a similar manner to this author.<sup>110</sup> But newspapers' drawbacks do need to be borne in mind: their high levels of detail, human interest and apparent accuracy are seductive, so the researcher must be aware that newspapers did more than merely publish information – they also promoted a particular world view. Some words of Andrew Hobbs from his *A Fleet Street in Every Town* are worth dwelling upon:

[...] the local press was woven into the fabric of cultural life in a provincial town, as a mirror, magnifier and maker of local culture [...] Newspapers did more than report their localities, they became part of the loop of making and re-making culture, giving them the status of a local institution – [...] part of the events and processes they reported, both arena and actor. They selectively promoted or 'framed' certain aspects while ignoring others, and occasionally intervened directly and self-consciously in local culture, initiating events and movements.<sup>111</sup>

Although focused on the Victorian era, the above comments apply equally well to the Edwardian period and describe the role of Merseyside's newspapers during the Great War. Some three or four years before the outbreak of war, for example, Wirral's newspapers promulgated some of their most important beliefs about the

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<sup>110</sup> G.J. Bryant, 'Bolton and the Outbreak of the First World War', THSLC, 138 (1988), pp. 181-199; N. Mansfield, *English Farm Workers and Local Patriotism 1900-1930* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2001); M. Reeve, "'The Darkest Town in England": Patriotism and Anti-German Sentiment in Hull, 1914-19', *International Journal of Regional and Local History*, 12(1) (2017), pp. 42-63.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.. See M. Lester, 'Local Newspapers and the Shaping of Local Identity in North-East London, c.1885–1925', *The International Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 5(1) (2009), pp. 44-62 for a discussion of this phenomenon in another local context.

local area's relationship with the nation, the empire and the monarchy.<sup>112</sup> During June and July 1911, the BN and BA published huge amounts of detail about local celebrations of the coronation of George V. An almost religious reverence for the monarchy was promoted and the loyalty of local people fomented and publicised. The BA printed a 'Coronation Supplement' containing photographs of the district's organising committee and combined its love of nation and empire with promotion of Birkenhead by showing the local tramcar which had been decorated for Edward VII's coronation in 1902 (Figure 1). This was a reference to Birkenhead's fame for being the site of the world's first street tramcar service in 1860 and thereby linked national with civic pride.<sup>113</sup> G.J. Bryant commented on exactly the same phenomenon in Bolton, implying that the practice was widespread in England.<sup>114</sup> Paul Ward described such coronation celebrations as 'great acts of national communion'.<sup>115</sup> As part of this metaphor, the newspapers could be described as recording the liturgies for these 'acts of communion'.

As intimated above, another limitation of local newspapers is their selectivity: they filled more of their column inches discussing upper and upper middle-class people than any other groups in society. People like Wirral's *de facto* aristocrat, Sir W.H. Lever (1851-1925; from 1915 Viscount, generally referred to as 'Lord', Leverhulme) and Conservative MPs Alfred Bigland (1855-1936) and Gershom Stewart (1857-1929) were regularly reported upon, as were Birkenhead's ruling elite, whose wealth had been derived from participation in Liverpool commerce (especially in the cotton trade) and who served as borough councillors, aldermen,

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<sup>112</sup> See B. Beaven, *The Provincial Press, Civic Ceremony and the Citizen-Soldier During the Boer War, 1899–1902: A Study of Local Patriotism*, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37(2) (2009), pp. 207-228.

<sup>113</sup> See p.57 below. BN 10/6/1911, 24/6/1911 and 1/7/1911.

<sup>114</sup> G.J. Bryant, 'Bolton and the Outbreak of the First World War', p. 183.

<sup>115</sup> P. Ward, *Britishness Since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 18 and 23.



mayors and justices of the peace.<sup>116</sup> Broadly, local lower middle-class people received attention when they excelled at sport or exhibited the characteristics of good citizenship. Working-class people were most commonly described *en masse* as slum-dwellers, the ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving poor’, employees, union members, strikers or the unemployed. The most common reason why any of them were named and spoken about as individuals was their appearance in police courts following their arrest for drunkenness on Friday and Saturday nights.

In sum, it is accepted that local newspapers fill the gap left by the disappearance of a presumed enormous quantity of contemporary documents generated by a multitude of people, groups and institutions during the early twentieth century. In addition, where official records, such as council minutes *do* exist, newspapers can complement these sources by adding extra details and portraying events with more colour. It has been shown, however, that newspapers were imbued with political bias emanating from the loyalties of their owners and editors, that they promoted local and national patriotism and a vision of citizenship and that they were selective, giving most attention to the social elite and largely ignoring working-class people, unless they appeared in court. Whilst benefitting from local newspapers’ lively and detailed coverage of events, the historian must be aware of their limitations and where possible endeavour to verify their claims by comparing them with information gained from other sources. The following sections discuss the additional sources which have been cross-referenced with the newspapers in order to maximise both the accuracy and objectivity of the thesis.

### **British Army Service Records and Other Genealogical Sources**

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<sup>116</sup> The role and membership of the upper middle-class elite are discussed in Chapters One and Five, especially on p.71. Also see Appendices Two and Three for further details of individuals and their families.

Some six million men served with the British Army during the Great War.<sup>117</sup> All of them were entitled to pensions and so every man generated his own service file which recorded his date of attestation and embodiment, address(es), occupation(s), date and place of birth, family, physical characteristics, dates and places of military service, training, discipline, qualifications, health and fitness, wounds, discharge and medals. Thus, every file is a potential treasure trove of personal, military, social and genealogical information, touching upon a range of people in addition to the soldier himself.<sup>118</sup> The data it has generated has become a solid factual foundation for the entire project and an anchor for the arguably less objective sources such as the aforementioned newspapers and oral testimonies (which are discussed below). My experiences as a family, local and military historian made me aware of the value of these documents and the scholarly work of Richard Grayson showed how they could be employed in aggregate as part of an academic enquiry.<sup>119</sup> For the purposes of this project, 2000 service files belonging to men who were resident in Wirral when they joined the British Army during the Great War were identified by means of the Ancestry.co.uk search facility.<sup>120</sup> They were then studied and their key details recorded on a Microsoft

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<sup>117</sup> This is according to *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1920), pp. 29-236, M. Jones, 'War and National Identity' in F. Carnevali and A. M. Strange, eds. *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 79-94 and *The Long Long Trail Website*: <https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/some-british-army-statistics-of-the-great-war/> [Accessed 12/3/2021].

<sup>118</sup> They are held by TNA, Catalogue References W0363 (about two million files concerning soldiers who were discharged from the army and did not receive pensions by 1920) and W0364 (about 750,000 files relating to soldiers who were discharged by 1920 and did receive pensions). Both sets of records have been digitised and published online by commercial family history sites such as Ancestry.co.uk. The latter was used in this project. Over sixty per cent of files are believed to have been destroyed during the 1940 London Blitz.

<sup>119</sup> R.S. Grayson, *Belfast Boys: How Unionists and Nationalists Fought and Died Together in the First World War* (London: Continuum, 2009) and 'Military History from the Street: New Methods for Researching First World War Service in the British Military', *War in History*, 21 (2014), pp. 465-495.

<sup>120</sup> No contemporary soldiers appear to have described their addresses as being in 'Wirral'; it was, therefore, necessary to find Wirral residents by looking at every soldier with an address in Cheshire. Once this method had produced every apparent Wirral resident, further searches were

Excel spreadsheet.<sup>121</sup> The entire collection is called the Wirral Soldiers' Sample (WSS). The WSS has produced two forms of information – quantitative in the form of statistics about places of birth, occupations, units, ages at attestation, death, discharge etc. and qualitative in the form of family stories (including some about marital and sexual relations), correspondence about missing soldiers, pensions, allowances and medals and records of disciplinary actions such as courts martial.

In order to judge the degree to which the WSS is representative of Wirral society in the early twentieth century, comparisons between the statistics derived from the WSS and those from other sources can be made. Firstly, regarding places of residence, we find that Wallasey (which included the townships of Egremont, Liscard, New Brighton, Poulton, Seacombe and Wallasey) is greatly over-represented, making up 43.7 per cent of the sample. According to the population distribution recorded in the 1911 census, this figure should be 28.59 per cent. Soldiers from Birkenhead (including Claughton, Oxton, Upper and Lower Tranmere, Rock Ferry and New Ferry) make up 28.9 per cent of the sample.<sup>122</sup> In order to correspond with the 1911 census, this figure should be 47.64 per cent. In other words, there would need to be a further 374 Birkenhead soldiers on the list. It is not clear why Birkenhead is under-represented. Perhaps it is due to the indiscriminate and random effects of the Luftwaffe's bombs in 1940. West Kirby and Hoylake is another over-represented district; its soldiers make up 10.5 per

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carried out using major Wirral place names such as Birkenhead, Wallasey, Ellesmere Port and Neston. As the total figure moved closer to 2000, Wirral soldiers were becoming increasingly difficult to find, implying that a large proportion of extant Wirral soldiers' service files have been found.

<sup>121</sup> Columns within the spreadsheet record the individual soldier's full name, address, occupation, service number, military units, age at attestation, year and place of birth, dates of attestation, mobilisation, travel overseas and discharge, personal dimensions, description of physique, year and place of death and extra information about health, wounds, conduct, medals, correspondence etc..

<sup>122</sup> See Table 1 in Appendix Five.

cent of the sample, when the census figure is 5.11 per cent. In fact, no local authority district is represented anywhere near exactly apart from Ellesmere Port and Whitby, whose soldiers make up 3.05 per cent of the sample, when the exact figure according to the census should be 3.77 per cent.

Another category for comparison is employment. The most striking disparity here is between the 1911 census's statement that the largest source of employment was domestic service and the virtual absence of domestic servants (apart from gardeners and drivers) from the WSS. This is explained by the fact that the majority of domestic servants were women who were not, of course, allowed to join the army. Otherwise, employment patterns in the WSS broadly correspond with details on the 1911 census. The same is true for the soldiers' places of birth: proportions of people born in Wales, Ireland and Scotland are almost the same in the sample as they are in the census. In some ways, however, statistical correspondence between the census and the core list is unimportant because it is large and diverse enough to be a valid sample of Wirral people in its own right: it contains enough people to be capable of producing representative data and interesting stories about both civilian and military life and the relationships between them.

These statistical comparisons should cancel the assumption that this study of a collection of 2000 soldiers' service files will produce new numerical facts about either the population of Wirral or of the United Kingdom. Ultimately, all statistics arising from the WSS only describe the WSS itself. However, they *can* be taken as broad indicators of the sorts of things which were going on, both in the region and in the nation as a whole and, as stated above, where those two entities have

produced their own figures (for example, via the decennial censuses), these figures are compared with those from the WSS. It is important to look at a wide range of soldiers, together with their families in order root the enquiry in primary sources about real people, thereby to derive fresh answers to the above historical questions.

Military service records are valuable genealogical sources. They produce links to other staple primary sources familiar to the genealogist, such as census returns, parish registers, civil registration, probate records, directories and obituaries, as well as additional military records such as medal rolls and their index cards, medal citations, registers of soldiers' effects, pension record index cards, battalion war diaries, the *Soldiers Died in the Great War* database and De Ruvigny's *Roll of Honour*.<sup>123</sup> When necessary in order to verify or expand stories located in the newspapers and other sources, individuals and their families have been identified using the aforementioned genealogical sources and lodged on a dedicated 'family tree' hosted by Ancestry.co.uk.<sup>124</sup> This has facilitated accurate cross-references

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<sup>123</sup> Commercial family history websites have paid for their rights to scan and publish the various archives. See note 13 above for details of TNA holdings. In addition, the following records have been purchased from their respective repositories and in some cases have also published them online via their own websites as indicated here: County Records Offices hold parish records; The National Army Museum holds Soldiers' Effects Ledgers and the Western Front Association holds Soldiers' Pensions Ledgers and Index Cards <https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/pension-records/> [Accessed repeatedly]. De Ruvigny's *Roll of Honour* was originally published by the Standard Art Book Company of London in 1916; A copy is available on the *Internet Archive* at: <https://archive.org/details/rollofhonourbiog02ruvi/mode/2up> [Accessed 12/3/2021] and it has been reprinted: Marquis De Ruvigny, *Roll of Honour 1914-1918* (Uckfield: the Naval and Military Press, 2007). *Soldiers and Officers Killed in the Great War* has also been reissued by the Naval and Military Press as a CD-ROM. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) website is also useful with a facility to search for war dead as well as to research individual cemeteries and memorials: <https://www.cwgc.org/> [Accessed repeatedly].

<sup>124</sup> The *Wirral People* family tree is in fact a collection of smaller family trees and currently contains information on nearly 14,000 people (14/3/2021). In addition, local directories, especially *Kelly's Directory of Cheshire 1914 with Coloured Map* (London: Kelly's Directories, 1914), is available via The University of Leicester Special Collections Online, Historical Directories of England and Wales: <http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p16445coll4> [Accessed Repeatedly] and a copy of *The Hoylake and West Kirby Green Book Being A Directory of the Urban District of West Kirby and*

and completed individual stories which have helped to answer the historical questions posed in the following chapters. Examples of newspaper stories which have been verified and usefully embellished by genealogical data derived from the above sources, include the cases of John Lodge, John Sadler and Ulric Williamson.<sup>125</sup>

In addition, understanding of the role of the aforementioned labour leaders from Ellesmere Port has been deepened by genealogical research which has revealed their common origins in Staffordshire.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, key figures mentioned in the text such as the aforementioned W.H. Egan, Alfred Bigland, and Arthur Washington Willmer have been researched. Members of the upper middle-class elite which feature prominently in this enquiry have also been studied using the above combination of sources.<sup>127</sup> In order to show that individuals have received such background analysis, their dates of birth and death are included, in brackets, after their names.

### **Personal Papers – Letters, Diaries and Memoirs**

It is known that a great many letters were written by British soldiers and their families during the Great War. By 1914, due to the 1870 Education Act, most British people could read and write; some were even capable of elegant phraseology and poetic style – characteristics which are noticeable in many of the contemporary letters which *do* exist.<sup>128</sup> From the beginning, the army knew the

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*Hoylake in the County of Chester 1911* (Unknown Publisher) and a scanned copy of the *Absentee Voters' List for Wirral 1919* (Cheshire Archives, CCRg 1/409) have also been used.

<sup>125</sup> See pp. 169, 233 and 264.

<sup>126</sup> See pp. 69,70 and 319.

<sup>127</sup> See Appendix Four.

<sup>128</sup> The degree to which the men of the New Armies were more literate than pre-war regular soldiers has, as the many examples of elegant and interesting letters written by the latter group proves, been exaggerated.

value of getting letters to soldiers.<sup>129</sup> The Royal Engineers Postal Service (REPS) had been set up in 1913. By the end of 1916, it was delivering over ten million letters and 100,000 parcels per week, most of which were reaching their destinations the day after being posted. In 1914 REPS had 300 staff and by 1918 it had more than 3000, most of whom had been civilian postmen.<sup>130</sup> In Winter's words, 'Never before did soldiers create such an avalanche of letters and postcards.'<sup>131</sup> Sadly, however, only a small portion of correspondence between Wirral soldiers and their families still exists. During the Great War's centenary, more items came to light and some have been preserved and transcribed by local and family historians. This project has benefitted from the donation of three previously unknown collections to the West Kirby Museum. It should be noted, however, that these collections came from upper middle-class families based in the north-west corner of Wirral.<sup>132</sup> In order to get a fuller understanding, they must be compared with correspondence between a wider variety of people from all over the peninsula, but little either exists or is available to the researcher, apart from the material which was published by local newspapers.<sup>133</sup> In Deian Hopkin's words:

The new press had created a new reading public, by all accounts more impressionable than the traditional newspaper public. And above all the

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<sup>129</sup> M. Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 47-84.

<sup>130</sup> Including Wirral men Edwin James Wright (b. 1872) of New Brighton, Arthur Youd (1880-1961) of Rock Ferry and Ernest Ruston (b.1883) of Birkenhead. A. Rawson, *The British Army, 1914-1918* (Gloucester: Spellmount, 2006), pp. 152-158; G. Crabb and A. Kennedy, *The Postal History of the British Army in World War 1 - Before and after 1903 to 1929* (Epsom: George Crabb, 1977).

<sup>131</sup> J. Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2006), p.103.

<sup>132</sup> They are Alec Herron's Letters printed and bound by his family after his death in 1915, of which copies are held at the IWM and by Gresham's School in Norfolk, Gray Blackburn's correspondence which was donated by a member of the family and transcribed by a voluntary researcher, and the correspondence of the Sellars brothers of Hoylake, donated by an Australian descendant.

<sup>133</sup> WA has only three collections of letters (Andrew Carlyle Tate, Herbert Adams and Madeline Smith). LA and the IWM have one collection each (Arthur Behrend and Ada McGuire respectively), while Birkenhead Library and Cheshire Archives have none relating to anybody in Wirral, apart from the published collection relating to Alec Herron.

authorities were soon aware that Britain was fighting a total war on a scale hitherto inconceivable.<sup>134</sup>

The implications of so many personal letters being published in the local press are explored in depth in Chapter Two as part of the analysis of local reactions to war during 1914 and 1915. Wirral is fortunate, however, to 'possess' a unique collection of letters written by the McGuire family of Wallasey between 1914 and 1919.<sup>135</sup> They are valuable because they were written by four women – Ada, Hannah, Rhoda and Eva, thereby shedding light on local women's experiences and visions of the Great War as well as its impact on schools, children, poor people and a variety of middle-class neighbours and friends. They are also some of the few examples of extant letters written by people on the home front in Wirral. To add to their value, they also corroborate some of the abovementioned sources. For example, in May 1915, Ada wrote to Eva about Mr and Mrs Wachhorst of Wallasey, who had both died in tragic circumstances. The story tells us a lot about Merseysiders' ambiguous attitudes towards local Germans following the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania* on 7 May 1915, as well as about neighbourly networks, marital relations, loss and grief. The story also appears in the local press and is verified by genealogical research of the type which is described above, giving it a reassuring solidity.<sup>136</sup>

Diaries and memoirs written by Wirral people are also rare. This enquiry has been able to use twelve, which are held by the IWM, LC, WA and LA.<sup>137</sup> Large portions

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<sup>134</sup> D. Hopkin, 'Domestic Censorship in the First World War, *Journal of Contemporary History* 5 (1970), pp.159-169, p.160.

<sup>135</sup> The letters were found in a loft in a house in California and donated to the IWM, 96/31/1. See Appendix Nine for notes on the McGuire family and their letters.

<sup>136</sup> See pp. 223-224 below.

<sup>137</sup> IWM: R. Hozack, 14744, Lionel Irvine Leslie Ferguson, 7154 and John Raymond Mallalieu, 11158; LC: Ernest E. Haire, WW1/GALL//041, Gladys D. New, WW1/DF/094, A.G. Newman,



of these works have proved not to be relevant to this enquiry as they are detailed descriptions of military experiences overseas with few observations of a sociological or cultural nature or descriptions of life either before or after the war. However, certain valuable observations about the impact of recruitment campaigns and the reasons for resilience are made by Andrew Carlyle Tait, Norman Ellison and Herbert Adams. The latter's memoir confirms the role of populist politicians in pre-war Birkenhead and, along with Ernest Haire's diary, provides interesting details about religious faith. Again, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, these reflections 'triangulate' with facts found in the newspapers and in other sources.<sup>138</sup>

### **Sound Recordings of Interviews**

Six sound recordings held by the IWM have been used in this enquiry.<sup>139</sup> In common with the aforementioned diaries and memoirs, most of the material is not directly relevant to the enquiry, as it focuses on military experiences on the Western Front. This results from the bias of interviewers during the 1980s, who were less interested in the social, economic, psychological and cultural issues upon which this thesis focuses. However, most of the interviewees did comment on their feelings when war was declared and discussed recruitment and their various reasons for joining up. Some memories were verified by further research. For example, William Tobey spoke about the impact of his anti-war headmaster at Birkenhead School. Subsequent research revealed that this was Frederick Griffin MA (1867-1950), who was active in public life as well as being a teacher.

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WW1/RNMN/REC/073, Eric L. Roberts, WW1/AIR/265 and Leonard F. Rooke, WW1/GS/1382; WA: Herbert Adams, YPX/27 and Andrew Carlyle Tait, YCT/1-4; Norman Ellison, LA 920 NFE.

<sup>138</sup> For Example, p. 276 below about Herbert Adams's faith.

<sup>139</sup> IWM: Raymond Briggs, 790, Thomas Hirst Brown, 10081, Ernest Hugh Haire, 24542, John Raymond Mallalieu, 9417, William Burton Tobey, 567 and Charles O. Tomlinson, 28056.

Oral testimony is fascinating and seductive: it is awe-inspiring to hear the 'authentic' voices of past generations, with their quaint local accents and phraseology. We tend to revere older people and to respect ex-service people in particular. We should not forget, however, that they are only human and, therefore, capable of making factual errors. Few errors, however, can be identified in these testimonies.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, Great War veterans were capable of unconsciously combining communal memories and historical myths with their own memories. As far as can be ascertained, however, there is only one example of the phenomenon in the recordings used here – when Thomas Hirst Brown referred to the supposed contemporary saying that the war would be 'over by Christmas', when there is no primary evidence for the phrase ever having been used in Britain in 1914.<sup>141</sup> Such errors are easy to identify and do not detract from the importance of oral history as a tool for doing 'history from below'. In the words of Paul Thompson:

Since the nature of most existing records is to reflect the standpoint of the authority, it is not surprising that the judgement of history has more often than not vindicated the powers that be. Oral history by contrast makes a much fairer trial possible: witnesses can now be called from the under-classes, the unprivileged and the defeated. It provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Indeed, the author was enlightened about an aspect of early twentieth-century British history by the reminiscences of Ernest Haire, who said that F.E. Smith had been nicknamed 'Gallop' and had allied himself with Sir Edward Carson. This is factually true: it transpires that he earned the sobriquet in consequence of his service as an officer with the Buckinghamshire Yeomanry. See J. Campbell, *F.E. Smith, First Earl of Birkenhead* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013).

<sup>141</sup> Thomas Hirst Brown IWM Sound Recording10081; see p. 126 below. P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and A. Thomson, 'Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History', *The Oral History Review*, 34:1 (2007), pp. 49-70.

<sup>142</sup> P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.7; see A. Thomson, 'Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History', *The Oral History Review*, 34:1 (2007), pp. 49-70. In this regard, it is regretted that there were no Great War veterans alive at the time of researching this thesis.

Finally, as most of what the veterans said reflects the knowledge published by academics such as Catriona Pennell and because their separate accounts largely corroborate and complement each other, we can be satisfied with their trustworthiness.<sup>143</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite the fact that British society during the era of the Great War was highly literate, complex and bureaucratic, a disappointingly small proportion of the records generated by contemporary institutions, groups and individuals are extant. For example, not a single record relating to the emergence of the labour movement in Ellesmere Port has been discovered apart from in the EPA. This is the case for so many other topics – newspapers are the only sources which provide details of contemporary events. In addition, where official records, such as council minutes, do exist, the newspapers provide more details, helping us better to imagine events. Because they were the only source of information about the world, the nation and the local region, newspapers were required to be accurate. They did, however, promote a particular world view, which was patriotic and deferential to traditional institutions such as the monarchy. This project attempts to anchor information obtained from the local newspapers in data acquired from additional primary sources such as army service records, genealogical sources, private correspondence, diaries, memoirs and oral testimonies. Cross references

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<sup>143</sup> C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Another example is the way in which Thomas Hirst Brown's comments about the importance of the Church Lads Brigade (p. 126 below) correspond with scholarship on the subject, especially J. Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977) and S. Pryke, 'The Popularity of Nationalism in the Early British Boy Scout Movement', *Social History* 23(3) (1998), pp. 309-324. Also see J.S.K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

between the various sources have produced several coherent narratives which have helped to answer some of the enquiry's key questions about such things as attitudes to war, recruitment, responses to loss and bereavement and the roles of the working-class and of women. The project aims to cast new light on the impact of the Great War on British society by engaging in 'bottom up' history – by bringing to life as many individual and collective stories as possible in order convincingly to answer key historical questions.

## **CHAPTER ONE: Wirral 1910 – 1914**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In order to discover how Wirral was affected by the Great War it is necessary to understand what it was like before 1914. Section 1.2 introduces Wirral as a ‘semi-island’ (the literal meaning of ‘peninsula’). Section 1.3 goes into more detail about its geography, while 1.4 investigates its demography. They show that Wirral was a liminal frontier zone and land of opportunity, characterised by population growth, diversity and innovation. These features are identifiable in archaeological, historical and literary evidence as far back as Roman times and are threaded throughout the thesis as part of the analysis of the impact of the Great and of the reasons for the people’s resilience during the conflict. Section 1.5 explores the economy and employment and shows that Wirral was dependent upon Liverpool, but that some of its industries, especially at Port Sunlight and in Ellesmere Port were unique and home-grown. Section 1.6 discusses connections to the port of Liverpool and the consequent occurrence of an upper middle-class elite who performed a paternalistic role in local society. This leads to an analysis of local welfare provision and the emergence of an incipient welfare state in Section 1.7. Section 1.8 deals with politics and shows how Wirral people were at once both conservative and liberal in outlook and saw British democracy as something worth defending. Sections 1.9 and 1.10 look at two pre-war political and social problems which received the most attention in the contemporary local press – industrial relations and the women’s suffrage campaign. The points raised therein emerge again in Chapters Three and Four, showing how the Great War occurred at a

pivotal moment in this debate, as beliefs about the status of women and the working-class had to be reconfigured.

The themes of citizenship and patriotism are threaded throughout the ensuing sections. Beliefs about how individuals should behave and contribute to society are discussed as are ideas about monarchy, empire and the armed forces.

Together, they created a vision of the local community as a branch of the larger extended families of nation and empire. The thesis shows how such concepts both engendered a commitment to the national war effort and enabled a high degree of resilience during the exceedingly trying circumstances brought about by total war.

## **1.2 The Semi-Island**

For the purposes of this enquiry, 'Wirral' refers to the traditional entity, formerly known as the 'Hundred of Wirral', whose boundaries were carved out by glaciers and are the Irish Sea, Dee and Mersey Estuaries and the so-called 'Deva Spillway' or shallow valley at its southern end, now occupied by the Shropshire Union Canal, which separates it from the City of Chester.<sup>144</sup> This will enable the study of a historically consistent area and allow comparisons between the full range of settlements and their attendant economies and cultures.

Erroneous beliefs about the nature of early Wirral have wide currency.<sup>145</sup> They result, amongst other things, from the misinterpretation of two ancient phrases –

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<sup>144</sup> G. Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester* Three Volumes, (London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mayor and Jones, 1819); W.W. Mortimer, *The History of the Hundred of Wirral* (London: Whittaker and Co., 1847); E.H. Rideout, *The Growth of Wirral*; S.J. Roberts *A History of Wirral* (Chichester, Phillimore, 2002).

<sup>145</sup> H. Gamlin, *Twixt Mersey and Dee* (Liverpool: D. Marples, 1897). A good account of Wirral's myths and legends can be found at: <http://www.hiddenwirral.org/>. [Accessed 15/6/2020]. Modern travellers on the Mersey Ferries are subjected to some of them via an 'historical' summary which is played on a loop over the public address system.

the oft quoted and unattributable proverb, 'From Blacon Point to Hilbre, a squirrel might leap from tree to tree' and a line from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* referring to the 'wyldrenesse of wyrale'.<sup>146</sup> Many have imagined that the peninsula was always wild, sparsely inhabited and lawless. Hard evidence implies otherwise: the oldest known human habitation site in the north of England (dating to about 7500 BCE) was discovered at Greasby in 1987; there is evidence of Roman occupation and *Domesday Book* implies that, during the early middle ages, Wirral was the most densely populated and economically advanced hundred in Cheshire. Access via the two estuaries and the Irish Sea, as well as the proximity of Chester are the probable reasons for this.<sup>147</sup>

Wirral was and is a liminal zone: it lies at the junction of several geographical, linguistic and cultural entities.<sup>148</sup> During the early middle ages, it was in the kingdom of Mercia, but was next to Northumbria which lay north of the River Mersey.<sup>149</sup> Wales lies to the south and the Isle of Man and Ireland lie westwards across the Irish Sea. Further borders lay within the peninsula itself, including those

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<sup>146</sup> T.A. Coward, *Picturesque Cheshire* (London and Manchester: Sherratt and Hughes, 1904), p. 219 and S. Armitage, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London and New York: W.W. Morton and Co., 2007), G. Rudd, 'The Wilderness of Wirral in "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"', *Arthuriana*, 33 (2013) pp. 52-65 and R. Samuel and P. Thompson, eds., *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 3.

<sup>147</sup> S.J. Roberts *A History of Wirral*, pp. 26-8, 34 and 65-74; and D.J.P. Mason, 'The Prata Legionis at Chester', *Britannia* 19 (1988), pp. 163-189. Meols (formerly Great Meoles) on the Irish Sea coast has yielded an immense amount of archaeological evidence pointing to the existence of an international trading post which flourished between prehistory and the fourteenth century. More medieval artefacts have been discovered there than in any British site outside London. A. Hume, *Ancient Meols* (London: John Russell Smith, 1863), S.J. Roberts, *Hoylake and Meols Past* (Chichester, Phillimore, 1992) and D. Griffiths et. al., eds., *Meols: The Archaeology of the North Wirral Coast: Discoveries and Observations in the 19th and 20th Centuries, with a Catalogue of Collections* (Oxford: Oxford University School of Archaeology, 2007).

<sup>148</sup> A.C. Diener and J. Hagen, *Borders: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>149</sup> N. Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire (Origins of the Shire)* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) and *A Frontier Landscape: The Northwest in the Middle Ages* (Bollington: Windgather Press, 2004). The name 'Mersey' means 'boundary river' and Mercia means 'the people of the boundary region', J. McN. Dodgson, *The Place Names of Cheshire* (Cambridge, English Place Name Society, 1972).

delineated by the possible *prata legionis* and the area of Scandinavian settlement at its northern end.<sup>150</sup> The area's special character in the middle ages is brilliantly explored by Gillian Rudd in her article about the Wirral wilderness in the Sir Gawain poem.<sup>151</sup> Associated with its relatively dense settlement and liminal character is the peninsula's cultural and linguistic diversity. Place names reveal the presence of Celts, Saxons, Danes and Hiberno-Norse, the latter having generated local legends and a recent stimulating historiography. Indeed, at the time of writing, a group of archaeologists is researching the possible site of the 937 Battle of Brunanburh in the neighbourhood of Bebington.<sup>152</sup> As will be shown below, diversity continued to be an essential characteristic of local society during the early twentieth century.

Arising from the above characteristics is the area's reputation for innovation. Examples include the world's first public park at Birkenhead in 1847, the country's first street tram service begun by George Francis Train (1829-1904), in Birkenhead in 1860, the first railway tunnel under a river (between Birkenhead and Liverpool) in 1886 and the inauguration of the Scout Movement in Birkenhead by Robert Baden Powell in 1908. The area is also home to two of the world's best-known model villages at Bromborough Pool and Port Sunlight and has played a role in the development of ship design, submarines and hovercraft.<sup>153</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>150</sup> D.J.P. Mason *Prata Legionis* and S. Harding, *Ingimund's Saga* (Birkenhead: Countywise, 2000).

<sup>151</sup> G. Rudd, 'The Wilderness'.

<sup>152</sup> S. Harding, *Ingimund Saga* and 'Wirral Carrs and Holmes', *Journal of the English Place Name Society*, 39 (2007), pp. 45-57; P. Cavill et. al. *Wirral and Its Viking Heritage* (Nottingham: English Place Name Society, 2000); G.R. Bowden et. al. 'Excavating past population structures by surname-based sampling: the genetic legacy of the Vikings in northwest England', *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, 25 (2008), pp. 301-309; M. Livingston, ed., *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

<sup>153</sup> J. McInnis, *Birkenhead Park* (Birkenhead, Countywise, 1984); W.R.S. McIntyre, *Birkenhead Yesterday and Today* (Liverpool: Philip Son and Nephew, 1948); S.J. Roberts, *A History of Wirral*, pp. 31, 147 and 150-54; J. Rickards, 'Arrowe's Jamboree – Mudboree', *Wirral Journal* 1 (Jan, 1983) pp. 4-6; LE 20/9/1973.



important themes in Wirral's history – its economic development, diversity, liminality and reputation for innovation – have been introduced and will feature throughout the following analysis.

### **1.3 Geography**

Before the Great War, Wirral was in Cheshire. However, two of its growing urban areas were independent – Birkenhead had become a county borough in 1888, as did Wallasey in 1913. Wirral's third great urban area was Ellesmere Port. Its district council was created in 1902 and its council offices were opened in 1908.<sup>154</sup> The names and relative sizes of the local authorities can be seen in Appendix Five. Until 1918, Wirral had two parliamentary constituencies – Birkenhead and Wirral.<sup>155</sup> Wirral contained three types of settlement – urban, suburban and rural. By 1914, about two thirds of the peninsula was still rural. Its greenest areas lay in its central valley and along the Irish Sea and Dee coasts. Its biggest urban areas were at its north-eastern tip (Wallasey and Birkenhead) and along the shores of the Mersey as far as Ellesmere Port. Wirral's suburbs grew up along the railway lines and included such popular places as Bebington, Bromborough, Hoylake, West Kirby, Neston and Parkgate. By 1914, its villages were still distinct settlements – each was separated from its neighbours by countryside. But there were portents of the massive urban development which was later to make many villages coalesce, creating the greater Merseyside conurbation. For example, in 1912, the BN bore an advertisement for new houses in Heswall and Neston, entitled 'From Village to Villadom' which said:

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<sup>154</sup> The establishment of local councils is evidence of a growth in local consciousness which extended the possibilities for public service and expressions of citizenship. See P.J. Waller, *Town City and Nation: England, 1850-1914* (New York: Opus Books, 1983) and D. Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1976).

<sup>155</sup> See Appendix Six for all local election results 1910-1935.

[...] one can form some slight idea of the charms held out along the shores of the Dee: the charms of romance, the charms of health-giving air and the charms of beauty. What more does one desire in one's search for relaxation of body and mind.<sup>156</sup>

In addition, the 390 acres of the *Greasby Hall* Estate were put up for sale in April 1913; the sellers described it as 'quite ripe for development as a building estate.'<sup>157</sup> Walter Citrine commented on the expansion of Wallasey in the years 1908-1909, when the many 'speculative builders' provided job opportunities for electricians like himself.<sup>158</sup> Liverpool caused Wirral's urbanisation. Throughout the twentieth century, between thirty and forty per cent of Wirral's working population earned its living in Liverpool.<sup>159</sup> Most of the commuters were middle-class, male employees of the city's commercial houses – the type of people who joined the Liverpool Pals in August 1914.<sup>160</sup> Most of them travelled by rail and ferry: by 1914, there were seven ferry landing stages on the Mersey Estuary and an electrified railway tunnel (one of the first in Britain and built in 1903). In addition, Wirral's own railway network was well developed, having been laid down between the 1860s and 1880s (Figure 4). By 1887, nobody in Wirral lived further than two miles away from a railway station; most commuters could be in Liverpool within thirty minutes and certainly no journey from anywhere in Wirral to Liverpool should have taken more than an hour. The busiest route was the Hooton to Liverpool line, along which sixty trains travelled each day. In June 1911, the last section of the network

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<sup>156</sup> BN 18/5/1912.

<sup>157</sup> BN 30/4/1913.

<sup>158</sup> W. Citrine, *Men and Work: The Autobiography of Lord Citrine* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), p. 32.

<sup>159</sup> This estimate is confirmed by the WSS: 36.17% of those with known employers, worked in Liverpool. See Appendix Eight.

<sup>160</sup> Of the 51 men from the WSS who joined the Liverpool Pals, 22 (43.13%) were clerks. See Appendix Eight.

was completed when Ellesmere Port was linked to Chester, Birkenhead and Liverpool by a new LNW and GWR joint line, serviced by a state of the art 'motor train'. By 1914, Birkenhead had a comprehensive tram network as well as a rail-less electric bus service. Meanwhile, since the creation of the Crosville Company in 1906, the rest of the peninsula was being reached by increasingly efficient motor bus services.<sup>161</sup> The impact of the transport system on military recruitment in Wirral during 1914 and 1915 is discussed in the next chapter.

Wirral, was for much of its history, an economically advanced region within the United Kingdom. By the early twentieth century, its transport infrastructure was modern and efficient, enabling rapid communication with the rest of the country and with the wider world. It will be shown below that these characteristics helped to shape its response to war in 1914.

#### **1.4 Demography**

Table 1 in Appendix Five demonstrates how rapidly the population of Wirral was increasing and its urban areas expanding before 1914. Between 1901 and 1911, Wirral's population rose by twenty-three per cent, whereas those of Cheshire and of England and Wales rose by 15.6 per cent and 10.9 per cent respectively.

Wirral's exceptional population growth was the product of in-migration. By 1911, 40.2 per cent of the population of Birkenhead had not been born in the town; 3.9 per cent of its people had originated in Wales, 3.7 per cent in Ireland and 2.7 per cent in Scotland. Of Wallasey's population, 61.4 per cent had been born elsewhere; 3.3 per cent of its people came from Ireland, 3.2 per cent from Wales

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<sup>161</sup>A.D.M. Phillips and C.B. Phillips, eds., *A New Historical Atlas of Cheshire* (Chester: Cheshire County Council and Cheshire Community Council Publications Trust, 2002), pp.78-79; LE 25/4/1911, BN 3/6/1911.

and 2.4 per cent from Scotland.<sup>162</sup> Analysis of Hoylake and West Kirby's Great War dead has revealed that, of the 332 people whose origins are known, 138 (41.6 per cent) were not born in Wirral. Just over twenty-three per cent of the population had been born in Liverpool.<sup>163</sup>

Birkenhead received dockworkers, shipbuilders and factoryworkers, whereas most migrants to Wallasey were clerks. From 1904, Ellesmere Port received an influx of workers from the West Midlands, who went to work at the Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Company and at Burnell's Iron Works.<sup>164</sup> In addition, a small number of Lancashire coalminers had settled in Ness to work at the colliery.<sup>165</sup>

Of all the 'Celtic' settlers in Wirral, the Welsh, with their thriving language and distinctive Nonconformist religion, were the best at preserving their identity. There were Welsh chapels in Birkenhead, Wallasey, Ellesmere Port, Moreton and West Kirby. Eisteddfodau were frequently held in Wirral towns; the Welsh National Eisteddfod was held in Birkenhead Park in 1917.<sup>166</sup> Welsh people collectively expressed their political views and allegiances. An example of this occurred on 14 January 1910 when 300 people met in Birkenhead to hear the Rev. Simon G. Evans of the Welsh Presbyterian Church on Laird Street address them on the subject of the forthcoming general election. He hoped that 'Wales will again renew

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<sup>162</sup> R. Lawton 'Genesis of Population' in W. Smith et. al., eds., *A Scientific Survey of Merseyside* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1953), pp. 120-131.

<sup>163</sup> The origins of most of the men recorded on the Grange Hill Memorial in West Kirby have been researched; details are published online at *An Imperishable Record*: [grangehill1922.wordpress.com](http://grangehill1922.wordpress.com).

<sup>164</sup> The many Midlanders living in Ellesmere Port were known as 'Wolves' (after Wolverhampton). The BN of 10/4/1912 said that Ellesmere Port had been quiet over the Easter Holiday weekend because many people were visiting their old homes in Wolverhampton. See Chapter Three below for analysis of how this common Midlands heritage fostered solidarity in the local labour movement.

<sup>165</sup> S.J. Roberts, *A History of Wirral*, p. 151.

<sup>166</sup> D.B. Rees, *Hedd Wyn and the Black Chair Festival* (Talybont, Y Lolfa, 2018).

its confidence in the Liberal Cause'.<sup>167</sup> Despite their numbers, the Scots, who tended to be engineers, doctors, academics and leading members of local churches and cultural societies do not seem to have made as great a collective impact on local life.<sup>168</sup> Irish people did so either as militant Protestant Unionists and Orangemen or as Catholic Nationalists.

Evidence also exists for a degree of immigration from overseas. For example, on 6 September 1911, the WN reported on the opening of a Synagogue on Falkland Road in Egremont. It contained seating for 300 people, indicating the possible size of the local Jewish population, many of whom were first generation immigrants from Eastern Europe. Nine of the fourteen members of the management committee have been traced; seven of them were born in Russia, one in Poland and one in Liverpool.<sup>169</sup>

Most immigrant families moved to Wirral via Liverpool and, naturally, were involved in maritime businesses, such as commodity broking, insurance and shipping.<sup>170</sup> The latter provided employment to a great many Wirral people.

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<sup>167</sup> D.B. Rees, *The Welsh of Merseyside*, Vol. 1 (Liverpool: Cyhoeddiadau Modern Cymreig Cyf, 1997), pp. 45-46.

<sup>168</sup> D. Sim, 'The Scottish Community and Scottish Organisations on Merseyside: Development and Decline of a Diaspora', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 31(1) (2011), pp. 99-118 and A. Munro and D. Sim, *The Merseyside Scots: A Study of an Ex-Patriot Community* (Birkenhead: Liver Press, 2001). Many second-generation immigrants from Scotland and Ireland were conscious of their heritage. For example, Ralph Grandison (1888-1954) and Willie McGuire (1883-1962) described themselves as Scottish and Irish respectively when emigrating to the USA, even though both were born in Liverpool. M. Handley, 'Settlement, Disease, Poverty and Conflict: the Irish in Birkenhead, 1841-51', THSLC 163 (2014), pp. 73-91. See Appendix Nine for details of the McGuire Family.

<sup>169</sup> See D. Englander, 'Anglicized not Anglican: Jews and Judaism in Victorian Britain' in G. Parsons, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain Volume 1: Traditions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); D. Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture 1840-1914* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994); L.P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England 1870-1914* (London: Simon Publications, 1973).

<sup>170</sup> F.E. Hyde, *Blue Funnel: A History of Alfred Holt and Company of Liverpool 1865-1914* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1956); R. Hunt, 'Shipping was his World: The Story of William Inman and his Famous Shipping Line', *The Wirral Journal*, 4 (1988 Autumn), pp. 32-38; P.N. Davies, *The Trade Makers: Elder Dempster in West Africa 1852-1972, 1973-1989* (St. John's Newfoundland: International Maritime History Association, 2000); G. Cubbin, *Harrison's of*

Seventy members of the WSS were seamen. Walter Citrine (1887-1983) came from a seafaring family, who moved from Liverpool to Wallasey when he was two years of age. He commented that ‘the sea was in our blood’ and described his father’s rugged, hard-drinking character and membership of the National Union of Seamen.<sup>171</sup>

Merseyside’s trade with the Americas was important.<sup>172</sup> People with American connections were usually wealthy and belonged to middle-class families who had moved around because of their heads of households’ business careers. Ernest Herschell (1875-1916) of Oxtun and Meols is a good example. His father was an African merchant, originally from Germany. Ernest involved himself in South American trade and lived for a while in Argentina. He gave his house in Meols the Spanish name *Buen Orden*.<sup>173</sup>

The colonies and parts of Britain’s ‘informal empire’ in Latin America offered life enriching opportunities for adventurous young men from less wealthy backgrounds. Leonard Bates (1883-1917) of Oxtun worked as a mining engineer in Lobitos, Peru between 1909 and 1914. This experience made him an ideal officer in the newly formed Tank Corps in 1916. He died in an accident in Dublin. Fred Cumpsty (1882-1916) lived in his parents’ draper’s shop on Market Street,

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*Liverpool: A Chronicle of Ships and Men 1830-2002* (Gravesend and Preston: World Ship Society and Ships in Focus Publications, 2003); P. Newall, *Cunard Line: A Fleet History* (Preston: Ships in Focus, 2013).

<sup>171</sup> W. Citrine, *Men and Work*, p.17.

<sup>172</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) was American Consul in Liverpool 1853-57, when he lived at Rock Park, Wirral. He wrote *Our Old Home: A Series of English Sketches* (Boston MS: Ticknor, 1863), which contains numerous interesting observations of contemporary local life.

<sup>173</sup> See D. Rock, ‘The British in Argentina: From Informal Empire to Post Colonialism’ in M. Brown, ed., *Informal Empire in Latin America: Culture, Commerce and Capital* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008) pp. 49-77. See Appendix Four for details of other upper middle-class Wirral families, such as the Zieglers.

Hoylake. He was an accomplished gymnast, who worked for about three years in South Africa as an instructor, before joining up in Britain in 1914.<sup>174</sup>

This demographic survey not only reminds us that Merseyside was a land of economic opportunity which attracted immigrants from all over Europe, but that the Wirral people who experienced the Great War were quite diverse, and that, despite their varied origins (including from the nation which was Britain's main enemy), they all appear to have counted themselves as British.<sup>175</sup> The British population might have been class-ridden and unequal, but this data questions its homogeneity and parochialism. Given the number of families with external roots, it would appear that some people, either because of their own heritage or that of their neighbours, must have been aware of the outside world and have had some acquaintance with other cultures and languages. Furthermore, there is evidence that many families and individuals had either lived in or had intimate dealings with other parts of the world, giving them a cosmopolitan character, a familiarity with other languages and an experience of travel and adventure.

### **1.5 The Economy and Employment**

By 1914, Wirral had experienced an industrial revolution. Most of its land was still agricultural, but the majority of people lived and worked in the industrial and business centres along the Mersey Estuary and in the expanding dormitory towns and suburbs of the Irish Sea and Dee coasts. However, one of the most striking details to appear in Table 2 in Appendix Five is the fact that, by 1911, domestic

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<sup>174</sup> Biographies published on *An Imperishable Record*: [grangehill1922.wordpress.com](http://grangehill1922.wordpress.com).

<sup>175</sup> See the cases of Ludwig Blattner on p.113 and Mr and Mrs Wachhorst on p. 223 below as examples of Germans who displayed their loyalty to Britain in 1914.

service was the largest single source of employment.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, in West Kirby, there were 523 servants per thousand families; it was one of the sixteen districts in England and Wales with the highest ratio of servants per head of population. Twelve of these districts were in London and the Home Counties. Ninety-seven per cent of Wallasey's and ninety-two per cent of Birkenhead's domestic staff were female. The figures remind us of the importance of Wirral's middle-class in providing employment and of the limited career options for women.

Despite no longer being the main source of income and provider of jobs, farming was still a vital part of Wirral's identity. It was celebrated annually at shows hosted by the Cheshire Agricultural Society, Birkenhead and Wirral Agricultural Society and Wirral Farmers' Club in Chester, Bebington and Birkenhead, when heavy horses, cattle, pigs, poultry, dairy and arable produce were exhibited and reported upon in great depth by the local press.<sup>177</sup> Ploughing matches were held during the late winter and early spring.<sup>178</sup>

Traditionally, Cheshire had specialised in cheese production. However, by 1900, due to urban growth and transport improvements, Wirral farms were concentrating upon the supply of fresh milk. Dairy herds were particularly large in the fields close to Wallasey and Birkenhead, where there were between fifteen and twenty cows per acre. Another consequence of urban growth was the emergence of market gardens, firstly along the Dee coast due to the presence of sand which combined with the underlying boulder clay to make a more fertile soil and next to the aforementioned urban markets. Table 2 in Appendix Five shows how, despite their

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<sup>176</sup> See M. Ebury and B. Preston, *Domestic Service in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Reading: University of Reading, 1976).

<sup>177</sup> For example, the BN 10/7/1911, when the show was described as 'worthy of a Coronation Year' and in the BN 27/9/1913.

<sup>178</sup> For example, at Leighton in 1910, at Bidston in 1912 and at Thurstaston and at Raby in 1913.



industrial and commercial bases, small portions of the two towns' workforces were engaged in agriculture and horticulture.<sup>179</sup>

By 1911, there were 118 fishermen in Hoylake.<sup>180</sup> They were objects of fascination, whose heroism as lifeboatmen and deaths at sea were often reported by the local press, for example, when John and Alfred Housley and Christopher James Hughes drowned off their punt in June 1910 and when the *Daisy* sank in December 1914.<sup>181</sup> Inshore fishing was carried out in the Dee Estuary at Heswall and Parkgate. Most fishermen were also members of the RNR and were employed during the Great War on minesweepers.<sup>182</sup>

At Ness, the Wirral Colliery produced approximately forty-five to fifty-thousand tons of coal per year from a six-foot seam lying under the Dee Estuary. It provided dangerous, poorly paid and erratic work for 180 men in 1910, forty-nine in 1911 and 187 in 1913, when the Wirral Colliery Company took it over. During the Great War, it was run by the government.<sup>183</sup>

Birkenhead grew up around a shipbuilding yard founded by William Laird in the 1820s. By 1911, Cammell Laird's employed twenty-five per cent of the town's male workforce – perhaps at peak times some 6000 men.<sup>184</sup> When the yard had orders, Birkenhead prospered and unemployment was low; when business was slack, unemployment and poverty increased. By 1910, unemployment was high, but

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<sup>179</sup> Phillips and Phillips *A New Historical Atlas of Cheshire*, p. 53; 7.4% of the WSS were employed in Horticulture and Agriculture; see Appendix Eight. See Appendix Four for details of wealthy farming families.

<sup>180</sup> According to the 1911 census; in addition, eighteen people were recorded as being retired fishermen out of a total population in West Kirby and Hoylake of 12,009.

<sup>181</sup> BN 25/6/1910 and 9/12/1914.

<sup>182</sup> Individual records are held at TNA: BT 377 for ratings; WO 339 for officers. See T. Dorling, *Swept Channels* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935).

<sup>183</sup> Place, *Neston*, pp. 65-66. Eight (0.4%) of the WSS were coalminers. See Appendix Eight.

<sup>184</sup> R. Lawton, 'From the Port of Liverpool to the Conurbation of Merseyside' in W.T.S. Gould and A.G. Hodgkiss, eds., *The Resources of Merseyside* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982), pp. 1-13.

declined when, in 1911, the company started to build the 23,000-ton HMS *Audacious*, a dreadnought costing two million pounds, which was launched in October 1913. It also built the world's largest floating dock in 1912 and HMS *Melbourne* for the Royal Australian Navy in 1913.<sup>185</sup> Grayson's Rollo and Clover Docks lay downstream of Laird's yard and carried out ship repairs.<sup>186</sup> Michael Reeve made a similar point about Hull's love for the RN, but in that case, it was not due to shipbuilding but to awareness that it was required to defend the town from invasion by nearby continental powers.<sup>187</sup>

Other large Birkenhead businesses included The British Leather Company, the Gelatine and Glue Works, Rank Flour Mills, Gamlin's Furniture Manufacturers, Arthur H. Lee and Son Tapestry Manufacturers and Moon Bros. Machine Tool Makers. In 1847, the first Birkenhead dock was opened. Far from becoming a rival to Liverpool, however, Birkenhead effectively became a satellite of its older neighbour. Its docks were taken over by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board in 1858. Over 2000 men were working at Birkenhead Docks by 1912.<sup>188</sup>

Moving upstream along the Mersey, the next major employer was Lever Bros. Soap Manufacturers at Port Sunlight (Figure 3). The factory was founded by William Hesketh Lever (1851-1925; from 1915, Viscount Leverhulme) in 1888. Between 1899 and 1914, he built 800 houses to accommodate 3500 people in his famous garden village.<sup>189</sup> Despite Lever's philanthropic reputation, working

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<sup>185</sup> K. Warren, *Steel, Ships and Men: Cammell Laird and Company 1824-1993* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998).

<sup>186</sup> McIntyre, *Birkenhead Yesterday*, pp. 50-55.

<sup>187</sup> M. Reeve, 'The Darkest Town in England': Patriotism and Anti-German Sentiment in Hull, 1914-1919', *International Journal of Regional and Local History* 12(1) (2017), pp 42-63 (p.44).

<sup>188</sup> BN 19/6/1912. R. Mountfield, *Western Gateway: A History of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1965).

<sup>189</sup> For a contemporary favourable analysis of Port Sunlight see W.L. George, *Engines of Social Progress* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908), pp.115-136.

conditions in his factory were sometimes poor. For example, in order to exploit the irregular supply of palm oil from West Africa, the hundred men who worked in the palm oil mills were taken on at unpredictable intervals and required to work long shifts without meal breaks – all conditions which they complained about in the summer of 1911.<sup>190</sup> Walter Citrine, in his capacity as trade union leader, recalled meeting Lever during the pre-war years and commented on his clever negotiating skills, grasp of detail, irascibility and ruthlessness, but admired his commitment to his workers' welfare and creation of the Port Sunlight model village.<sup>191</sup> Lever's paternalistic approach and his creation of a strong communal identity must help to explain why, in September 1914, over 700 men left Port Sunlight en masse by train for Chester in order to become the 13/CR or 'Wirral Pals'.

Next along the Mersey Estuary came Price's Candle Factory with its own version of a model village, created in the 1850s at Bromborough Pool. By 1913 it was employing about 650 people, some of whom lived in company cottages – an earlier 'model village' which Lever had deliberately aimed to out-do.<sup>192</sup>

Ellesmere Port was Wirral's newest and fastest growing industrial centre. It was not an offshoot of Birkenhead, but rose in its own right due to its situation next to the River Mersey and to the Shropshire Union and Manchester Ship Canals, which gave it access to the Midlands, Manchester, Liverpool and to the empire and rest of the world. The first major company to perceive the town's potential was an iron manufacturing concern called Burnell's; it arrived in 1903; by 1908 it employed 200 men. Shortly afterwards, the Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Company decided,

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<sup>190</sup> LE 11/8/1911 and BN 19/3/1913.

<sup>191</sup> W. Citrine, *Men and Work: The Autobiography of Lord Citrine* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), pp.54-60.

<sup>192</sup> BN 1/10/1913. Three members of the WSS worked at Price's: William Joseph Cliffe, John Thomas Eaton and Thomas Jones, all of Bromborough.

at a cost of £50,000, to relocate to Ellesmere Port, where it bought a twenty-acre site. In 1910, it purchased a further four acres. The company took its Staffordshire workers with it. By 1908, it was employing 800 men and by 1911, 3000. The two companies lay opposite each other on either side of the railway line and enjoyed mixed fortunes in the years before the Great War. The transport strikes of 1911, the coal strike of 1912 and strikes within the works in 1913 and 1914 reduced the companies' profits, such that by August 1914 they were both at a standstill and their workers unemployed, which partly explains why so many Ellesmere Port men joined the army so early in the Great War.<sup>193</sup>

Other businesses settled in the town at the same time. Between 1905 and 1912, five large factories were built. Three of these were flour mills. Another one was the Portland Cement Manufacturing Company, which was soon exporting 12,000 tons of cement per week and which, by 1915, had the second largest rateable value (1600 pounds) after the Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Company. In 1911 fifty-eight per cent of Ellesmere Port's population was employed in manufacturing. Seventeen per cent were employed in transport.<sup>194</sup>

Most of Ellesmere Port's transport workers worked for the Shropshire Union Railway and Canal Company. Many of them (possibly as many as 200) worked on canal boats, carrying cargoes between the Midlands and the company's dock next to the Mersey Estuary. As will be shown in Chapter Four, this group of workers played a distinctive role in the development of the local labour movement.<sup>195</sup>

Transport was a major employer throughout Wirral. Some 3.3 per cent of

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<sup>193</sup> P. Aspinall, *Ellesmere Port*, pp. 55-56, 65; *Leamington Spa Courier* 11/11/1904; LE 14/8/1911 and 23/8/1911; BN 6/9/1913. Nine members of the WSS were Ellesmere Port iron workers.

<sup>194</sup> BN 22/10/1910; Aspinall *Ibid.*.

<sup>195</sup> See p.177 below.

Cheshire's workforce was employed by the railways. Given Wirral's dense railway network, and the numbers of railway workers in Birkenhead (see table 2), it is probable that a higher proportion of its population was so employed, giving a possible total of some 3000 railway employees on the peninsula.<sup>196</sup> Often the work was tedious and poorly remunerated, leading to hardship and discontent. In April 1911, for example, the BN referred to the forty-four sixteen and seventeen-year-old youths who worked for Mersey Railways as gate and door attendants and who were paid between 12s and 13s per week. They struck in the hope of receiving a 1s per week increase.<sup>197</sup>

In common with the rest of the United Kingdom, then, Wirral's largest working-class employment sector was domestic service, with over ninety per cent of employees being female.<sup>198</sup> However, a unique feature of Wirral's economy was the predominance of shipbuilding, Cammell Laird's being the second largest source of employment. Levers' soap works and Ellesmere Port's two iron works were the next largest single employers. These manufacturing concerns provided reasonably well-paid, but irregular employment. The resulting sense of uncertainty for working-class families was an important aspect of local life in the months before the Great War and something which affected recruitment patterns and welfare provision after the commencement of hostilities. Other working-class people worked in transport and in trades, while a growing number of lower middle-class people worked as clerks in Birkenhead, Wallasey and Liverpool. The effective, local upper-class comprised the businesspeople who thrived on

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<sup>196</sup> S. Marriner, *The Economic and Social Development of Merseyside* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 90-108.

<sup>197</sup> BN 12/4/ 1911.

<sup>198</sup> See M. Ebury and B. Preston, *Domestic Service in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Reading: University of Reading, 1976).

Liverpool's international trade. It is essential to remember these characteristics when explaining the region's response to war in 1914.

### **1.6 Landownership and the Upper Middle-Class Elite**

Appendix Two shows that little of Wirral's land was in the hands of ancient Cheshire families. Fourteen of the fifty-three proprietors' wealth had been generated in Liverpool; four of them were cotton-brokers.<sup>199</sup> Only two of Wirral's ancient gentry families, residing in their traditional seats of *Backford Hall* and *Poulton Hall*, appear on the list – the Cleggs and the Lancelyn-Greens. The two most powerful aristocratic families of the north-west of England, the Stanleys of Alderley and the Grosvenors of Chester, owned only small parcels of land in Little Meols and in Woodchurch respectively and did not live on the peninsula.<sup>200</sup> The Stanley family began its rise to power in thirteenth century Wirral, but later settled in South Lancashire where their influence was strongest. By 1914, the family's heir was Edward George Villiers Stanley, Seventeenth Earl of Derby (1865-1948). After 1914, as a result of his role in mass recruitment, he became a figurehead for the whole of Merseyside.<sup>201</sup>

Appendix Three lists the owners and/or occupiers of Wirral's manor houses. Of the seventeen seats, six were occupied by Liverpool businessmen or their descendants. As the largest single landowner, investor in the grandest manor house (*Thornton Manor*) and major employer, the future Lord Leverhulme was the nearest thing to a local feudal lord. He had been Liberal MP for Wirral between

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<sup>199</sup> Some families' wealth had originally derived from the Slave Trade. See D. Richardson et. al., *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007) and G. Dawson, *Arwe* (Irby: Dawson Publishing, 1994).

<sup>200</sup> E. Bujack, *English Landed Society in the Great War: Defending the Realm* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

<sup>201</sup> R.S. Churchill, *Lord Derby: King of Lancashire* (London: Heinemann, 1959) and The Earl of Derby's Papers at LA 920DER(17).

1906 and 1909 and was an important local figurehead. He was to play a vital role during the Great War as a setter of standards, military recruiter and provider of welfare.<sup>202</sup> Several smaller landowners were more localised figureheads and philanthropists. Examples include Canon W.E. (1851-1924) and Mrs Julia (1845-1920) Torr at *Carlett Park* in Eastham, Thomas Gibbons Frost (1860-1938) of Great Mollington and Henry Neville Gladstone (1852-1935) and his wife, Maude, at *Burton Manor*.<sup>203</sup>

Wealthy upper middle-class families, most of whom had made their fortunes in Liverpool, were a vital source of wealth in Wirral. The most common occupation for such people was commodity broking, particularly in cotton.<sup>204</sup> Most of them moved into large houses in the countryside or suburbs and stimulated local economies by patronising businesses, by employing domestic servants, by sending their children to local private schools and by enjoying local leisure facilities such as golf clubs, which in themselves provided employment to a variety of staff, including 'caddy boys'. Indeed, thirteen of the 334 people on the Grange Hill War memorial have been identified as having been so employed (probably at the Royal Liverpool Golf Club in Hoylake) before 1914.<sup>205</sup>

Examples of wealthy Wirral residents include cotton brokers, John Hastings Ziegler (1851-1927), Liberal member of Birkenhead Borough Council, and Arthur Kilpin Bulley (1861-1942), the founder of Ness Gardens.<sup>206</sup> During the period in

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<sup>202</sup> A. MacQueen, *The King of Sunlight: How William Lever Cleaned Up The World* (London: Corgi, 2011); B. Lewis, *So Clean: Lord Leverhulme, Soap and Civilization* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

<sup>203</sup> R. Hutchings, *Carlett Park* (Birkenhead: Countywise, 1994), pp. 15-26; G. Barnes, 'Millers and Mayors: The Frost Family of Chester', *Cheshire History* 42 (2002-3), pp. 105-116.

<sup>204</sup> F.E. Hyde et.al., 'The Cotton Broker and the Rise of the Liverpool Cotton Market', *Economic History Review*, 8 (1955), pp. 75-83.

<sup>205</sup> See, *An Imperishable Record: Grangehill1922.wordpress.com*.

<sup>206</sup> See Appendix Four.

question, the effective ruling class in Wirral comprised the few industrial magnates like the future Lord Leverhulme, a few inhabitants of the old rural manor houses and the upper middle-class. It was the latter who chiefly ran local government and demonstrated their citizenship by administering local boards, committees, political parties and charities and helped to keep law and order by acting as magistrates. They went on to play leading roles in steering Wirral society through the Great War and, in consequence, will feature in subsequent analysis of life during that period.

### **1.7 Welfare: Local Government, Paternalism and Self-Help**

Table 1 in Appendix Five lists the ten local authorities which administered Wirral before 1914. They were all created in 1894 and either changed or abolished in 1933.<sup>207</sup> Most of the councillors in these bodies were wealthy middle-class businesspeople and industrialists. It was they who had to administer the increasingly interventionist laws passed by central government and to cope with the growing complexity and deepening strains in contemporary society.

Willmer and Ziegler, whose biographies are discussed above and in Appendix Four, were good examples of wealthy businessmen who served on Birkenhead Borough Council. Similar examples can be found in the district councils. John Tapscott (1849-1924) a Corn Merchant from Heswall, George James Lyell (1858-1958) a produce merchant from Heswall and Thomas Hannay (1848-1917) a cotton broker from Upton were all members of Wirral Rural District Council. Each

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<sup>207</sup> S.J. Roberts *A History of Wirral*, p. 178; F. Neale, 'The Birkenhead Garibaldi Riots of 1862', THSLC, 131 (1982), pp. 87-111.



of their posthumous estates was valued at the 2005 equivalent of over one million pounds.<sup>208</sup>

Ellesmere Port and Whitby Urban District Council was created on 31 March 1902. In 1982 Peter Aspinall made the interesting point that it was an '[...] avenue of advancement for the town's leading families and businessmen' and went on to discuss the case of Henry Webster Boulton (1867-1956), the managing director of Burnell's Iron Works. He was born in Oxton, the son of Edward William Boulton (1821-1904), a Liverpool timber merchant. He was a prominent member of the council from the start and a key member of the local Conservative Association. By 1907 he owned a fifth of the shares in the Ellesmere Port, Little Sutton and District Conservative Club Ltd. He was, in Aspinall's words, 'a new aristocrat'. Aspinall said: 'The directors of the town's metalworks emerged as a significant ruling faction, dominating the town's political and some of its social organisations.'<sup>209</sup>

Council records prove that there was a growing sense of civic responsibility and a decline in *laissez-faire* attitudes, by showing that, between 1910 and 1914, Birkenhead Borough was required to put into practice the provisions of at least fourteen acts of parliament, covering issues such as food, fisheries, public health, housing and finances. Specialist committees, staffed by selections of aldermen and councillors were convened to deal with each issue.<sup>210</sup> In devoting so much of

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<sup>208</sup> Their names appear in the BA of 22/4/1911; further details were obtained from censuses and probate records; estate values were calculated using TNA online currency converter.

<sup>209</sup> Aspinall, *Ellesmere Port*, pp. 89 and 97. See Appendix Four. See M.J. Daunt, "'Gentlemanly Capitalism" and British Industry 1820-1914', *Past And Present*, 122 (February 1989), pp. 119-158.

<sup>210</sup> Birkenhead Corporation Proceedings: Minutes of the Distress and Finance Committees, WA B/36/17,18, the Board of Guardians and Medical Officers' Reports, WA B/605/C/8 and War Period Archives, WA B/163/WP/1-3. See P. Harling, 'The Centrality of Locality: The Local State, Local Democracy and Local Consciousness in Late Victorian and Edwardian England', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9 (2004), pp. 216-234 for an excellent discussion of the role of local government in creating 'local collectivism'.

their spare time to civic duties, these people were demonstrating that they were citizens.

Wirral Rural District Council revealed its interventionist approach to local developments during an episode which became known as the 'Moreton Bungalows Question'. Since 1908, a semi-permanent settlement of wooden holiday cottages and tents had grown up on the coastal marshland next to Leasowe Lighthouse. Occupants were lower middle-class families, mainly from Birkenhead and Liverpool. Overall, they were law-abiding, but the natives of Moreton resented their presence, claiming that they were immoral – their tendency to run about 'half naked' and to leave their doors wide open was regarded as particularly offensive. Council inspectors were called in and the bungalow owners were told to quit on the grounds that their homes were overcrowded and unsanitary, built as they were on a 'morass' with a tendency to flood. It seems ironic that the bungalow owners were being told to leave on health grounds, when they had chosen to live there, on the coast, to escape the urban squalor of Liverpool and Birkenhead, but apparently the upper middle-class sensibilities of the majority of the council simply could not cope with the idea of such an apparently anarchic settlement which lay outside the usual confines of civic control and viewed the campers as not living like responsible citizens. This story of people living on the boundary between town and untamed country is a striking example of Wirral's liminality. In March 1913, the bungalow owners resisted an order to quit

and the dispute lay unresolved until after the Great War, when Moreton was urbanised and its population increased fourfold.<sup>211</sup>

The Beveridge Report of 1942 and the Labour Governments of 1945-51 were not the originators of the British Welfare State, which ended the *laissez-faire* attitudes of governments towards the British people. Based on the above survey of pre-1914 local government in Wirral, it would appear that many of the attitudes and actions necessary for a 'cradle to the grave' system of care were coming into being at the local level.<sup>212</sup> Indeed, real efforts were already being made to slay what Beveridge was later to describe as the 'Five Giants'. However, most of this work was being done by a paternalistic upper middle-class elite, who seemed keen to preserve the status quo.<sup>213</sup> This was the nature of the society which had to live through the Great War and which was well described by a Roman Catholic academic at Liscard in April 1911, when he referred to such developments as a 'turning point in civic relations' and an advance of 'paternalistic legislation – socialistic, not socialist'.<sup>214</sup>

However, self-help was also important. Martin Daunton described friendly societies, such as the Oddfellows and Foresters, as being part of the 'mixed

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<sup>211</sup> BN 22/2/1913, 19/3/1913 and 29/3/1913. E. Rideout, *The Growth of Wirral*, p.99; 1911 census: 989 and 1921 census: 4029; for discussion of the impact of plotlands in other parts of Britain see S.V. Ward, 'Plotlands – Utopia or Rural Slum?', *The Built Environment*, 11 (1985), p. 53 and 'The Plotlanders', *Oral History*, 13 (1985), pp. 57-70.

<sup>212</sup> M.J. Daunton, 'Payment and Participation: Welfare and State-Formation in Britain, 1900-1951', *Past and Present*, 150 (1996), pp. 169-216; J. Lewis, 'Gender, the Family and Women's Agency in the Building of Welfare States: The British Case', *Social History*, 19 (1994), pp. 37-55; S. Pedersen, 'Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship in Britain During the Great War', *The American History Review*, 95 (1990), pp. 983-1006. Also see P. Harling, 'The Centrality of Locality: The Local State, Local Democracy and Local Consciousness in Late Victorian and Edwardian England', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9 (2004), pp. 216-234.

<sup>213</sup> See Appendix Four for examples of upper middle-class elite families.

<sup>214</sup> Reverend Parkinson, President of the Catholic Social Guild, WN 8/4/1911. See P. Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State*, pp. 49-53; J. Lewis, 'Gender, the Family and Women's Agency in the Building of Welfare States: The British Case', *Social History*, 19 (1994), pp. 37-55; M.J. Daunton, *ibid.*

economy of welfare' in early twentieth century Britain and, along with charities and the market, as being a manager of one of the 'risk pools', as 'resources were redistributed between the working-class members of the various institutions, from young to old, fit to sick, and employed to unemployed, but not from rich to poor.'<sup>215</sup>

The Oddfellows had branches in Wallasey, Neston, Childer Thornton and Birkenhead. In 1911, the latter had 800 members and a total of £24,272 'well invested' for the benefit of its members. At its meeting in the *Crooked Billett*, the chairman, Dr. Ratcliff-Grayland, proclaimed that the society was better able than the government to provide health insurance. The Independent Order of Foresters' main branch was at Port Sunlight. It provided members with a wide range of social activities as well as insurance.<sup>216</sup> In addition, the Birkenhead Co-operative Society had been founded in October 1891 with a membership of 103. By 1911 it had 11,000 members, a central grocery store and the Co-operative Hall on Catherine Street.<sup>217</sup> Most urban areas had Trades Councils. In 1911 the one in Hoylake and West Kirby proclaimed that it had 300 members and '...stood not only for the welfare of the tradespeople, but for the district itself.' The Workers' Education Association also had a role. By means of public lectures and evening classes, it enabled academics to disseminate knowledge, ideas and thinking skills. Lecturers speaking in Birkenhead in 1911, deplored cramming in schools and encouraged workers to think for themselves about the virtues or otherwise of striking.<sup>218</sup> The

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<sup>215</sup> M.J. Daunton, 'The Role of the State: Taxation, Citizenship and Welfare Reforms' in F. Carnevali and A. M. Strange, eds. *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 180-196 (p.180).

<sup>216</sup> For example, cycling and morris dancing, BN 22/8/1903, 8/6/1904, 4/5/1907 and 29/5/1920.

<sup>217</sup> For a contemporary favourable analysis of the Co-operative Movement see W.L. George, *Engines of Social Progress* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908), pp. 201-250.

<sup>218</sup> J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

roles of paternalism and self-help in helping local people to cope with the Great War are explored in Chapter Six.<sup>219</sup>

As well as delineating the role of the social elite, this section has introduced the concept of an ‘incipient welfare state’ – a phenomenon which is evident in related historiography dating back to the 1980s. Subsequent chapters will analyse it in more depth, showing its importance in enabling resilience during total war.

### **1.8 Politics**

By 1910, local politics were still dominated by the Conservatives; socialism made only a minor impact. Until 1918, there were two parliamentary constituencies in Wirral – Wirral and Birkenhead. In 1918, Birkenhead was split into East and West and Wallasey was created. Until 1983 when it was abolished, Wirral returned a Conservative MP, apart from in 1906 and in 1923 when it voted Liberal.

Birkenhead returned Conservative MPs during every election until 1906 when the Liberals won. In 1910 it fell to the Conservatives again. Birkenhead did not get a Labour MP until 1923 when William Henry Egan was elected in Birkenhead West. The Conservatives regained it in 1924.<sup>220</sup> It must be recognised, however, that, in effect the prevailing political and social beliefs in Wirral can broadly be described as both ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’ – conservative insofar as a great many people revered the monarchy, social hierarchy and the empire and liberal in that they believed in parliamentary democracy, individual liberty, freedom of speech and social justice.

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<sup>219</sup> BN 8/1/1910, 11/3/1911, 25/3/1911, 12/8/1911 and 27/3/1912.

<sup>220</sup> William Henry Egan (1869-1943), Boilermaker at Cammell Laird’s, M.P. for Birkenhead West 1923-1924 and 1929-1931, later Mayor of Birkenhead. See Appendix Six for a list of local general election results 1910-1935.

For example, during the 1910 Constitutional Crisis over the People's Budget, the Liberal J.H. Ziegler claimed that the Conservatives stood for an 'oligarchic despotism' of the House of Lords and 'for riveting to us [...] a hateful tyranny of that House.' These words seemed to presage the anti-German phraseology of 1914 and shows that liberal values had deep roots. Despite this and the Liberals' espousal of the progressive causes of Irish Home Rule, Female Suffrage and Welsh Disestablishment, Birkenhead, at the end of 1910 was lost to the Conservatives, who also retained Wirral with a majority of 7727.<sup>221</sup>

To modern eyes, issues such as free trade and Welsh Disestablishment do not seem as important as everyday concerns such as housing and working conditions, which neither party seems explicitly to have mentioned. Given that these were major issues for the working-class, it might seem strange that socialist politicians did not receive more support. There *were* socialists in Wirral. For example, Walter Citrine, in his 1964 autobiography remembered attending his first ILP meeting sometime around 1911. It was held in a disused shop in Brighton Street in Wallasey:

[...] about twenty men and women were present. There was a small stock of literature, chiefly paperbound books and pamphlets which could be bought for a few pence. Amongst the books I bought were two, *Merry England* and *Britain for the British*. There was a visiting speaker who addressed the audience and subsequently answered questions for about half an hour.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> BN 3/12/1910 and 14/12/1910; there is no analysis of why the Conservatives won in any of the local newspapers.

<sup>222</sup> W. Citrine, *Men and Work*, pp.61-62.

On 1 May 1911, the LE printed a letter from J. Middleton, Secretary of the Seacombe ILP, protesting against 'the excessive expenditure of £900 for coronation festivities in view of the fact that no money could be raised for the feeding of necessitous school children.'<sup>223</sup> Following the elections of November 1913, there were eight Labour councillors in Birkenhead. At a post-election meeting, Councillor Vaughan said that 'They had now got a balance of power and were going to use it to build better houses and otherwise brighten the life of the worker.'<sup>224</sup>

Perhaps it was this notion which local people either failed to understand or found threatening. As has been shown, the ruling elite believed in preserving a paternalistic hierarchy and made the point publicly and forcefully on many occasions. For example, in January 1911, Restal Ratsey Bevis, Managing Director of Cammell Laird's, gave a speech at the *Woodside Hotel* in which he attacked socialism, claiming that 'these super socialistic ideas have been brought about by the total ignorance of the real relationship of labour to capital.'<sup>225</sup> He explained that he believed in trades unions, but felt that they should be used to enable efficient relationships between management and workforce and, indeed, to keep the workers in order. It was a classic endorsement of the concept of a paternalistic hierarchy in which the workers knew their place.<sup>226</sup>

Other dignitaries made similar attacks. For example, in March 1911 in Hoylake at the local Branch of the Wirral Conservative Association, Arthur Dean, 'a young but

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<sup>223</sup> See Davies, *Liverpool Labour*, p. 61 for a discussion of The Independent Labour Party on Merseyside.

<sup>224</sup> BN 5/11/1913: out of a total 45; the councillors were W.H. Adams, T. Bushell, W.H. Egan, C. Nathan, P. Naylor, C. McVey, J. Platt and S. Vaughan. A week later Councillors Naylor and Vaughan were made into Aldermen.

<sup>225</sup> BN 1/2/1911; Restal Ratsey Bevis was born in Brazil in 1854 and grew up in Birkenhead; he died in Ormskirk in 1931.

<sup>226</sup> See K. Brown, ed., *Essays in Anti-Labour History* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

able speaker [...] took up the cudgels against socialism' and described it as being 'rotten to the core'.<sup>227</sup> Despite his impressive oratory, his message seems to have been based on fear and prejudice rather than on reason and was part of a semi-co-ordinated local campaign against socialism. Indeed, on 15 March 1911, the BA contained an appeal for volunteers to become anti-socialist lecturers and mentioned that Councillor T. M. Thompson was already fulfilling that role.<sup>228</sup>

Thompson is an example of a populist campaigner who played on public fears. He seems to have been able to distract working-class people away from involvement in progressive issues and to play on their religious prejudices and fear of change. The BN described how Thompson had whipped up an anti-Mormon riot, described him and his followers as being 'anti-Socialist, anti-Ritualist, anti-Catholic, anti-Mormon and anti-almost anything.'<sup>229</sup> It described how he and his followers marched along Argyle Street 'their ranks being swollen every minute by youths in search of excitement.' Perhaps this type of activity syphoned working-class energies away from day-to-day issues such as housing and working conditions which the Labour councillors were trying to address. It will be important to see whether the Great War changed attitudes, helped to forge a more cohesive working-class consciousness or fomented more progressive attitudes.

At a meeting of Labour Councillors in November 1911, Councillor Charles Nathan said:

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<sup>227</sup> BN 4/3/1911.

<sup>228</sup> Thomas Major Thompson, born in County Armagh and grew up in Liverpool, travelling salesman, an independent Birkenhead Councillor and Orangeman who espoused a range of populist causes before 1914. He is remembered by Herbert Adams in his account of pre-war life in Birkenhead – Adams Papers, WA YPX/27 and by Bert Pinguey in h.R. Hikins, *Building the Union*, p.170.

<sup>229</sup> BN 15/11/1911. Thompson is mentioned by S. Davies, and B. Morley in *County Borough Elections in England and Wales 1919-1938 a Comparative Analysis, Volume 1* (London: Routledge, 2016), unpaginated e-book.



If the workers of Birkenhead would vote as solidly as they struck, they would soon have the whole power in their hands and use it to sweep away slumdom [sic] in Birkenhead and see that every man and woman had better conditions to live under.<sup>230</sup>

He was referring to the strikes of the summer of that year which had had a profound impact on Merseyside.

The above discussion has not only shown the dominance of local politics by the Conservatives and Liberals, but revealed the ways in which issues were debated – largely in public with the use of forceful oratory, face-to-face interactions (often outdoors) between the politicians and the public – and how both parties relied upon good local organisation and funding. Other campaigners (such as T.M. Thompson) used similar methods, often involving parades, banners and music. Such infrastructures, attitudes and tactics were later to be used in the recruitment campaigns of 1914 onwards.

### **1.9 Industrial Unrest**

In 1994 Eric Taplin implied that the region was ‘near to revolution’ in 1911 in his book of the same name.<sup>231</sup> This is not necessarily the case, but events in that year were certainly dramatic and provide insights into contemporary labour relations. In his autobiography, Walter Citrine said about the events of 1911 that ‘the workers on Merseyside were a notoriously militant lot.’<sup>232</sup> Platers’ helpers at Cammell Laird’s struck in May 1911 and Birkenhead dockers followed suit in a ‘desultory

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<sup>230</sup> Charles Nathan (1867-1953), assurance agent, later to become Birkenhead’s parliamentary Labour candidate.

<sup>231</sup> E. Taplin, *Near to Revolution: The Liverpool General Transport Strike of 1911* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Press, 1994).

<sup>232</sup> W. Citrine, *Men and Work*, p.39.

fashion' at the end of June. On 8 August, as the BN put it, 'the storm broke' when most dockers struck, as did miners at Neston, railway staff and carters all over Merseyside, upholsterers and bakers in Birkenhead and canal workers in Ellesmere Port. Troops were sent to Merseyside, the cruiser H.M.S *Antrim* was stationed in the Mersey estuary and an army of special constables recruited by Birkenhead Council. There were violent scenes when strikers confronted 'scabs'; insults and threats were shouted and stones, bottles and coal thrown at police and non-strikers. A riot at the Haymarket in Birkenhead on 14 August led to the serious injury of P.C. Southern of the Nottinghamshire force and the prosecution of Patrick McGlory for the assault.<sup>233</sup>

Historians argue about whether revolution was imminent in 1911.<sup>234</sup> Based on the evidence from Merseyside, this seems unlikely. As we have seen, in Birkenhead, there was not one co-ordinated general strike, but a complex mosaic of separate disputes. They were all motivated by a desire for higher wages, shorter hours and better conditions, but there was, perhaps, another stimulant to the militancy – a traditional Birkenheadian enjoyment of demonstration, riot and disorder, especially during the summer months, which had frequently been evident since the 'Garibaldi Riots' of 1862.<sup>235</sup> Additionally, the disputes are evidence of the discomfort felt by working-class people within a system in which the middle-class were enjoying

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<sup>233</sup> Journalist Vivian Burchill was awarded a commemorative clock for rescuing P.C. Southern from the mob. He died performing a similar act of bravery on the Western Front in 1916. See 'An Imperishable Record' for his biography: <https://grangehill1922.wordpress.com/2019/12/16/vivan-burchill/>. See Section 2.9 below. All the local newspapers during the period May to September 1911 described events in detail. See Sir James Sexton's *The Riot Act: A Play in Three Acts* (London: Constable, 1914).

<sup>234</sup> H.R. Hikins, 'The Liverpool General Transport Strike 1911', THSLC, 113 (1961), pp. 169-195, S. Davies and R. Moon, 'The Rank and File in the 1911 Liverpool General Transport Strike', *Labour History Review*, 79 (2014), pp. 55-81, J. Belchem, *Liverpool City of Radicals* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011) and London Socialist Historians' Blogspot: <http://london-socialist-historians.blogspot.com/2011/10/liverpool-general-transport-strike-of.html> [Accessed 14/2/2020]

<sup>235</sup> F. Neal, 'The Birkenhead Garibaldi Riots'.

higher standards of living, whilst they were still receiving low and erratic wages and being required to live in slums. Their discontent was occasionally expressed violently, but was not yet being channelled into support for socialist politicians.

This theme will be taken up in subsequent sections of the thesis.

As shown above, T.M. Thompson tapped into this tendency for his own gains. It was given free rein during the summer of 1911 and as, Councillor Nathan said, the episode did not seem thereafter to advance the cause of labour in its efforts to gain more votes and to enact social reform. There were more disputes up until the declaration of war in August 1914: the Birkenhead dockers struck between 15 July and 9 August 1912, over a new tally system relating to the National Insurance Act; Price's Candle Works employees struck in October 1913 and, as we have seen, Ellesmere Port iron workers did so on and off up to August 1914.<sup>236</sup> During the early part of the war, industrial strife diminished, but occurred again later on as the conflict progressed. It is necessary to discover whether the wartime labour problems were a continuation of the pre-war trend in working-class consciousness and whether they had any longer-term post-war effects. These points will be discussed in Chapter Three below.

### **1.10 The Women's Suffrage Campaign**

By 1910, partly in order to prove their worth as citizens, women were playing an increasingly important role in Wirral's civic affairs.<sup>237</sup> In February 1911 a meeting of the Birkenhead Women's Local Government Association was addressed by

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<sup>236</sup> BN 10/8/1913, 6/9/1913 and 1/10/1913.

<sup>237</sup> The point is made by K. Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother: Women in Merseyside's Political Organisations 1890-1920* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), p. 141. See T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950) and R. Bellamy, *Citizenship: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) for exposition of the participatory nature of citizenship.

Eleanor Rathbone of Liverpool. Thirty important local women were listed; some of them (for example, Mrs W.P. Thompson, wife of Councillor J.T. Thompson and Miss Willmer, daughter of Mayor A.W. Willmer) were relations of Borough Councillors and came from the same upper middle-class elite. Their Hon. Secretary, Mrs Abraham, explained that their role was to secure election of suitable women to local government, promote legal eligibility of women to serve on the same committees as men and to promote among women the study of their duties as citizens in respect of local government. Miss Rathbone described how women should take charge of issues 'less attractive to men' such as health-visiting and child-care.<sup>238</sup>

In December 1912, Mrs MacIver ran for election as an independent in the Grange Ward of Birkenhead Borough. Liberal-minded middle-class women espoused social causes such as the Anti-Sweating League, which had been created in Liverpool in 1907. In August 1913, it met at *The Heys* in Eastham, the home of Mrs A. C. Duckworth (1861-1930, widow of J.B. Duckworth, 1848-1912, cotton broker), and were addressed by Mrs Julia Torr of *Carlett Park*. Such public-spirited energies were soon in evidence after the declaration of war in 1914, when numerous women formed a range of committees throughout Wirral to organise social relief and nursing.<sup>239</sup>

The women's suffrage campaign was carried out peacefully in Wirral. There are no records of the kind of outrages which made the Suffragettes infamous elsewhere,

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<sup>238</sup> See P. Harling, 'The Centrality of Locality' for an analysis of women's roles in local government and for discussion of the so called 'ladies elect'.

<sup>239</sup> Eleanor Rathbone (1872-1946), campaigner for women's rights and independent M.P. for Combined English Universities 1929-1946.

<sup>239</sup> BN 11/2/1911, 13/12/1913 and 16/8/1913; see R. Hutchings, *Carlett Park: A College with a History* (Birkenhead: Countywise, 1994) for further details about the Torr family.

only of law-abiding and dignified presentations and debates. Local Liberals were on their side. E.P. Jones addressed the Wallasey and Wirral Women's Suffrage Society in Liscard in January 1910, promising to support them in Parliament if he were elected. Birkenhead Council voted in favour of Women's enfranchisement in May 1911. In October 1910, Mrs Pankhurst attended a meeting in New Brighton, chaired by John Joyce J.P., in which she said that 'Freedom, so called, would be a mockery until political powers were granted to women as well as men. (continued applause)'.<sup>240</sup> This public discourse is further evidence of the groundswell of liberal and enlightened views in Wirral society.

Conservatives, such as Bigland and Stewart, opposed Women's Suffrage and there was a North-West Anti-Suffrage League. In January 1911, its secretary, John C. Philipps, held a public debate with a Miss Platt of the Wallasey and Wirral Women's Suffrage Society. The BN of 18 January enthused about the 'excellent speeches' and 'level-headed discussion.' However, during census night in 1911, Miss Mary Hoy carried out a less law-abiding protest when she:

[...] entertained guests at her home, *Highbury* on Torrington Road, [...] Liscard. Of the ladies who passed the night under her hospitable roof, Miss Hoy rendered no account, and probably when the enumerator called he found one of the mottoes prescribed by the Union for the occasion, such as 'No Vote – No Census' decorating an otherwise empty schedule.<sup>241</sup>

It is testimony to Miss Hoy's moderation that she wrote a letter to the following edition of the WN in which she explained that she had consulted the authorities

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<sup>240</sup> BN 8/1//1910, 6/5/1911 and 22/10/1910.

<sup>241</sup> BN 18/1/1911.

before carrying out her protest.<sup>242</sup> This story carries a similar message to that of the 1911 labour unrest, in that many women felt that the old paradigm did not fit: they did not believe that traditional female roles allowed them to be citizens – female suffrage would be a positive step towards putting this right. The enfranchisement of women over thirty in 1918 is often viewed as a reward for their contribution to the war effort. It is necessary to study their wartime experiences in Wirral in order to establish a more thoroughgoing understanding of developments in women’s attitudes, roles and status within society. This occurs in Chapter Four below.

### **1.11 Leisure, Culture and Identity**

Not only was Wirral ‘Liverpool’s Bedroom’ but also its ‘Playground’. Even during the troubled summer of 1911, the local newspapers enthused about the multitudes who, as soon as the sun shone, travelled to the peninsula by ferry, rail and motor bus to enjoy its open spaces, coasts and amusements. During that year, Marine Lake in West Kirby enjoyed a record season for swimming and boating and during the following Easter, thousands of people visited Port Sunlight, Eastham and New Brighton. During the August Bank Holiday of 1913, all the records were broken – the ferries transported more passengers than ever before; the number of people travelling by ferry and bus to Bidston Hill nearly doubled and there were seventy-five per cent more cyclists than in the previous year. Parkgate was ‘busier than ever’; Hoylake promenade and beach were ‘black with people’ and at West Kirby:

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<sup>242</sup> WN 8/4/1911; F. Anyon, ‘The 1911 Census’, *Birkenhead History Society Newsletter*, 111 (April 2009), p.5 and the 1911 Census: Registration District 452, Sub-District 3, Enumeration District 61, Schedule 263.

[...] the crowds were never so great [and] the popularity of the Monument and Grange Hills and the uplands of Caldy is becoming more apparent as holidays come and go. Hundreds of visitors found the time to climb these altitudes.<sup>243</sup>

Cheap ferry and rail fares enabled working-class people to enjoy the seaside resorts, a phenomenon which sometimes generated tension, especially in New Brighton, which had originally been laid out as a genteel coastal dormitory town, but in parts was developing a much rougher, more populist character, especially around the Tower, which had been built to rival Blackpool's in 1900. Walter Citrine, the future trade unionist and Labour parliamentary candidate for Wallasey began his career as an electrician at the tower in 1903 and expressed his love of the place in his 1964 autobiography.<sup>244</sup> It has been argued that the Tower's demolition in 1921 was an attempt by the upper middle-class to restore New Brighton's genteel character (Figure 3).<sup>245</sup>

As well as the above attractions, the people of Wirral were able to enjoy numerous sports. The newspapers reported upon many of them both regularly and in detail. They included football, rugby union, cricket, bowls, swimming and athletics. Other activities included sailing, model boating, pigeon, dog and poultry fancying and horticulture. For the more intellectually inclined there were literary and debating societies in Birkenhead, Tranmere, Heswall, West Kirby and probably more places. There were choral societies in Moreton, Claughton and Ellesmere Port and

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<sup>243</sup> BN 12/8/1911, 10/4/1912 and 6/8/1913.

<sup>244</sup> W. Citrine, *Men and Work*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>245</sup> H.J. Perkin, 'The "Social Tone" of Victorian Seaside Resorts in the North-West', *Northern History*, 11 (1976), pp. 180-194.

an amateur orchestral society in Port Sunlight. Theatres and music halls such as the *Argyle*, *Hippodrome* and *Theatre Royal* in Birkenhead were popular.

National events, often connected to the Royal Family, were celebrated with enthusiasm and described in detail in the local press. Examples include the Coronation of George V in June 1911, the unveiling of the Edward VII Clock Tower in Birkenhead in October 1912 and the annual Empire Day in May. The births, marriages and deaths of local dignitaries were also observed, a good example being the death of Lady Lever in July 1913, which was described as a ‘bombshell’ for the local area.<sup>246</sup>

Paul Ward observed that such ceremonies were part of the construction ‘of the nation as a family’, that ‘celebration of the monarchy’ was ‘a centripetal force of the nation’ and coronations were great acts of ‘national communion’. Further, ‘Monarchy and empire provided opportunities for establishing the compatibility between the distinctive national identities of the United Kingdom and a sense of British identity.’<sup>247</sup> Given Wirral’s social diversity and dynamism, Ward’s argument is highly relevant, as not only did these activities forge a national identity but also consolidated that of the neighbourhood and region, enabling people to see themselves as members of three tiers – the local, the national and imperial – of one family, the identity of which was further to be consolidated and drawn upon during the Great War.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> BN 26/10/1912, 28/5/ and 26/7/1913.

<sup>247</sup> P. Ward, *Britishness Since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 18 and 23. See F. Driver and D. Gilbert, eds., *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

<sup>248</sup> See D. McCrone, and R. Kiely, ‘Nationalism and Citizenship’, *Sociology*, 34 (2000), pp. 19-34 and E.F. Biagini, *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals and Collective Identities in the British Isles 1865-1931* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Local newspapers reported Empire Day celebrations with gusto, for example, the BN of 28/5/1913.



Allied to this phenomenon and celebrated in similar ways was an enthusiasm for citizenship. The latter term was rarely used by the local press, but implicit in published obituaries of local people who had demonstrated admirable qualities, such as dedication to their families, regular work habits, long careers, church and charity work and public service.<sup>249</sup> Others showed heroism by upholding the law or by saving lives.<sup>250</sup>

Of course, the enthusiasm of the local press for such sentiments and events does not prove that they were enjoyed and admired by everybody. There is evidence of hostility and indifference and many press reports show that the poorer people of Birkenhead (and probably of most other places too) had their own way of enjoying themselves, which often involved drinking and led to trouble with the law. For example, in July 1912, thirteen people appearing at Birkenhead's Police Court, were accused of drunken misbehaviour. Anne McIntyre of Carnforth Street was fined five shillings, but protested that she had only been having 'a bit of sport' on a Saturday night, which probably sums up what many of her neighbours thought they were doing at that time.<sup>251</sup>

Wirral's economy and society were dynamic and diverse. We might expect that the peninsula did not have a coherent identity. In fact, the reverse is true: increasing prosperity and in-migration stimulated local self-awareness. Middle-class inhabitants were educated and curious and possessed enough leisure time in which to pursue their interests in history, archaeology and nature by exploring

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<sup>249</sup> Examples include the obituaries of W. Jenkins of Great Sutton, who had been a churchman, school trustee and overseer of the poor, and died aged 80 in the BN of 16/6/1913 and Alderman Fiddes of Birkenhead, who was a renowned 'public servant' and a 'soul of courtesy and fount of kindness' in the BN of 29/10/1913.

<sup>250</sup> Examples include Mrs Stanhouse of Birkenhead who saved her children from a fire in the BN of 20/12/1913 and some 'unnamed gentlemen', who saved some children from a fire in West Kirby in the BN of 11/9/1912.

<sup>251</sup> BN 24/7/1912.

Wirral and writing and speaking about it. Ironically, their migration to Wirral was promoting the urbanisation which was destroying the traditional Wirral they were trying to preserve. They created a sense of place and a canon of stories and myths which still flourishes.<sup>252</sup>

A leading light in this field was William Fergusson-Irvine (1869-1962), a colonial produce merchant and general editor of the THSLC. Along with Hoylake's Vicar, Francis Sanders (1846-1912), he edited *Wirral Notes and Queries* and in 1892 wrote the following words in its introduction:

We trust that [the articles] will show that the singular district called the Wirral Peninsular (sic.), although wanting in important ecclesiastical and secular buildings, yet contains much of great archaeological interest.<sup>253</sup>

He wrote at least a further eleven articles and books and delivered countless lectures about Wirral's history and environment. A favourite talk was entitled 'The Beauties of Wirral', which Fergusson-Irvine illustrated with lantern slides. In January 1913, he delivered it to the Birkenhead Municipal Officers' Guild, the chairman of which commented that Wirral's 'paths and lanes provided an unlimited volume of pleasure in their variety and loveliness.'<sup>254</sup> In 1909, Fergusson-Irvine wrote the introduction for Edgar Young's *Perambulation*:

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<sup>252</sup> See the *Hidden Wirral* website for details: <http://www.hiddenwirral.org/>

<sup>253</sup> F. Sanders, and W.F. Irvine, eds., *Wirral Notes and Queries Being Local Gleanings, Historical and Antiquarian Relating to the Hundred of Wirral from Many Sources*, Volume 1 (Birkenhead: Willmer Bros, 1892), p.1; K. Burnley, 'The Life and Work of William Fergusson Irvine' *The Wirral Journal*, 4, (1989, Summer), pp. 40-43.

<sup>254</sup> BN 25/1/1913. Fergusson-Irvine's father came from Scotland and his son, Andrew 'Sandy' Irvine (1902-24), died whilst trying to climb Everest with Herbert Leigh-Mallory (1886-1924), whose father also had connections with Wirral. See W. Davis, *Into The Silence: The Great War, Mallory and the Conquest of Everest* (London: Bodley Head, 2011).

Few large centres of population can, like Liverpool, boast of such delightful and such unspoilt country lying at the very door; country, moreover, that has historical associations so full of interest and picturesque incident.<sup>255</sup>

Young echoed Fergusson-Irvine's words: 'Wirral is perhaps one of the pleasantest tracts of land in the three kingdoms, situated so close to a large busy city.'<sup>256</sup> The *Perambulation* probably did more than any other book to promote the idea of Wirral as a rural paradise with a rich heritage. It set the pattern for subsequent local writing – a nostalgic travelogue which ignored modern developments by describing churches and historic homes and telling the stories which were to be engrained in the local imagination and unquestioningly repeated in subsequent books and tourist literature. The only contemporary people he spoke about were either the gentlemen in their ancient homes or the workers on the land. About the latter in Willaston he said, '[...] large families are brought up in some hardship, but, in most cases in great respectability'. His was a romantic picture of a location where you could commune both with nature and the past. Doubtless, it offered solace in a time of change and upheaval. This sentimental view of Wirral as a special place was later to become a psychological prop for Wirral people throughout the Great War.<sup>257</sup>

## **1.12 The Military**

Before the declaration of war in August 1914, military matters were important to the people of Wirral. Many of them were well-disposed towards the navy because

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<sup>255</sup> E. Young, *The Perambulation of the Hundred of Wirral* (Liverpool: Henry Young, 1909) p. xviii.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.* p.9.

<sup>257</sup> Stories which are still being repeated today include 'arrow marks' on Shotwick Church porch, Mary Davies of Great Saughall and her horns, the monks of Hilbre, Wirral wreckers and smugglers and the 'Viking altar' on Thurstaston Hill. Indeed, Norman Ellison repeated the latter story in the BN of 10/8/1912 and all the above stories in his *Wirral Peninsula* (London: Hale, 1955). See *Hidden Wirral*: <http://www.hiddenwirral.org/> for details.

its expansion created employment at Cammell Laird's Shipyard. Indeed, the launching of HMS *Audacious* on 14 September 1912 was celebrated as were the visits by HMS *Nubian* and HMS *Zulu* to Ellesmere Port in May 1912.<sup>258</sup>

Concerning the army, the main topic to feature in the local press was the Territorial Force. Wirral's most important unit was the 1/4/CR (known as the 'Greys'). Its headquarters was in Birkenhead. 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'G' Companies were based there, 'E' in Tranmere, 'F' in Liscard, and 'H' in West Kirby, Heswall and Parkgate. Other territorial units included the Cheshire Field Company of the RE based at Harrowby Road in Birkenhead, 'D' Squadron of the DH based on Conway Street in Birkenhead and (from 1912) a section of the Welsh Border Mounted Brigade Field RAMC at Ellesmere Port. Wirral men could also join the Lancashire and Cheshire RGA or the territorial battalions of the KLR, especially 10/KLR ('Liverpool Scottish') and the 5 and 6/KLR ('Liverpool Rifles').<sup>259</sup> There was also a 'platoon' of the Cheshire RNR, made up of older ex-servicemen, in Birkenhead and another in Port Sunlight.<sup>260</sup>

Again, the enthusiasm and deference of journalists might not represent the feelings of the majority of the population, but there were reports about the territorials in most editions of the local newspapers. The Greys' annual camp, which was usually held somewhere in Wales, was described in detail every summer, while events such as the Trooping of the Colour in Birkenhead Park and the annual Meeanee Day Parade on 17 February received effusive

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<sup>258</sup> BN 25/5/1912.

<sup>259</sup> H. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.9-22.

<sup>260</sup> I.F.W. Beckett, and K. Simpson, *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 1985) pp. 129-130.

attention.<sup>261</sup> However, it was often noted that there were not usually enough part-time soldiers. In 1911, the Cheshire Territorial Force was only at eighty-nine per cent strength. This was despite the many appeals and blessings from the establishment and from the church.<sup>262</sup> G.J. Bryant made similar observations about the Territorial Force in Bolton, which was also under strength. He also made the point that military parades were a source of entertainment, rather than of indoctrination, which could well also be the case in Wirral.<sup>263</sup>

The words spoken by clergymen during annual church parades tell us about attitudes to military service and war. In May 1910, at St. Saviour's Church in Oxton, the Rev. J.B. Sayer said that soldiering was '[...] a duty which every physically capable citizen owed towards his king and country. To bear arms was an honourable occupation [...]' and in October 1912, the Bishop of Sodor and Man said, at St. Mary's in Birkenhead, 'For his country the patriot was proud to live and for his country the patriot was prepared to die.' Such sentiments were echoed in the numerous letters sent to the local press by people advocating national service.<sup>264</sup> However, there was also dissent. In September 1911, the People's Peace Propaganda group was addressed by John Adams of Rock Ferry and made the following resolution:

That this meeting protests against the prevalent military spirit, the agitation for comprehensive military training or conscription and the ever-increasing

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<sup>261</sup> Meeanee Day, 17 February, was celebrated as the CR's Regimental Day. It was a commemoration of the action of the 22nd Foot against the combined armies of the Baluchi Ameers of Scinde and the Sikhs of the Punjab in India.

<sup>262</sup> BN 1/2/1911.

<sup>263</sup> G.J. Bryant, 'Bolton and the Outbreak of the First World War' THSLC, 138 (1988), pp. 181-199 (pp. 185-186).

<sup>264</sup> A. Summers, 'Militarism in Britain Before the Great War', *History Workshop*, 2 (1976), pp. 104-123; A.J. Hoover, *God, Germany, and Britain in the Great War: A Study in Clerical Nationalism* (New York: Praeger, 1989).

cost of armaments in the country. It urges the government to seek the settlement of all national and international disputes by arbitration.<sup>265</sup>

Such requests fell on deaf ears and, after August 1914, the war effort was supported by most local people. The existing military infrastructure fostered an approving and patriotic attitude towards the idea of conflict, enabled local men quickly to be mobilised and to be supported by the rest of society. To some extent, it facilitated further recruitment and created a sense of pride in local military traditions which sustained the whole of society during the war.

The main military units have been introduced and attitudes to militarism explored. Subsequent chapters will show how existing structures were expanded and adapted during 1914 and how reverence for military service became an essential component of the area's attitude to war.

### **1.13 Conclusion**

It has been shown that certain features of Wirral's history are traceable from early times. These include its relative economic advancement, attractiveness for immigration and consequent diversity, dynamism and liminality. By 1914, there were many aspects of local life which were supportive of tradition. The most obvious was the predominance of the Conservatives and Liberals in local politics and the relative unpopularity of socialism. In general, people demonstrated a mixture of both liberal and conservative outlooks and were patriotic, seeing themselves as members of an extended local, national and imperial family. Citizenship was not

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<sup>265</sup> BN 25/5/1910, 8/10/1913 and 6/9/1911. This was similar to Bolton's experience, where the commanding officer of the local artillery unit's Anglican chaplain attempted to get his non-conformist colleagues to help with recruitment, claiming that military service would make men 'better citizens', G.J. Bryant, 'Bolton and the Outbreak of the First World War', p.187.

overtly discussed, but the clear implication of much local discourse was that it was important. Society was believed to work well when people played their part by fulfilling their roles, staying within conventional bounds (unlike, for example, the Moreton campers and drunken frolickers in Birkenhead), serving the community and participating in local patriotic demonstrations. Allied to this phenomenon was the leading role played by a paternalistic upper middle-class elite, the popularity of the royal family and armed forces and a deferential attitude to the social hierarchy. A traditional vision was embodied in a growing sense of place – a feeling that Wirral was a special kind of homeland with charming countryside, stalwart rural folk and a rich heritage. The growth in sport, leisure and cultural activities supports the view that people were largely happy with their lot.

On the other hand, there is also evidence of discontent, stress and conflict. Industrial unrest (especially in 1911 but prevalent throughout the period) and the campaign for women's suffrage are examples. In-migration and immigration continued to foment diversity and population growth and urban development were transforming the face of Wirral. While the middle-class were prospering in suburbia, the working-class were enduring irregular employment and deprivation in the virtual ghettos of Birkenhead. New industries provided both opportunities and challenges. Despite being in a minority, socialists and pacifists and the advocates and practitioners of self-help (for example, the Co-operators and Oddfellows) were making an impression. The rest of the enquiry will focus on the impact of total war on these issues and analyse the interplay between them before reaching a judgement about the extent to which society was transformed.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Moving from Peace to War: The Outbreak and Progress of the War and how it was Received.**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This study is an opportunity to explore Britain's complexity in greater depth, calling on local, more sharply focused examples which shed light on both the national and local situations. Wirral society was complex: there was a multitude of sporting, social, cultural, religious and political associations who were well-organised, vocal and active. Interactions between the different interest groups, industrial relations and political and other campaigns were carried out colourfully and loudly, in public with oratory, marches, music and demonstrations. All of these features constituted an infrastructure and an energy which, after 4 August 1914, were turned over to fighting the war. This chapter explains how this happened. It then explores the degree to which the home and fighting fronts were intertwined. The importance of correspondence and of the role of the newspapers in publishing it is further explored and other ways in which civilians learned about the effects of warfare delineated. This is important in order to understand that civilians knew about the true nature of the war, but continued to support it.

Despite the term 'citizenship' not appearing in contemporary sources, the concept was important to the people of Wirral during the pre-war years. Here, it is argued that belief in citizenship played a vital role in helping local people to make the transition from peace to war. It will be shown that the pre-war citizen became the wartime hero(ine) – someone who demonstrated the laudable qualities of a pre-war member of the community in a warlike situation and was elevated as a fine example for everybody else to copy. This is part of the thesis's argument that a



regional study reveals that there was continuity between the pre-war and post-war worlds and that the war had a conservative or reactionary influence upon society.

The picture corresponds to the thrust of current historiography which talks about the diversity of responses in Britain, the difficulty of either discovering or explaining all of them and how the commonly held belief that the British people uniformly welcomed the war with delight is unfounded. Catriona Pennell summed it up:

[...] describing the reactions of over 40 million British and Irish people to the outbreak of war in 1914 as either enthusiastic [...] or disengaged [...] is over-simplified and inadequate. A society as complex as the United Kingdom in the Edwardian era did not have a single, uniform reaction to such a major event as the outbreak of war in Europe.<sup>266</sup>

Section 2.2 considers whether the war was welcomed in August 1914 and then explores the evolution of attitudes and responses over subsequent months into early 1915. Sections 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 explore Wirral's version of the national phenomena of 'spy-fever', the mobilisation of the reserves and mass recruitment respectively. In general, the arguments of the national historians such as Pennell are corroborated, but the story of recruitment in Wirral is subtly different: it seems to have begun in August, rather than waiting until September. Furthermore, in defiance of the national trend, rural areas did not lag behind the urban in supplying recruits. Within Wirral itself, however, there were additional localised responses. Section 2.6 explores the importance of welfare and voluntary service in enabling a large portion of the population to commit themselves to the war effort. Section 2.7 asks whether there is a Wirral Great War myth similar to those in Accrington and

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<sup>266</sup> C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 227.

Bury. Section 2.8 explores the degree to which soldiers and civilians had knowledge about each other and discusses the role of the local press in disseminating information about the experiences of soldiers on the fighting fronts and how this affected the public's attitude to the war. Building upon the work of Mike Finn, it is argued that a much closer bond between the civilian and military worlds existed than has hitherto been imagined and that this, far from discouraging local people, actually assisted their transition from peace to war and bolstered their resolve to carry on fighting.<sup>267</sup>

An essential theme is that the people of Wirral, were not passive recipients of the effects of war, but active participants in and prosecutors of it. The whole of society, both on the fighting fronts and at home developed what Pennell calls 'a war culture' – a determination to be involved in the conflict and to defeat Britain's enemies for genuine and specific reasons.<sup>268</sup> In this regard, we must begin to see local people as not merely coping with the *impact* of the war, but as having a *relationship* with it. The chapter is concluded in Section 2.9.

## **2.2 Was the War Either Expected or Welcomed?**

When asked about the outbreak of war in 1914, veteran Ernest Haire of Birkenhead remembered how people's minds were focused on the problems in Ireland rather than on the continent:

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<sup>267</sup> M. Finn, 'The Realities of War', *History Today*, Volume 52(8) (2002) pp. 26-31 and 'Local Heroes: War News and the Construction of "Community" in Britain, 1914-18', *Historical Research*, 83 (2010), pp. 520-538.

<sup>268</sup> C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 5.

[...] because you see F.E. Smith joined Carson and he had the title “Gallop Smith” and Carson. We were really afraid of what would happen and the war broke out and everything stopped.<sup>269</sup>

Norman Ellison of Wallasey remembered thinking that the idea of war was ‘preposterous and impossible. I bought a new fishing rod and made plans for a holiday in North Wales with my schoolmaster friend, Alfred Kynaston.’<sup>270</sup> The local newspapers corroborate these memories, as during July and August 1914, they bore few clues that a world war was imminent. In addition to the usual advertisements for the products and services associated with an increasingly affluent society during high summer, there were reports of numerous sporting fixtures and of the leisure activities and entertainments available to holidaymakers along the Wirral coast. Apparently, few people were concerned about the possibility of war. Only the WN of 1 August, low down on page four, contained some hints of an impending conflict with an article entitled ‘The War Shadow. Activity at New Brighton Battery. Well Stocked with Ammunition.’ It said that 110 local RGA volunteers were on duty and that they could be seen guarding Perch Rock Fort and signalling to their counterparts in Seaforth across the estuary.

Another, smaller article presaged future events when it reported that the Liverpool and District Bread and Flour Trade Association, in view of the ‘war scare’ had found it necessary to increase the price of a two-pound loaf by a farthing and that further rises were possible. Beside that, there was an article about the placing of troops at the docks. The Chairman of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board said that it was ‘simply a precautionary measure taken by the government’ and that it

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<sup>269</sup> Ernest Haire, IWM Sound Recording 24542 and LC Liddle/WW1/Gall/041.

<sup>270</sup> D. Lewis, ed., *Remembrances of Hell: The Diary of Norman Ellison* (Shrewsbury: Airlife, 1998), p.22. Lewis’s work is based on Ellison’s papers at LA 920 NFE.

had 'nothing whatever to do with the strike.' It is not possible to discern exactly what people were thinking about the possibility of war, but, on the basis of this evidence, it would appear that it was not at the forefront of many people's minds. The judgement is corroborated by Gladys New (born in Birkenhead in 1896) who, in 1989, recalled that the war came as 'a great shock to everybody'.<sup>271</sup>

However, there is also evidence that some people not only knew about the possibility of war but were also opposed to it. On 2 August, J. Meredith Heaney of the Liscard Adult School informed the WN (published on 5 August) of the school's resolution that the newspapers should 'exercise the enormous influence they undoubtedly have towards bringing the current deplorable situation on the continent to a speedy and peaceful conclusion.' The same edition contained an entire column of additional appeals for neutrality and peace. On Sunday 2 August the congregation of Egremont Baptist Church passed a resolution by 'upstanding vote' which urged the government to 'declare without delay the neutrality of Great Britain and thus enable her to use her good offices in the furtherance of peace.'<sup>272</sup> The Rake Lane Brotherhood of the Borough of Wallasey made a similar appeal, stating that there was 'no necessity for Britain to become involved in the threatened European war.' The Rector of Wallasey, the Rev. Cogswell, urged everybody 'to throng your churches at this time of anxiety and to cast our care upon God.' During the holiday weekend, it was customary for the Chester Diocesan Guild of Bell Ringers to hold a festival in Liscard. On this occasion, they decided not to ring their bells because 'the effect might be to mislead many people who might misinterpret the message of the bells as one of thanksgiving.' On

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<sup>271</sup> Gladys New Papers, LC Liddle/WWI/DF/095.

<sup>272</sup> WN 5/8/1914.

Monday 3 August, an anti-war protest was held at the local beauty spot known as Red Noses in New Brighton, led by the Reverends Fraser and Dunnico.<sup>273</sup>

None of the other Wirral newspapers contain either references to a possible war or to protests against it. It is possible that, due to the higher proportion of middle-class people in Wallasey and to their consequent higher levels of education, there were more people in that town who were both aware of events in the wider world and sufficiently confident to voice their views about them. Alternatively, Wallasey's apparent uniqueness might result from the interests and bias of the newspaper's staff. There are three conclusions to be drawn from this evidence: firstly, that most people seem not to have expected a world war in August 1914, secondly that many of those who did see its possibility were opposed to it and thirdly that the news of the war's outbreak was received with solemnity. There is no evidence of anybody celebrating Britain's declaration of war on 4 August.

According to G.J. Bryant, Bolton's experience of August 1914 was somewhat different to that of Wirral, as a large demonstration against the war was held in the centre of town on Bank Holiday Monday, whereas Wirral's 'capital', Birkenhead, seems not to have witnessed a similar event. This is explained by the larger number of Liberal and Labour members of Bolton's town council, socialism's stronger presence in the town` and an awareness that war would adversely affect their town's most important industry, textile manufacture. Bolton's feelings were beautifully summed up by a member of the crowd outside the town hall: "tis none

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<sup>273</sup> WN 5/8/1914.

of our quarrel, but we mun keep us word. Eh, they do deserve all they get, making trouble like this 'ere.'<sup>274</sup>

In August 1914, the BA revealed that general awareness of a possible war had grown when it published the following observations:

Before the war all was buzz and excitement in the town. Now that it has actually arrived, people are singularly silent. The town was effervescing until a late hour on Tuesday night; but immediately war had been declared, a great calm fell on the public. It is not that they were afraid or depressed, rather they suppressed their feelings, and set their teeth with a determination to teach the German emperor that we are not a negligible country.<sup>275</sup>

The WKN said that 'a blow has been struck at the vitals of summer', while The WN described how: 'the military activities in New Brighton have created the greatest interest, but in common with other parts of the country the crowds have not shown any disposition to Mafeking.'<sup>276</sup> There is no evidence of exultation at the prospect of war. In the BA of 12 August, Sir W.H. Lever described it as a 'catastrophe'. The same paper bore an advertisement saying, 'Be normal, do not hoard, be frugal'

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<sup>274</sup> Ironically, Bolton's Liberal councillors were slow to vote in favour of the Liberal Government's declaration of war, demonstrating that local Liberals were more radical than the national party. G.J. Bryant, 'Bolton and the Outbreak of the First World War' THSLC, 138 (1988), pp. 181-199 (pp.181 and 196 fn.).

<sup>275</sup> BA 3/8/1914.

<sup>276</sup> Mafeking is a town in South Africa which was besieged by the Boers for 217 days. The rejoicings which occurred when it was relieved on 17 May 1900 led to the coining of a new word meaning 'great patriotic celebrations'. See B. Beaven, 'The Provincial Press, Civic Ceremony and the Citizen-Soldier During the Boer War, 1899-1902: A Study of Local Patriotism', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37(2) (2009), pp. 207-228 especially p. 209 for discussion of Mafeking.

while the WKN urged everybody to ‘carry on our daily avocations, duties and affairs.’<sup>277</sup>

Popular understandings of how the declaration of war was greeted in Britain have been informed by excessive focus on London. Events were described by *Times* reporter, Michael MacDonough:

It was in the streets after the House of Commons had adjourned that I found myself in an atmosphere of real passion. Parliament Street and Whitehall were thronged with people highly excited and rather boisterous. A brilliant sun shone in a cloudless sky. Young men in straw hats were in the majority. Girls in light calico dresses were numerous. All were already touched with war fever. They regarded their country as a crusader – redressing all wrongs and bringing freedom to oppressed nations. Cries of ‘Down with Germany!’ were raised.<sup>278</sup>

Events in the capital are not necessarily representative of the behaviour of all British people. Many provincial newspapers describe completely different attitudes and responses during August 1914. References to people learning their lessons after having naively celebrated the commencement of the Boer War in 1899, appear in various regional newspapers, as well as those from Wirral. For example, the *Westmorland Gazette* talked about Kendal: ‘The hysterical scenes that occurred when the volunteers left for South Africa were not repeated. We were all

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<sup>277</sup> WKN 15/8/1914.

<sup>278</sup> Quoted in T.C. Barker, *The Long March of Everyman* (London: Harper Collins, 1975), pp. 170-171.

fearfully sober; none fondly imagined this affair to be 'a picnic'; there was not a Jingo within sight.'<sup>279</sup>

The idea that Britain's declaration of war was welcomed jingoistically is not supported by the evidence from the provinces and certainly not from Wirral.<sup>280</sup> However, once the war had begun, many people were determined to get involved. It was perceived that Britain and its empire were being threatened by Germany and that it was necessary to fight against that country with vigour. There is evidence of a widespread mood of confidence, unity and determination. All of the local newspapers contained editorials expressing these sentiments. One of the clearest appeared in the WKN of 8 August:

On every hand the same eagerness for the latest news may be observed, the same readiness to take part in any debate that touches upon a conflict which is going to change the map of Europe. Every fraternity exhibits the same indulgence, class and creed and politics are submerged in the overwhelming concern for home and empire. Loyalty and devotion speak an unassailable faith in the ability of those who have answered the country's call in the hour of peril [...] Events we do and shall follow closely, ready to sacrifice and prepared to meet with restraint the demands a struggle of such dimensions may make. The spirit of patriotism is setting the land aglow, and we venture to say that greater fervour than that which exists in our own district is unknown.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> *Westmorland Gazette* 8/8/1914.

<sup>280</sup> See C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, Chapter 1.

<sup>281</sup> WKN 8/8/1914.



People believed that Britain had not wanted war. The BA of 8 August said that Great Britain's participation in it was 'none of our seeking', while Councillor Richard Bird of Hoylake announced that 'war had broken in upon us.'<sup>282</sup> But now that the war had begun, the reasons for it were clear: Germany, personified by its Kaiser, had broken international laws and was threatening Britain's security.<sup>283</sup> It had to be stopped. The BA further said that Britain was fighting 'To protect the small independent state of Belgium from the German maw.' War was a 'ghastly and horrible method of settling disputes', but it had become necessary and Britain was going to do its best. In the words of the Rev. W. Hollowell (1860-1932), Headmaster of Calday Grange School in West Kirby:

We must stand together now [...] We are united because we feel this is a Christian war, a war that teaches us that the pleasures and riches of life are not such great things after all. We shall rejoice in our ability to relieve the burden of others.<sup>284</sup>

The Reverend Charles Roper echoed the sentiment in West Kirby when he said that the Germans had been taught 'a corrupted morality of force' and that the British were fighting for 'liberty of religion.'<sup>285</sup> An 'enthusiastic meeting' was held in

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<sup>282</sup> WKN 22/8/1914.

<sup>283</sup> L. Reinermann said that 'Wilhelm became a "representative individual" whose personal characteristics were generalised to the entire German Nation' in 'Fleet Street and the Kaiser: British Public Opinion and Wilhelm II', *German History*, 26, pp. 469-485 (p.469). Bolton had witnessed similar anti-German propaganda: a 'contemporary recalled in the 1960s that the journals in the local library, such as the *Illustrated London News*, *The Graphic*, *Strand Magazine* and *Review of Reviews*, were full of anti-German cartoons and remembers seeing a film at this time portraying an unsuccessful invasion of Britain by men in spiked helmets.' G.J. Bryant, 'Bolton and the Outbreak of the First World War', p. 184. Also see M. Reeve, "'The Darkest Town in England": Patriotism and Anti-German Sentiment in Hull, 1914-19', *International Journal of Regional and Local History*, 12(1) (2017), pp.42-63.

<sup>284</sup> WKN 12/9/1914. Hollowell's son, Francis John, was killed during the Battle of the Somme on 7/7/1916 whilst serving as an officer in the Worcestershire Regiment, aged nineteen. See his biography on *An Imperishable Record*: <https://grangehill1922.wordpress.com/2015/04/02/francis-john-hollowell/>.

<sup>285</sup> WKN 17/10/1914.

Bromborough on the night of 14 August under the auspices of the Red Cross Society when Drs. Carter and Kennedy gave talks about Germany's war aims and said that 'Britain stood today united in the cause of right. In the cause of that equality which she had always stood for.'<sup>286</sup> There was no doubt that Britain was right and Germany wrong. There is evidence from other parts of the country of the same beliefs being published and preached with similar terminology. For example, in his war diary on 2 August 1914, the Reverend Andrew Clark of Great Leighs in Essex described taking a service in Hagbourne in Berkshire:

[...] instead of the sermon I intended, I mentioned the grave news and spoke for a little on the impending war, and the sacrifices it would call for. The churchwarden thanked me for doing this. Several parishioners had sons in the services and all would count it a kindness to have received such early intimation that the critical moment had come.<sup>287</sup>

Importantly, the war was also justified in local terms. On 23 September, a recruiting meeting in Birkenhead, the mayor said:

We had scarcely yet realised what was taking place on the continent – cathedrals destroyed, towns burnt, women and children homeless (shame!). But though these outrages seemed far off they would take place in England too once the German got here, and the Briton whose blood did not boil at the very thought, and who was not stirred to prevent these outrages was not worthy of the name (cheers).<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> BN 15/8/1914.

<sup>287</sup> J. Munson, ed., *Echoes of the Great War: The Diary of the Reverend Andrew Clark 1914-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.5.

<sup>288</sup> BA 26/9/1914.

On 20 November the prospective Liberal candidate for Wirral, A. J. Ashton, addressed a recruiting meeting in Ellesmere Port and said that unless the local people could 'bring themselves to recognise what the struggle meant, they would do no work in Ellesmere Port in twelve or eighteen months' time.<sup>289</sup> In other words, the Wirral way of life, its economy and infrastructure would have been destroyed by Germany.<sup>290</sup> The sentiment was echoed in March 1915 when a Mr E.C. Rees addressed a recruiting meeting in Birkenhead and claimed that the recent deaths of some local soldiers in Flanders had occurred 'on the heights of Tranmere and the slopes of Bidston'.<sup>291</sup> Helen McCartney comments on the phenomenon: 'much of [the soldiers'] understanding of what the war was about had the domestic sphere at its heart'; and, in relation to Hull, Michael Reeve called it 'defensive patriotism' which involves 'appropriation of the national narrative through local cultural norms'.<sup>292</sup>

As a result of this vision, people were eager to get involved and actively to participate in the war effort. They were not going to sit back and let the war happen to them; they were going to participate in it, to prosecute the war against Germany and to do everything possible to ensure a final victory. De Groot confirms this perception: '[...] the war seemed a noble cause, worthy of sacrifice. The nation responded. That response deserves immense admiration.'<sup>293</sup>

In sum, the declaration of war was not celebrated. People observed its implications with sobriety and resolved to prosecute it with vigour. It was not

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<sup>289</sup> Arthur Jacob Ashton (1855-1915), Barrister and Recorder for Manchester from 1914.

<sup>290</sup> BN 21/11/1914.

<sup>291</sup> BA 27/3/1915.

<sup>292</sup> H. B. McCartney, 'North-West Infantry Battalions and Local Patriotism in the First World War', in N. Mansfield, ed., *The Great War in the North West*, pp. 1-13 (p. 5) and M. Reeve "'The Darkest Town in England'", p.43.

<sup>293</sup> De Groot, *Back in Blighty, The British at Home in World War 1* (London: Vintage, 2014), p. 435.

expected to be a short war and the need for sacrifice was expected. These characteristics will feature again below during more detailed analysis of popular resilience.

### **2.3 Spy-Fever and Xenophobia**

During the first twelve months of the war, German plotters and saboteurs were believed to be everywhere.<sup>294</sup> The BA said that the phrase ‘Halt who goes there?’ could be heard all over the district and reported that one Hoylake wag had replied that he had ‘something explosive’. It turned out to be a packet of beef sandwiches.<sup>295</sup> Jumpiness led to Wirral’s first war casualty – Private Lewis Morrice, a twenty-year-old Territorial from Birkenhead, who was accidentally shot by a comrade on Bidston Hill on 11 August. His death had been assumed to be the work of a German spy, but his wounds were found to have been caused by a ‘service bullet’.

On 6 November 1914, a reporter for The BA was arrested at West Kirby Railway Station. He was seen to be writing notes whilst sitting in the waiting room. It was his copy for the newspaper about that night’s meeting of the West Kirby Literary Society. But some local ‘worthies’ thought he was a spy and even said that his handwriting looked German. Only when he showed his Mersey Ferries season ticket did they release him. The reporter then spoke to the ticket collector: ‘It’s funny that I should be taken for a German spy’. The collector replied, ‘Well you see sir, you’re a stranger to West Kirby and in these times the milingtery can’t be too pertikler.’ The BN, the BA’s Liberal rival, protested at this mocking article and said

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<sup>294</sup> See C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, Chapter 3 and P. Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst. Germans in Britain During the First World War* (Oxford: Berg, 1991); S. Yarrow, ‘The Impact of Hostility on Germans in Britain, 1914–1918’, *Immigrants and Minorities*, 8 (1989), pp. 97-112.

<sup>295</sup> BA 12/8/1914.

that the local vigilantes had done the right thing. Such attitudes and occurrences must be seen as representing local people's desire to be active, to be taking part in the war and to be protecting their country and neighbourhood.<sup>296</sup> Simon Hancock described a very similar phenomenon in Pembrokeshire, where 'Spy mania [...] clearly played on real fears generated by the declaration of war. There were local incidents, some not without humorous elements.'<sup>297</sup>

A further, sinister, consequence of such feelings was a growing sense of xenophobia. A petty example of anti-German feeling occurred in Hoylake when Councillor Ashby spoke about local demands to change the name of Prussia Road. It subsequently became Queen's Road.<sup>298</sup> We have seen that there was a sizeable group of Germans living in Wirral. The Aliens' Registration Act was advertised in the local press and announced by the Mayor of Birkenhead, during the first week of August. All foreigners were required to register with the police and had restrictions placed on their movements. The mayor expressed the desire that the rights of aliens be upheld, but many of the subsequent incidents were distinctly unjust.<sup>299</sup>

Michael Reeve analysed this phenomenon in Hull, where the *Hull Daily News* appears to have been even more excitable than Merseyside's newspapers in whipping up spy fever and describing German atrocities in Belgium. This was due to the newspaper being owned by the notorious populist and owner of the *Daily Mail*, Lord Northcliffe (1865-1922), whereas, as was discussed above, the Wirral

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<sup>296</sup> BA 11/11/1914.

<sup>297</sup> S. Hancock, *The Social Impact of the First World War In Pembrokeshire*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, (Cardiff University, **2015**), pp. 325-326.

<sup>298</sup> WKN 12/9/1914.

<sup>299</sup> BA 12/8/14; BN 8/8/1914. See P. Panayi, 'An Intolerant Act by an Intolerant Society: Internment of Germans in Britain During the First World War' *Immigrants and Minorities*, 11 (1992), pp. 53-75.

newspapers were locally owned by relatively moderate Conservatives and Liberals.<sup>300</sup>

All foreigners were treated with suspicion, but particularly if they had German-sounding names. The BA reported on seven aliens in Birkenhead who were not given permits to stay and lamented that they all had 'good situations in the town, had no hostile intentions, looked upon themselves as Englishmen, did not want to go, and did not know where to go.'<sup>301</sup> 'A Russian Jew' was arrested near Perch Rock in late August 1914 and released later on; George Henshall Steveni of West Kirby had to explain that he was Norwegian, not German. Following the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915, foreigners were treated with even more hostility. James Schlock, an American visitor, was arrested in Mollington in May 1915. Two sailors at Birkenhead and Wallasey Docks – Gertz Kranz from Holland and John Mikkelson from Denmark – were fined in June 1915.<sup>302</sup>

Several respected and liked Germans were harshly treated following the outbreak of war. One of the most notable cases is that of the ten members of the Hoylake and West Kirby German Band led by Adam Groop and his three brothers, Ludwig, Charles and Augustus. The BA of 8 August 1914 said that the group had been deported to Chester Castle, but hoped to return to Wirral soon. They ended up in the internment camp at Queensferry and were eventually deported. Accusations that they had played German patriotic songs in public must have been false. A similar case was Ludwig Blattner (1881-1935), who managed *La Scala* Cinema in

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<sup>300</sup> M. Reeve, "The Darkest Town in England", p.46.

<sup>301</sup> BA 22/8/1914.

<sup>302</sup> BN 26/6/1915.

Wallasey. He composed a pro-British patriotic song in September 1914, called 'A Call to Arms', but was still interned later in the year.<sup>303</sup>

Many other Germans were mentioned in the local press, including Mrs Lottie Foster of *Deva Villas*, West Kirby, who had been residing in Berlin with German relations; Reinhardt Schmidt who was told to get out of Birkenhead, but confessed that he had 'nowhere to go'; Dr Dunchmann of the Ellesmere Port Dye Works; Commander Stahlknecht of West Kirby, who saved himself by changing his name to Hawk-Genn; August Botha Eberstein, a pen manufacturer in Wallasey who said that he was born in the U.S.A.; George Stein from Liverpool, who appeared in court in Wallasey and protested that he was 'an alien of no man' but was told that 'that was not the point'; and Austrians Fritz Marcus Manasse and Rudolph Cux, who travelled without permission more than five miles from Wallasey.<sup>304</sup>

As was shown in Chapter One, Wirral society was ethnically and culturally diverse. Apart from the Catholic versus Protestant squabbles, there had been few instances of discrimination or inter-communal strife and Germans in particular had always been respected and integrated. The persecution of 'aliens' was an innovation caused by the war. It is possible that the war provided an excuse to unleash long-held resentments against successful outsiders, but, so far, no evidence has been uncovered to support the case. Distasteful though we find these examples of xenophobia, they should be seen as an aspect of the local populace's eagerness to be actively involved in the war. The Germans were believed to be 'enemies in our midst', local, tangible representatives of the distant

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<sup>303</sup> WN 26/9/1914. By 1919, 23,000 Germans had been repatriated, M. Jones, 'War and National Identity' in F. Carnevali and A. M. Strange, eds. *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 79-94 (p.81).

<sup>304</sup> BA 8/8/1914, 14/8/1914, 22/8/1914; BN 8/8/1914, 26/6/1915; WKN 15/8/1915, 12/9/1915, 24/10/1915 and 31/10/1915.

nation against whom they were struggling and which posed such an appalling threat to their nation.

## **2.4 Reservists and Voluntary Units**

Naturally, the most important aspect of the local response to the Great War was recruitment – its capacity firstly to bring reservists into full-time service and secondly to turn large numbers of civilians into soldiers as quickly as possible. Chapter One revealed that there were many organisations with large memberships, dealing with many aspects of life.<sup>305</sup> It will now be shown how many of these institutions helped to build the nation's armed forces, further supporting the argument that the people of Wirral did not just experience the Great War as passive recipients of uncontrollable events, but actively and purposefully engaged in it.<sup>306</sup>

Straight after the declaration of war, members of 1/4/CR were summoned to headquarters in full marching gear with all their kit. Absentees were treated as deserters. The other territorial units, such as 1/10/KLR (Liverpool Scots), the 1/6/KLR (Liverpool Rifles), the DH, the Legion of Frontiersmen, the RE, and the RAMC were also called up, as were RNR personnel. The 3/CR was recalled from Londonderry and stationed at Gamlin's Furniture Works in Birkenhead and at West Kirby.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> The findings explored in this chapter chime with N. Mansfield, 'Volunteers and Recruiting', in G. Gliddon, ed., *Norfolk and Suffolk in the Great War* (Norwich: Gliddon Books, 1988), pp. 18-32 and G.J. Bryant, 'Bolton and the Outbreak of the First World War', p. 191.

<sup>306</sup> See H.B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.6.

<sup>307</sup> BA 8/8/1914, 12/8/1914; WKN 8/8/1914, 29/8/14, 5/9/1914. See Appendix Eight for a list of regiments joined by members of the WSS.



People became increasingly aware of the severity of the situation as local uniformed employees such as policemen, postmen, railway workers and ferry crew left their jobs to join the colours. By 8 August 1914, twelve Birkenhead constables had left for active service. By early September, Inspector Sandland of the Wallasey Force had returned to the CR to act as drill instructor.<sup>308</sup> Captain W.J. Newton of 1/4/CR was observed with his men practising shooting in Heswall, which had lost three of its postmen to the army and soldiers could be seen route-marching along Wirral's rural lanes. The BA said that these experiences 'brought home to Heswall folk more forcibly than, perhaps even reports of battles in Belgium, the seriousness of the struggle in which Britain is involved'.<sup>309</sup> The next edition of the newspaper, on 12 August, described Leasowe, 'a once quiet village' as having been turned into 'a fortified camp, bristling with warlike preparations' and the BN of 8 August said that Birkenhead had become 'a garrison town.'

The next tier of personnel to be mobilised was the National Reserve. It contained men who had served in the armed forces but who were over forty-two and whose obligations had expired.<sup>310</sup> The WN of 8 August said that the Wallasey Company met at the Riverside Schools and was commanded by Colonel J.W. De Silva and the BA of 22 August described a church parade of seventy members of Number Four Company from Hoylake and West Kirby at Hoylake.

Mature men with no military experience also wanted to serve and clubbed together to form Local Volunteer Defence Companies or Volunteer Training Corps – a kind of extempore home guard. This was a grey area within Britain's military structure.

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<sup>308</sup> CC 12/9/1914.

<sup>309</sup> BA 8/8/1914.

<sup>310</sup> I.F.W. Beckett and K. Simpson, *A Nation at Arms*, pp. 129-130 and *The Long Long Trail at* [http://www.1914-1918.net/national\\_reserve.html](http://www.1914-1918.net/national_reserve.html). [Accessed 7/7/2016].

The government was suspicious of such a spontaneous, grassroots movement which resembled a network of private armies led by possible over-mighty subjects: the volunteers were allowed to carry dummy weapons for drilling purposes; their uniforms were not allowed to be khaki and had to be purchased for twenty-three shillings.<sup>311</sup> Members wore armbands bearing the initials 'GR', standing for 'Georgius Rex', giving rise to their nickname, the 'Gorgeous Wrecks'. They were active in Wirral, probably due to the many middle-class, middle-aged men living there.<sup>312</sup>

There is evidence of further spontaneous voluntary units which must have been even more worrying to the authorities. By September the North-West Wirral Rifle and Training Association had been formed under Colonel Ewan with a firing range near Hoylake Promenade.<sup>313</sup> By October it was expanding and Mr J.I. Ingham offered it the *Dale Estate* in Hoylake as a training base. Regarding rural southern Wirral, *The Nantwich Guardian* of 7 August 1914 described the formation of a volunteer force in Mollington and Great Saughall, which drilled under a former NCO from The KLR on the lawn of Mr Ravenscroft's farmhouse. It had fifty members and a miniature rifle range.<sup>314</sup> In order to avoid becoming a refuge for men who did not want to join the army, all such units had a lower age limit of thirty-five. We do not know how many such avoiders lay within the ranks of the Volunteers, but the movement is further evidence of the desire of Wirral people to be involved in the war.

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<sup>311</sup> J.M. Osborne, 'Defining Their Own Patriotism: British Volunteer Training Corps in the First World War' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (1988), pp. 59-75 (pp. 64-65). The BNVS describes Birkenhead's unit on pp. 134-139.

<sup>312</sup> I.F.W. Beckett and K. Simpson, *A Nation at Arms*, pp.15-17. Wirral demonstrated its fondness for innovation when the country's first volunteer unit was founded in Mollington, E.J.W. Disbrow, *History of the Volunteer Movement in Cheshire 1914-1920* (Stockport: Swain and Co., 1920).

<sup>313</sup> WKN 12/9/1914, 24/10/1914.

<sup>314</sup> E.J.W. Disbrow, *History of the Volunteer Movement in Cheshire 1914-1920*, p.3.

The above voluntary paramilitary units (especially as Wirral was the first place to witness their occurrence) are further evidence of the area's reputation for innovation. In addition, the large numbers of middle-aged male volunteers results from the strength of the local middle-class, whose wealth derived from the area's large maritime economy. It also demonstrates the importance of militarism and patriotism and is evidence of many people's desire to be actively involved in the war, even though they were too old actually to fight.<sup>315</sup>

## **2.5 Recruitment**

Recruitment to the regular army, judging by the number of columns it occupied in the local press, was the biggest issue of the day. When discussing it, it must be remembered that the newspapers were not always objective – on many occasions their reports resembled propaganda rather than news. They became organs of the recruitment drive as well as observers of it. This necessitates cross-reference with other sources, but, unfortunately, few additional archives exist, apart from the interviews with local veterans from the 1980s and 90s. Despite these reservations, it is possible to make limited judgements about recruitment in Wirral during 1914 and early 1915 which further illuminate Wirral particularism and improve understanding of the phenomenon in Britain as a whole.

The seven new local military formations created and shepherded by local figureheads can be put under three headings: the 'Liverpool Pals' (17, 18, 19 and 20/KLR); the 'Wirral Pals' or 'Wirral Battalion' (13/CR) and the 'Bantams' (15 and 16/CR). The first was the work of the 17th Earl of Derby, the second that of MP for

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<sup>315</sup> Michael Reeve commented on a similar phenomenon in Hull, where a great many people became special constables in order to help discover suspected German spies, "The Darkest Town in England".

Wirral, Gershom Stewart, with the assistance of Sir W.H. Lever and the third that of Alfred Bigland, MP for Birkenhead.<sup>316</sup>

Lord Derby was based in South Lancashire, at *Knowsley Hall*, but his ancestors came from Wirral and he was the most powerful aristocrat in the region. He explained the beginning of the Pals Battalions in 1919 as follows:

I can claim but little credit for the formation of the 89 Brigade [...] I merely voiced the wish expressed to me by many would-be recruits that they should be allowed to serve with their friends. The appeal was, therefore, likely to be a great success before it was even made.<sup>317</sup>

Recruiting began on 31 August 1914. Many Wirral men appeared in their ranks, including at least forty officers from Birkenhead who were present at Belton Park Training Camp in Lincolnshire in April 1915 and who bore such familiar names as Beazley, Laird, Pemberton, Willmer, Ziegler and Ravenscroft.<sup>318</sup> Gerard De Groot asserted that, at this stage in Britain, there were two types of recruit – ex-public schoolboys and ‘the others.’ This is an over-simplification because, on Merseyside, there was a large lower middle-class, who formed the majority of Lord Derby’s Pals’ Battalions – clerks who commuted daily to Liverpool in order to work in one of its many commercial concerns. The class dimension in recruiting patterns is evident here. John Goldthorpe and David Lockwood analysed the role of

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<sup>316</sup> Edward George Villiers Stanley, 17th Earl of Derby (1865-1948); see R. Churchill, *Lord Derby*, pp.184-352; P. Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army*, pp.58-59, Maddocks *Liverpool Pals*, pp. 22-28. Gershom Stewart (1857-1929), Unionist M.P for Wirral 1910-1923, see BNVS pp.11-12; William Hesketh Lever 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Leverhulme (1851-1925); Alfred Bigland (1855-1936), Unionist M.P. for Birkenhead 1910-1922. S. McGreal, *The Cheshire Bantams: 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the Cheshire Regiment* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2006), pp. 17-42. The BNVS describes local military units’ contributions to the war pp. 5-16.

<sup>317</sup> G. Maddocks, *Liverpool Pals: The 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th Battalions of The King’s Liverpool Regiment 1914-1919* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 1991), p.23.

<sup>318</sup> BNVS, p.14.

affluence in determining class and made the pertinent observation that many British working-class people have at various times achieved 'economic parity' with the middle-class, but that wealth 'does not constitute the whole of the economic aspect of class stratification.' Job security is another factor: manual workers were more likely to be 'dismissed at short notice' and were less likely to benefit from wage guarantees and pensions.<sup>319</sup> Wirral's clerks were much more likely to receive financial support from their employers, in the form of wage supplements and job guarantees, than were dock or shipyard workers and were more able to join the Pals Battalions early on and *en masse*. The Pals Battalions' officers were usually the privately educated managers of the clerks' firms, imbued with the 'chivalric values' acquired at their respective schools.<sup>320</sup> This relates to another point made by Goldthorpe and Lockwood about the importance of education 'as a key agency in allocating individuals to their occupational roles' and thereby, in this context, to their military roles too.<sup>321</sup>

Despite having been political rivals in the 1909 general election, Lever and Stewart collaborated in the creation of the Wirral Battalion. It recruited mainly from the Port Sunlight works, meaning that it contained more people from a single factory than any other British battalion. Famously, some 750 recruits travelled by rail, amidst great ceremony and emotion, from Port Sunlight to Chester on 7 September 1914. The event's centenary was commemorated in 2014 when an equal number of people made the same journey.<sup>322</sup> Lever continued to act as the battalion's benefactor. Not only had he urged all of his male staff aged nineteen to thirty-five

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<sup>319</sup> J. Goldthorpe and D. Lockwood, 'Affluence and the British Class Structure', *The Sociological Review*, 11(2) (1963) 133-163 (p. 137).

<sup>320</sup> G. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Pearson, 1996), p.44.

<sup>321</sup> J. Goldthorpe and D. Lockwood, 'Affluence and the British Class Structure', p.133.

<sup>322</sup> BN 9/9/1914 and LE 29/8/2014.

to join up, but he made it possible for them to do so by continuing to pay recruits half their salaries and promising to keep their situations open for when they returned. He also provided members of 'his' battalion with personal encouragement, comforts and necessities such as food, cutlery and footballs.<sup>323</sup>

Keith Grieves offered a regional comparison. He showed how, in the county of Sussex, it was assumed that, due to a 'symbiotic relationship of landed wealth and military function', the local aristocracy, would fulfil their traditionally paternalistic role by recruiting men through the local Territorial Associations.<sup>324</sup> In reality, due to regional demographic changes, this framework proved to be inadequate and Claude Lowther MP, when he began recruiting for his 'corps of Sussex men' on 2 September 1914, enjoyed a lot more success.<sup>325</sup> He promised, just as did the Earl of Derby with regard to the Liverpool Pals, that men would be able to serve 'side by side' with their friends and used social networks, such as football teams to pull in the new recruits.<sup>326</sup> It was an example of the successful use of an essentially urban recruiting system to a rural county. In turn, this can be compared with industrial and highly urban Bolton, which decided against forming a Pals Battalion because it would have cost money which the council 'preferred to spend on other things' and probably because of the reluctance of the local middle class to join up.<sup>327</sup> The point is made that patterns of recruitment were dependent upon an intersection of the willingness of local men to join up and leadership from above. In Wirral, the leadership was provided partly by a regional aristocrat but mainly by

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<sup>323</sup> BA 12/9/1914.

<sup>324</sup> K. Grieves, 'Lowther's Lambs: Rural Paternalism and Voluntary Recruitment in the First World War', *Rural History* 4(1) (April 1993), pp.55 -75 (p.58).

<sup>325</sup> Ibid. p.60.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid. p.64.

<sup>327</sup> G.J. Bryant, 'Bolton and the Outbreak of the First World War', p.195.

non-aristocratic figureheads who were similar to Claude Lowther in Sussex and who exercised a paternalistic role similar to that played by traditional aristocrats.<sup>328</sup>

Alfred Bigland began recruiting men under the minimum height of 5' 3" (allegedly following the arrival of some Durham coalminers in Birkenhead, who had been rejected by their local regiment and were desperate to sign up) on 30 November 1914. Within two days, he had more than enough men (1100) for one battalion and soon had enough for a second. In March 1915, they were part of a parade of 12,000 New Army soldiers in Liverpool which were admired by the Earl of Derby and by Kitchener himself.<sup>329</sup>

The WSS produces figures for recruitment during the period 31 August to 7 September 1914, when 131 men from the sample joined up. Of these, thirty (22.9%) joined 13/CR (Wirral Pals), while twenty-three (18.4%) joined three of the Liverpool Pals Battalions. Those who joined the Wirral Pals were completely working-class, while the Liverpool Pals' recruits were almost all middle-class.

Three Wirral Pals and two Liverpool Pals worked at Lever Bros. Soap Works. The figures prove that the efforts of the big recruiters – Lord Derby, Gershom Stewart

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<sup>328</sup> Grieves's examples of Sussex aristocrats include Lord Leconfield, The 5<sup>th</sup> Marquis of Abergavenny and the 15<sup>th</sup> Duke of Norfolk, K. Grieves, 'Lowther's Lambs'. Also see E. Bujack *English Landed Society in the Great War: Defending the Realm* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018) Kindle e-book Loc. 123: 'The Edwardian Officer Corps was drawn largely from traditional elites and rank reflected a close correlation with the land' – a classic sweeping statement, which, as is being argued here, does not apply to Wirral. Interestingly, Claude Lowther was related to one of the north-west of England's most powerful aristocrats, Lord Lowther, who did fulfil the classic role described by Bujack, when he founded the 11<sup>th</sup> or 'Lonsdale Battalion' of the Border Regiment; see C. Bardgett, *The Lonsdale Battalion 1914-1918* (Wigtown: G.C. Book Publishers Ltd., 1993), Colonel H.C. Wylly C.B., *The Border Regiment in the Great War* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1924), pp. 16-29 and the website of The Lonsdale Battalion 1914-1918: [https://thelonsdalebattalion.co.uk/wiki/11th\\_\(Service\)\\_Battalion\\_Border\\_Regiment\\_\(Lonsdale\)](https://thelonsdalebattalion.co.uk/wiki/11th_(Service)_Battalion_Border_Regiment_(Lonsdale)) [Accessed 4/4/2021]. The battalion's colonel was a typical gentleman soldier from a landed family – Percy Wilfred Machell (1886-1916) of *Crackenthorpe Hall* near Appleby in Westmorland. There are no equivalents of such landed aristocrats or gentry acting as recruiters or officers in Wirral regiments. This is due to Westmorland being a profoundly rural and, therefore, probably more traditional society than Wirral in the period 1914-1918.

<sup>329</sup> BNVS pp.10-11.

and Sir W.H. Lever – especially by creating new battalions and targeting specific groups of men, really did affect recruiting patterns during the early stages of the war.<sup>330</sup>

When we study the apparatus which enabled mass recruiting in Wirral, again we discover the importance of the institutions, structures and attitudes which existed before the war. Recruitment committees were formed which consisted of the aforementioned dignitaries, as well as people like Captain Alan Field of the Liscard Naval Training School and future Colonel of 13/CR, Alfred Mansfield, a Birkenhead businessman and philanthropist and Charles Maclver J.P. of Heswall, councillor and Chairman of the Wirral Conservative Association.<sup>331</sup> Their methods were the same as those employed by pre-war campaigners – processions, music and public meetings in which oratory was deployed in order to stir emotions.<sup>332</sup>

A good example is a meeting held at Hoylake Town Hall on Wednesday 2 September and Reported in the BN. The speakers processed into the hall behind fifty members of the National Reserve, creating ‘an imposing spectacle’. The chair was taken by Councillor Richard Bird and the audience addressed by Gershom Stewart and then Major D. Strachan, who:

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<sup>330</sup> First Pals, 6; Second Pals, 13; Third Pals, 6. Of the Wirral Pals, sixteen of the thirty were labourers (three employed by Lever Bros.); of the Liverpool Pals, fourteen were clerks (two employed by Lever Bros.); others were engineers, a solicitor, a draughtsman, a produce broker and a cotton salesman; the working-class members of the contingent were a boilermaker, a groom and a decorator. Many more from both contingents might well have been employed by Lever Bros. but did not say so when they attested. See Chapter Three below for further discussion of the relationship between class and recruitment.

<sup>331</sup> See Appendix Four for further notes on the Mclver Family.

<sup>332</sup> John Alan Francis Field (1876-1918); Alfred Mansfield (1870-1940), founder of a gas, water and electricity engineering firm, based in India until 1914 when he returned to Birkenhead and assisted Alfred Bigland with his recruiting campaign; Charles Maclver J.P. (1867-1935), shipowner, Olympic sailor and member of a Merseyside business dynasty begun by his grandfather Charles Maclver (1812-1885) and continued by his father, David Maclver (1840-1907), M.P. for Birkenhead 1874-1885 and Kirkdale 1898-1907.



[...] appealed to every man between the ages of nineteen and thirty-five to flock to the colours. Great excitement was caused by the Major's production of a print of one of the Kaiser's orders to his army which, being translated, was 'Smash French's little army.' Here the vast audience rose up as one man and shouted 'Never! Down with him!' and 'Smash the tyrant!'<sup>333</sup>

It worked because forty-two recruits came forward and went to Chester the following Monday. Similar meetings were held all over Wirral that week, including in Heswall on the following day when Captain Field managed to keep the audience 'in a high pitch of excitement for an hour' and fifty recruits came forward.<sup>334</sup>

The BA of 15 September described meetings during the preceding week at Bromborough which yielded thirty recruits and at Little Sutton which attracted a crowd of 7000 and yielded fifty recruits after a Mr A.S. Collard told them that 'This was the biggest war with the heaviest casualties ever known.'<sup>335</sup> Soon after, fourteen Willaston men came forward to add to the eighteen who had already left. It was estimated that some 200 men per day were enlisting in Birkenhead. Prior to the war the annual average recruitment for the army in Birkenhead had been just fifty men. On 12 September the BA summed the situation up: 'Once the sergeants would have had to search out the recruits; now it is the recruits who are searching out the sergeants.'<sup>336</sup>

There is no doubt that meetings like those which are described above were common throughout Britain. The Reverend Andrew Clark recorded just such an

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<sup>333</sup> BN 5/9/1914. Many of the audience had probably been indoctrinated with this sentiment by the local and national press, especially the *Daily Mail*, L. Reinermann, 'Fleet Street and the Kaiser'.

<sup>334</sup> BN 5/9/1914.

<sup>335</sup> Alfred Stephen Collard J.P., *Elmwood*, Hooton, Shipowner (1865-1941).

<sup>336</sup> BA 12/9/1914.

event on 2 September 1914 in Great Leighs in Essex when a group of dignitaries, including members of the local gentry and military establishment occupied the platform and gave patriotic speeches in which they eulogised manliness and delineated the boundaries of loyalty and hostility. The Chairman said:

One cause stands out before all others, and can be expressed in four words: Germany meant to fight. We were bound to our neighbours, the little kingdom of Belgium and the great French Republic. I do want to say to the fathers and mothers of these two parishes – do not stand in the way of your son's going to fight for the country.<sup>337</sup>

Other social gatherings were opportunities for recruitment, including a football match at Prenton Park, when Alfred Mansfield and Alfred Bigland spoke for thirty minutes and referred to the fine example of Mr and Mrs David Palmer of the *Royal Oak Hotel* in Little Neston who had four sons in the army.<sup>338</sup> There were numerous appeals to local footballers to join up and sometimes complaints were made that they were failing to do so. Rugby players, however, do not seem to have shown any reluctance, as by October, the Birkenhead Park Club had ceased to host any matches due to twenty-five of its playing members (all of whom were mentioned by name) having joined the armed forces. Again, it is evidence that middle-class men were either more willing or more able to join up than working-class men.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> J. Munson, ed., *Echoes of the Great War: The Diary of the Reverend Andrew Clark 1914-1919* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985), p.13.

<sup>338</sup> BA 26/9/1914.

<sup>339</sup> BA 2/9/14 and 10/10/1914. This relates to the class analysis mentioned above, J. Goldthorpe and D. Lockwood, 'Affluence and the British Class Structure', p.133. Also see T. Collins, 'English Rugby Union and the First World War', *The Historical Journal*, 45(4) (December 2002), pp. 797-817, especially: 'Rugby union saw itself as the very embodiment of the late Victorian and Edwardian imperial ideal as practised by the public schools - vigorous, masculine, militaristic, and patriotic. In boys' school stories of the later 1900s, one can see an increasing tendency for the sporting hero to be a 'rugger' player and for the violence inherent in the game to be presented in a cathartic, character-forming way', p.798.

Often, the pre-war clubs, societies and churches became the machinery which delivered the men to the army.<sup>340</sup> The WKN made several references to recent recruits from the swimming club – Tom Shakeshaft, Bob Hallows, Harry Booth and Tom Rainford. Concerning the latter, it said, ‘If he learns to pilot a bullet with the same unerring accuracy as he does a football, well, there will be trouble in some quarter.’ Lists of church members appeared in other newspapers. For example, the thirty members of Rock Ferry and seventeen members of Oxton Road Congregationalist Churches who were serving by October 1914.<sup>341</sup>

Youth organisations and schools played a similar role. Many people commented on the importance of the Church Lads Brigade in inculcating a patriotic spirit and military discipline. The BA of 30 September 1914 quoted Joe Hallows (brother to the above Bob) who said that his training with the Church Lads had helped him quickly to settle into army life. The newspaper also reported that the Bebington branch had supplied some 100 members for the armed forces. The LE of 10 October contained a similar article which said that the organisation did not ‘aim at militarism’ but that many of the former church lads had already been promoted. Thomas Brown, during his 1987 interview, was audibly enthusiastic about the organisation when he said:

The Church Lads Brigade Oh! We had a man in charge at Bebington. He never got married, devoted to boys and the welfare of boys. We had our

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<sup>340</sup> Nick Mansfield makes the same point about East Anglia in ‘Volunteers’, p.21.

<sup>341</sup> WKN 29/8/1914; BA 10/10/1914, 21/10/1914; H. McCartney *Citizen Soldiers*, p. 6; see K. Grieves, ‘Lowther’s Lambs’, p.64 for a discussion of football and recruiting in Sussex and T. Mason, *Association Football and English Society 1863 -1915* (Brighton: Branch Line, 1980).

own brass band; we had camp every year. It was very useful for military drill and training.<sup>342</sup>

The Boys' Brigade fulfilled a similar function. By the end of August 1914, twenty of the boys who had belonged to the Neston branch under Captain Coventry were serving in the army.<sup>343</sup>

Schools were not direct recruiting grounds for soldiers, but they created peer pressure by sending details of their old boys who were training or serving with the forces to the newspapers. For example, in November 1914, Birkenhead Higher Elementary School, which had been founded in 1905, was aware of there being 117 of its old boys in the forces. It was a largely working-class school, so there were only four boys with the Liverpool Scottish, but twenty-seven with the 1/4/CR, fourteen each with the Liverpool Pals, ASC, DH and KLR. Nine old boys were with the RN and seven with the RNB. Curiously, there was only one young man with 13/CR or 'Wirral Pals.' Others were distributed amongst a range of infantry and specialist units such as the RFA, RGA and RE. Two former masters were NCOs with the Liverpool Pals.<sup>344</sup>

The means of supplying recruits were a lot more efficient than the system for receiving and processing them. Huge numbers of volunteers were desperate to sign up. On Monday 9 September there was a recruiting meeting at the Birkenhead Haymarket. Just after Major Strachan told the recruits to go to 76 Market Street on the following Monday, someone shouted:

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<sup>342</sup> Thomas Hirst Brown, IWM Sound Recording 10081.

<sup>343</sup> CC 29/8/14. See J. Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).

<sup>344</sup> BA 26/9/1914, 21/11/1914, 23/12/1914.

‘The place is too small (Hear Hear). We are kept hours waiting (Shame).’ Major Strachan replied, ‘We opened another recruiting station at the Labour Bureau in Argyle Street.’ A man replied, ‘It won’t do. In Liverpool they have opened the Town Hall.’<sup>345</sup>

Others were disappointed to be told that that they were too old to join up.

An indication of just how keen some local men were to join up appears in the service records of Harry G.W. Mears (1896-1922), an apprentice cotton broker from Hoylake: when claiming a disability pension after the war, he reported that he had tried to join the army on five separate occasions, but had been turned down because he had mild valvular heart disease. He had developed the condition whilst attending St. Oswald’s College, a boarding school in Ellesmere, Shopshire, in 1912. He was eventually accepted in 1917 with a fitness rating of Biii and served with the ASC at home. His military service led to his premature death at the age of twenty-six. Harry exemplifies the privately educated middle-class Merseysider whose education had predisposed him to military service and whose occupation probably enabled financial security in the manner discussed above.<sup>346</sup>

Clearly, there was a huge desire amongst the male population to join the armed forces. Some of the reasons for this will be discussed below, but the role of the upper middle-class, and the political and social elite who were discussed in Chapter One should be mentioned. Not only were they the charismatic public recruiters who created the military formations which were necessary for the

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<sup>345</sup> BA 9/9/1914.

<sup>346</sup> Harry G.W. Mears, TNA British Army Service Records WO363. See his full biography in *An Imperishable Record*: <https://grangehill1922.wordpress.com/2020/11/28/harry-geoffrey-wayte-mears-1896-1922/>. J. Goldthorpe and D. Lockwood, ‘Affluence and the British Class Structure’, p.133.

processing and training of the thousands of new citizen soldiers, but they were also responsible for oiling the wheels of the recruiting machine and for providing incentives to families to let their menfolk go. The picture corresponds with Edward Bujack's observation that recruitment proceeded with the 'peculiarly British twist of local leadership and encouragement, rather than official compulsion.'<sup>347</sup>

It has been shown how many local worthies appeared on recruiting platforms and made appeals; others were less vocal and offered tangible rewards. For example, at the end of August, five anonymous 'gentlemen' in West Kirby offered five shillings per week to the families of the first five men to volunteer. The collective value of the donations was twelve pounds per year.<sup>348</sup> Following the recruitment of thirty men in Bromborough in the middle of August, some 'local worthies' provided the men with 'necessities'.<sup>349</sup> When fifty Heswall men came forward during the same week, a Mr C. G. Churton transported their luggage in his car. During the previous week, a Mr W.H. Jones of Heswall gave every recruit a meat pie.<sup>350</sup>

The above discussion hints at the reasons why so many men wanted to join up during the last quarter of 1914: top-down pressure from the upper middle-class elite, the power of oratory and spectacle and the widespread belief that Britain was being threatened by Germany and that self-sacrifice was needed. Such feelings motivated someone like James Cresswell, a deserter from HMS *Kent* who had been missing since 1911 but who suddenly turned up at Birkenhead Police Station in August 1914, to say that 'he wanted to fight for his country.'<sup>351</sup> Other motivations

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<sup>347</sup> E. Bujack, *English Landed Society in the Great War*, Amazon Kindle e-book, Loc. 658.

<sup>348</sup> BA 2/9/1914.

<sup>349</sup> BA 15/9/1914.

<sup>350</sup> Claud Geoffrey Churton of *Gaytonhurst*, Heswall, Merchant (1880-1936); William H. Jones *Brackenhurst*, Thurstaston Road, Heswall.

<sup>351</sup> BA 18/8/1914.

included probable peer pressure and shame. The BA, for example, reported that 'all the clerks' employed at Levers' had joined the Liverpool Pals except one, who was rewarded with 'gifts of petticoats, blouses etc.'<sup>352</sup> The latter is an example of the phenomenon described by Lois Bibbings, in which pacifist men were subject to cruel 'gender-based punishment and character assassination'.<sup>353</sup>

Due to the paucity of records from the recruits themselves, it is difficult to gain a clearer idea of what drove them in 1914. However, there are testimonies from eight Wirral people held by the IWM and LC, as well as Norman Ellison's memoirs.<sup>354</sup> Ernest Haire revealed his eagerness to join up when he confessed that when he heard the news he was on holiday in Deganwy and immediately 'cycled back to Birkenhead without getting off the bike – about fifty-five miles.'<sup>355</sup>

John Mallalieu was in France on a school exchange visit. He received a message from his schoolmaster saying 'Return at once. On foot if necessary'. He cycled to Le Havre and took a train to Liverpool, arriving home on 8 August before joining the Liverpool OTC.<sup>356</sup>

There is some consensus about why they joined up – the desire to be involved and 'to do something' was strong. William Tobey, old boy of Birkenhead School, confessed to having been influenced by his Liberal anti-war headmaster, Frederick Griffin (1867-1950), and said, 'I had this view about doubting the propaganda

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<sup>352</sup> BA 15/8/1914.

<sup>353</sup> A Carden-Coyne, 'Masculinity and the Wounds of the First World War: A Centenary Reflection', *French Journal of British Studies*, 20(1) (2015), pp. 1-8 (p.3) and L. Bibbings, 'Images of Manliness: The Portrayal of Soldiers and Conscientious Objectors in the Great War', *Social and Legal Studies* 12(3) (2003), pp. 335-358.

<sup>354</sup> D. Lewis, *Remembrances of Hell*.

<sup>355</sup> E. Haire IWM Sound Recording 24542 and LC Liddle/WW1/Gall/041.

<sup>356</sup> J.R. Mallalieu, IWM Sound Recording 9417.

against the Germans, but at the same time I thought that the war had to be fought and had to be won.<sup>357</sup> Charles Tomlinson of Hoylake said he had:

[...] decided that we had better do something. We felt we ought to do something about it because Kitchener hadn't started. They were all calling for volunteers for this. We felt we've got to do something about it. We were upset because the Germans were getting the better of France.<sup>358</sup>

In contrast, John Mallalieu was sceptical. When asked why he joined up, he said:

Most young people were sort of a bit thrilled with the idea of getting in the army. It wasn't through any particular vast surge of patriotism. The people who tried to get out of enlisting and hung back for quite a long time. I think they were probably very brave to do it in the face of more or less public opinion. You know, Kitchener's posters: 'Your King and Country Need You' and all that sort of thing. But a lot of people would have liked the idea of not joining.<sup>359</sup>

His views on the youthful desire for adventure were corroborated by Norman Ellison, who said:

It was certainly not 'to guarantee the integrity of Belgium' or other patriotic motives which impelled me on 10 August 1914 to go to the barracks of Liverpool's crack Territorial regiment, the Liverpool Rifles, to enlist. Rather do I think it was the chance of adventure, of getting out of a rut.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> W.B. Tobey, IWM Sound Recording 567.

<sup>358</sup> C.O. Tomlinson IWM Sound Recording 28056.

<sup>359</sup> R. Mallalieu IWM Sound Recording 9417.

<sup>360</sup> D. Lewis, *Remembrances of Hell*, p.22.



and by Thomas Brown who admitted that ‘we were always out for a lark: it would be a bit of a change from everyday life.’ William Tobey said that the army offered him: ‘an escape clause from the unpleasantness of family life with (his father).’ Charles Tomlinson admitted that there was also an economic motive for his enlistment: he had been working as an apprentice in his father’s timber firm, but ‘businesses were closing and we had to do something. The timber trade declined.’<sup>361</sup>

Thomas Brown, the future Liverpool Pal, employed by Lever Bros. said, “We all thought it was going to be over by Christmas [...] They were so keen to join. There was a wonderful spirit.”<sup>362</sup> This is the only instance of anybody in any known source from Wirral using the famous phrase ‘over by Christmas’. In fact, it is actually contradicted by several other sources, especially by William Tobey who confessed to having lost any sense of time and that it would be ‘tempting providence to plan one’s life very far ahead as far as trying to get to university or anything like that. I couldn’t bring myself to count on the future’ and Charles Tomlinson who said that, ‘We didn’t really know how long the war would be.’<sup>363</sup>

In addition, the newspapers contain several pronouncements which contradict Thomas Brown’s memory, a good example being the account in the LDP of 17 November 1914 of a recruiting meeting in Liscard in which A. J. Ashton had explained how any young man joining the army at that point could not expect to be at the front until the following summer and if they delayed joining up, they would not be fighting until the following winter. Surely any recruit, especially the many

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<sup>361</sup> C.O. Tomlinson, IWM Sound Recording 28056.

<sup>362</sup> T.H. Brown, IWM Sound Recording 10081.

<sup>363</sup> C. O. Tomlinson, IWM Sound Recording 28056. G.J. Bryant asserts that the Bolton press tried ‘to educate the townspeople that it was going to be a long bloody war’ in ‘Bolton and the Outbreak of the First World War’, p.195.

well-educated young men who joined the New Armies, must have been aware that no new soldier could expect to be in action until he had been trained, a process which could take anything between nine months and two years to complete. Perhaps Thomas Brown's memory of the phrase was a result of having retrospectively absorbed the British myth of 'over by Christmas' which had flourished in popular culture during the fifty or more years before he gave his account.<sup>364</sup> The myth of 'over by Christmas' is perhaps a minor point, but it is not trivial because of what it tells us about contemporary beliefs and attitudes – people knew that they would have to make sacrifices and to be committed to a protracted conflict; they did not take the prospect of war lightly.<sup>365</sup>

Recent scholarship corroborates the picture painted by the Wirral sources, in revealing how it is virtually impossible to generalise about the reasons why so many men joined the army in the autumn of 1914. In the words of De Groot, 'The rush to the colours was not one monolithic mass, but rather some two million separate individuals, each with a different set of reasons for volunteering.'<sup>366</sup>

It is difficult to be precise about how many people, when and where in Wirral joined the armed forces in 1914. The local newspapers tell many colourful stories and thereby provide us with some useful facts, but they do not supply an overall,

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<sup>364</sup> G. Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p.3 for a similar example: Dyer's grandfather claimed to have been told that he was too young to enlist in 1914 and was advised by the recruiting sergeant to come back in a couple of days when he was nineteen. Dyer's research discovered that the story was false – his grandfather was twenty when he enlisted, but his memory appeared to have been moulded by subsequent popular myths: 'One of the commonly circulating stories of the 1914 generation had been so thoroughly absorbed by my family that it had become part of my grandfather's biography'. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson discuss the importance of oral myths in their introduction to *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.1-22.

<sup>365</sup> Even the famous myth destroyer John Terraine said, 'Christmas came, the first Christmas of the war which was to be "over by Christmas"' in T.C. Barker, *The Long March of Everyman*, p.181.

<sup>366</sup> G. De Groot, *Blighty* p. 46. M. Jones, 'War and National Identity' in F. Carnevali and A. M. Strange, eds. *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 79-94 (p.80).

dispassionate, statistical survey, mainly because it was not their role to do so.<sup>367</sup> Their primary motivation was profit, for which lively and personal narratives were necessary before people would buy the product on offer. Another motivation was patriotism – a desire to help the government’s recruitment campaign; in this regard, the newspapers were organs of propaganda. Often the numbers they did publish were designed to trigger responses, such as shame or pride, rather than simply to record facts. However, with these reservations in mind, insights can still be gained into recruiting during 1914 and early 1915.

Firstly, it seems that recruiting went well in Wirral. It is likely that if it had not, the newspapers would have said so in order to shame people into filling the gap, but this does not appear to have been necessary. Most remarks on the subject were congratulatory. The BA typifies this: on 5 August it said that Hoylake had yielded forty-three recruits and on 9 August it reported that 600 Birkonians had already joined up and that seventy-one Nestonians were already with the colours. On 15 August it announced that there had been ‘a rush to the colours’ in Ellesmere Port, as ninety-five local men had left the district by train to Chester on the previous Thursday. The same edition said that Higher Bebington, was ‘to be congratulated on the patriotic spirit the villagers have shown’ by giving up forty-seven of its residents to active service, including seven members of Christ Church Choir. All the clerks, except one, from Levers’ works had joined the Liverpool Pals and the 13/CR (Wirral Pals) had reached capacity with 1300 members. A second battalion was proposed. Heswall had provided 120 servicemen out of a population of 2000, prompting Gershom Stewart to praise ‘Heswall’s martial spirit.’ Bromborough had

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<sup>367</sup> *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1920), pp. 363-395, analyses recruitment on a national scale, but not by regions or localities.

produced thirty recruits. On 29 August it said that an additional thirteen men each from Great and Little Sutton had joined up.

In October 1914, under the headline 'Bravo Deeside', the WKN said:

Hoylake and West Kirby's contribution to the defence of the Empire is now rapidly approaching the 600 mark. When it is considered that the district is anything but an industrial centre, this must be regarded as magnificent.

From many quarters we also hear commanding officers paying tribute to the physique and general appearance of the men. In the main they are just the sort of lads who will materially improve a military uniform and cultured enough to do their King and Country credit.<sup>368</sup>

There were some complaints about Wallasey's contribution. The LDP of 17 November said that it had not produced enough men, but the assertion was contradicted by the military doctor who claimed that at least 1200 men had 'passed through his hands'. The same paper of 4 December contained the nearest to an objective statistical analysis of the town's contribution. It was made by Alderman Sidney Dawson at a recruiting meeting. His calculations were based on the 1911 census. Apparently, Wallasey contained a higher proportion of females than was the national average, but, even so, out of the 6000 eligible and fit males of military age, only half had joined up. The Corporation had 1360 employees of whom 500 were eligible for enlistment but only 333 had so far signed on, including four policemen, two tramways men and a ferryman. The following day's edition concluded that Wallasey had 'done well, but not as well as other places.' No reasons for this were suggested. The comment might result from the recruiters'

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<sup>368</sup> WKN 3/10/1914.

perennial state of dissatisfaction or perhaps it was due to the anti-war and progressive sentiments of some of its churches, such as those which were mentioned above and were hinted at in accounts of the women's rights and anti-militarism campaigners who were mentioned in the previous chapter, which made some people unwilling to enlist.

The BA of 15 September hinted at a possible disparity between town and countryside when it said, 'Burton has at last aroused itself from a state of apathy and produced twelve recruits.' Perhaps the recruits were farm labourers who had been involved with the harvest and consequently unable to leave home earlier. However, other agricultural districts seem to have experienced no such delays. The same paper for 29 August said that Puddington had produced five recruits; it was: 'a little place indeed [which had] responded nobly; the country is no whit behind the town.' Indeed, most of Heswall's earliest recruits were agricultural labourers. Rural Moreton was praised for its early and generous responses. By January 1915, it had no more eligible men left and so no further recruiting meetings were either possible or necessary.<sup>369</sup> Unfortunately, there is little meaningful information about recruiting at the Chester end of Wirral. Simon Hancock showed that the town versus countryside recruiting dichotomy was very pronounced in Pembrokeshire:

Although the county had responded fairly well, with the towns generally being more receptive than rural areas to the volunteering campaign [...] Apathy was the prevailing emotion in some parts of west Wales with few

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<sup>369</sup> BA 9/1/1915.

public meetings or responsible committees. In such matters the urban seemed always to chide the countryside.<sup>370</sup>

In this respect, the rural principality of Wales, which lacked a comprehensive transport network, was less likely to yield recruits from agricultural districts than was Wirral. In addition, Wales's Nonconformist religious tradition and perhaps even the inability of a great many Welsh people to understand the English Language erected further barriers against enlistment in the armed forces.

For specific reasons, Ellesmere Port probably surrendered a higher proportion of its male population to the armed forces than any other Wirral town. As discussed in the previous chapter, its main source of employment was the two ironworks. Following the commencement of war, their supplies of iron ore from Belgium and Germany ceased and production stopped. Workers experienced great hardship which was partly alleviated by their employers, who provided children's breakfasts and soup kitchens and allowed tenants to keep their houses rent-free. It is not surprising that, at the end of September 1914, about 1000 men from Ellesmere Port had 'rushed to the colours' in one week.<sup>371</sup>

The WSS enables more precise statistical judgements about recruiting patterns in Wirral. Full dates of attestation do not exist for 169 of the 2000 soldiers in the sample, so the following calculations are based on the 1831 men (91.6 % of the total) whose dates of joining up are known.<sup>372</sup> Two hundred and ninety-nine men

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<sup>370</sup> S. Hancock, *The Social Impact of the Great War in Pembrokeshire*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, (Cardiff University, 2015), p.169.

<sup>371</sup> BA 26/9/1914. J. Winter, 'Army and Society: The Demographic Context' in I.F.W. Beckett and K. Simpson, eds., *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 1985), pp.194-209, (p.197).

<sup>372</sup> In most cases where dates are unknown they have been expunged by fire or water damage resulting from the 1940 London Blitz.

from the WSS joined up between 4 August and 31 December 1914. Remarkably, 192 (64.2%) of these men joined up in August and September. The first day to see WSS members joining up was 5 August. Between then and 30 August, the average daily rate of recruitment of men from the WSS was about three. On 31 August, however, it went up to twenty-seven and the numbers for the ensuing seven days were twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty, twelve, fourteen, three and seven. These figures are striking because they corroborate the point made above that the creation of the new units (especially the Wirral Pals on 31 August) enabled a great many Wirral men to join up during a relatively short period and show that, even though, in common with the rest of the country, the best recruiting month in Wirral was September, the best single day in 1914 was the last one of August. Within the WSS, these rates were never exceeded, except during December 1915 when 351 members of the WSS joined up (fifty-eight of them on 10 December). The latter was probably in consequence of the newly introduced Derby Scheme, which required eligible men to sign up for probable later active service.<sup>373</sup>

In summary, taking into account the impressions made by newspaper reports and analysis of the WSS, recruiting in Wirral began well. A high proportion, if not the majority, of recruits in the period 1914 to early 1915 (typified by rural Moreton which had no more eligible men left by early 1915 and by the WSS which reveals a surge at the end of August and beginning of September) seem to have joined up early on. This slightly contradicts the national picture described by historians such as De Groot and Pennell, who argue that the most successful month was September and the best week that of the fifth of that month.<sup>374</sup> In fact, for soldiers from the WSS, as shown above, the best week in September was the previous

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<sup>373</sup> I.F.W. Beckett and K. Simpson, *A Nation at Arms*, p. 12.

<sup>374</sup> G. De Groot, *Blighty* p.54; C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p.144.

one, beginning on the first. The reasons for this can be found in the nature of Wirral's geography and society as discussed in the previous chapter: its railway network was highly developed, allowing quick access to one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Britain. Due to this propinquity, even tiny rural villages such as Moreton and Puddington, which one might expect not to know about the wider world and therefore to be slow in yielding recruits, were imbued with an eagerness to get involved which was cultivated by the newspapers and contact with city workers. These conditions did not prevail in the more rural parts of the United Kingdom, especially in Wales.<sup>375</sup>

The organisations and attitudes which had flourished in pre-war Wirral enabled mass military recruitment. Local figureheads were important in the process, not only in attracting and supporting the new recruits but also in enabling them to settle into military life. There were many motivations for joining up including the youthful desire for adventure, but people were also clear about the need for a war and that it would probably last a long time. This was going to require commitment, resolve and self-sacrifice. The authorities were satisfied with recruitment in Wirral, although Wallasey seems to have lagged behind the other towns. The countryside provided recruits as quickly and as enthusiastically as did the urban areas. Military recruitment in 1914 was a dramatic and singular phenomenon, but not one which is surprising in the light of Wirral's unique geography and society. In this respect the events of late 1914 represent continuity with the pre-war world and although there are obvious similarities with national trends, Wirral responded to the Great War in its own way.

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<sup>375</sup> For further discussion of recruitment in rural areas see P. Horne, *Rural Life in England*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1984), pp.72-92 and N. Mansfield, *Workers English Farm Workers and Local Patriotism 1900-1930* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2001).



## **2.6 Welfare and Civilian Voluntary Service**

Based on the amount of space devoted to it in the local press, the second most important topic to exercise people's minds and energies during 1914 was the welfare of the people during a time of expected social and economic disruption. Far from complacently assuming that it would be an easy war which would be over by Christmas, local civic leaders and people with authority and/or responsibility began to plan for a protracted struggle which would require special provision for the weak and the vulnerable. The nascent local welfare state which was discussed in Chapter One became more necessary than ever and appears to have functioned quickly and effectively from an early date. Michael Reeve, in talking about Hull, described this phenomenon as 'civic mobilisation' and said that 'national policies were adopted by local elites'.<sup>376</sup> G.J. Bryant commented on the same phenomenon in Bolton, where the 'evident distress in the town galvanised the middle classes into efforts to relieve it.'<sup>377</sup>

Straight after the declaration of war, the Prince's Relief Fund was created by Edward Prince of Wales.<sup>378</sup> He appealed to every local authority in Britain to make contributions; his message was probably read out at every council meeting in Wirral during that week, but certainly at Birkenhead, where the council made an immediate £300 donation to the fund. A few days later Birkenhead Corporation created its own relief fund. Officials donated £500, the Mayor £100 and four anonymous people £100 each; following Councillor Bickersteth's £90 donation, the total sum came to £1050. The BA said that this was evidence of 'the patriotic spirit

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<sup>376</sup> M. Reeve, "The Darkest Town in England", pp.54-55.

<sup>377</sup> G.J. Bryant, 'Bolton and the Outbreak of the First World War', p.192.

<sup>378</sup> J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1986), p.242.

of the townsfolk'. Wallasey Corporation made similar arrangements and decided that the efforts of all their local relief organisations would be managed via the existing distress committee with Sir James Gildea as chairman. Alderman Farley then insisted that funds became available straight away so that nobody would need to beg for help.<sup>379</sup>

A few days later a committee of seventy 'prominent ladies and gentlemen' from Birkenhead, under the auspices of the Chamber of Commerce, was created to co-ordinate welfare. It contained representatives from the Borough Council, the Board of Guardians, the Birkenhead TLC, the churches, the Red Cross, the SSFA, The Charity Organisation Society, The Birkenhead Distress and Insurance Committees, The Birkenhead Medical Society, the trades unions, the Co-operative Guild and local firms. Of the fifty-seven people at the meeting of 10 September, sixteen were women, of whom seven were called 'Miss', which hints at there being more opportunities for women than is often envisaged. Women had not been enfranchised but, just as had been the case before the war, they were playing an increasingly important role in local government and within the voluntary, welfare and charitable services. Indeed, of the fifty-nine people nominated to collect West Kirby's War Relief Fund, forty-two were women and Mrs Julia Torr of *Carlett Park* was head of the Wirral branch of the SSFA. To emphasise the point, local branches of the NUWSS 'suspended their normal political work' and dedicated their 'entire organisation for the help of those who [were] sufferers as a result of industrial dislocation caused by the war.'<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> BA 12/8/1914, WN 12/8/1914 and 26/8/1914.

<sup>380</sup> BN 15/8/14, 22/8/14 and 12/9/14, WKN 3/10/1914.

It is probable that relief committees staffed by members of local elites were convened in most British regions. It was certainly the case in Kendal where the local newspapers devoted as much, if not more space, to describing welfare provision as they did to military mobilisation and recruitment. For example, the *Westmorland Gazette* published a large article entitled 'Westmorland Organised for Relief', which said:

Probably a more representative county gathering has never been assembled than that which met in the Kendal Town Hall on Wednesday afternoon to discuss the question of relief of those in Westmorland who are likely to suffer that distress inevitable in the present situation.<sup>381</sup>

It then listed the 180 attendees by name, starting with the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Hothfield, and the Earl of Lonsdale, and finishing with Miss Collinson and Mr Wright of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade. As mentioned above, Westmorland was a more traditional, rural district than Wirral; its ancient aristocracy was still present, whereas Wirral's had gone, but both places (probably along with every other district in the country) benefitted from the creation of such relief committees by their local elites, whether the latter were aristocrats, landed gentry or upper middle-class businesspeople. It is an example of how the pre-war paternalistic hierarchy and its associated institutions was capable of dealing with the challenges of total war and as such, it is evidence for continuity between the pre-war and wartime worlds.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> *Westmorland Gazette* 22/8/1914.

<sup>382</sup> Kate Adie summed it up in *Fighting on the Home Front: The Legacy of Women in World War One* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2013), pp.25-42.

There is evidence for relief committees being formed by every Wirral local authority, but they did not all receive the same quantity of appeals for help. At the end of August, it was reported that the Neston Distress Committee had not received many more requests than would normally have been the case. Birkenhead, however, contained many needy people, most of whom were women whose husbands were on active service. The BA published a poignant description of the scene outside the SSFA offices on Argyle Street:

Careful enquiries among the recipients failed to discover that there are any Birkenhead men among the war's victims at the front, but there is a widespread belief that the Cheshires have been badly cut up, and many pale, tear-stained faces were to be seen among the women who came for their relief.<sup>383</sup>

As stated above, Ellesmere Port suffered more than anywhere else in Wirral. Later in August 1914, the BA said that there were 'reasons to believe that the town [was] experiencing the blackest period in its history.' Nine-hundred married ironworkers with families were unemployed. There had been 200 applications for relief over the previous two days. A thousand homes were left with hardly any income and 3000 men were 'walking about'. Seven hundred people were being fed at the voluntary soup kitchens and 6000 children were receiving cheap meals at a price of a halfpenny a head.<sup>384</sup> Revealingly, however, during one public meeting at Ellesmere Port, E. Peter Jones of the Mersey Iron Works made the astonishing claim that: 'he was glad that Britain had taken part in the war' and that he 'would rather be ruined ten times over than allow Germany to despoil the gallant Belgian

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<sup>383</sup> BA 5/9/1914.

<sup>384</sup> BA 19, 22 and 29/8/1914.

nation (Applause)', which, although his belief might not have been shared by his workers, is further evidence of the widespread preparedness to make sacrifices for the national cause.<sup>385</sup>

Allied to the enthusiasm for the provision of economic and social welfare was the effort to provide medical aid for the expected war casualties. Again, the thoroughness and efficiency of the provision contradicts the notion that people felt that it would be a short and easy war and is further evidence of people's determination to be involved and to play their part. Straight after the declaration of war, meetings were held all over Wirral in order to raise teams of volunteers who would provide medical care, first aid and materials necessary for caring for the wounded. The BA of 8 August published an appeal by the Birkenhead Red Cross Society for volunteers, clothes and accommodation and a description of the departure of the eighteen members of Port Sunlight's St. John's Ambulance Brigade which was waved off by Sir W.H. Lever who said, 'you have volunteered in the right spirit.' The next edition reported the donation by the trustees of William Laird of 63 Hamilton Square to the Red Cross.<sup>386</sup>

A week later, a meeting was held in Rock Ferry, led by the Reverend Mason-Pooley and his wife, who gave their home to be used as a depot. They also raised £8 0s. 10d., recruited 500 members and started making 500 garments. The Neston group, led by Mrs Pemberton, was convened at the town hall. Heswall's branch was almost completely run by women – Charles Maclver in the chair, Mrs Pemberton, Miss Hooper and Mrs Stone, assisted by Mr H.M. Jones and Canon May. By the end of August, it had fitted out an ambulance and collected 5750

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<sup>385</sup> BA 29/8/1914.

<sup>386</sup> BA 8 and 11/8/1914.

items. The Deeside branch enrolled 400 women volunteers and appealed for more men. In Great Saughall, Thomas Gibbons Frost supported the local first aid volunteers by giving them tea at Mollington Hall. Every town and village held regular Red Cross Flag Days to raise funds and various fundraising concerts were held throughout the peninsula, including one at Hoylake Town Hall.<sup>387</sup>

In addition, various buildings were converted into hospitals, such that by June 1915, there were at least eight Red Cross hospitals in Wirral at *Arrowe Hall*, Bromborough Golf Club, the *Roydens* in Bromborough, Birkenhead Borough, Heswall, Liscard, Parkgate and Tranmere. There were other provisions at *Oatlands* in West Kirby, *Oaklands* at Bromborough, *Palm Grove* in Birkenhead, a small unit for soldiers hurt in accidents at a former shop belonging to a Mr Thekston and a ward for sick soldiers at Penkett Road, both in Wallasey. All of these properties and all of the equipment were either donated by wealthy locals or funded by voluntary giving. It is further evidence of many Wirral people's commitment to every aspect of the war effort.<sup>388</sup>

Many people believed that the invasion of Belgium was sufficient reason for war and felt sympathetic towards Belgian refugees. The charitable and voluntary efforts to assist them occupied a good deal of space in the local newspapers. The Lady Mayoress of Birkenhead, Mrs Arkle, created a Belgian relief fund. By the beginning of October 1914, it had received over £1000 in donations and at that time the first fifty-two refugees arrived in Birkenhead. They were accommodated at

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<sup>387</sup> BA 8,12,15, 22 and 29/8/1914, CC 12/9/1914, 23/10/1914, WKN 12/9/1914.

<sup>388</sup> BA 23/6/1915, WN 3/219/1915. See C. Coles, 'The End of Isolation: The Cheshire County Lunatic Asylum During World War One', *Cheshire History* 41 (2001-2002), pp. 93-103 and 'Supporting the Medical War Effort: Chester's War Hospitals', *Cheshire History* 42 (2002-2003), pp.117-113 for discussion of the role of hospitals at Wirral's southern end, in the Chester City Council area.

*The Towers* in Higher Tranmere. Several more were housed in ‘a big house’ belonging to a Mr Elgood on Tower Road in Heswall. Nine refugees were accommodated in Parkgate and entertained by Mrs H.N. Gladstone at *Burton Manor*. At the end of October, five Belgian families were given rooms in boarding houses in West Kirby. Thirteen female refugees arrived in Wallasey. Others lived in New Brighton.<sup>389</sup>

Sir W.H. Lever moved his art treasures out of *Hulme Hall* at Port Sunlight, in his words, to make room for ‘more valuable treasures in the human lives saved from the terrors of the fire and sword of the enemy.’ By the third week of October 1914, 111 Belgian refugees were living in the building, but they were only allowed to stay for five weeks because Liverpool and Birkenhead were designated restricted areas for aliens, wherever they came from in the world.<sup>390</sup> This act of generosity by a wealthy local industrialist towards Belgian refugees is typical of what happened throughout Britain: Hannah Ewence, for example, described the role of the chemicals magnate, Sir John Brunner, in looking after Belgian refugees in central Cheshire.<sup>391</sup> The generous treatment of the Belgians compares with the persecution of the Germans, which happened at the same time and speaks of the way in which Wirral people had decided who was good and who was bad, who was to be protected and who was to be destroyed. Again, the same phenomenon can be seen in other parts of Britain. In the words of Hannah Ewence:

This conceptualisation of Germany as a ‘brute’ who had ‘raped’ and pillaged ‘brave little Belgium’ was a central component of nationwide wartime

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<sup>389</sup> BA 2, 10, 17 and 21/10/1914, WKN 24/10/1914, 7/11/1914, 17/7/1915, LDP 20/10/1914, WN 3/10/1914.

<sup>390</sup> BNVS p.84.

<sup>391</sup> H. Ewence, ‘Belgian Refugees in Cheshire: “Place” and the Invisibility of the Displaced’, *Immigrants And Minorities*, 36(3) (2018), pp.232-257 (p.238).

propaganda, playing an especially important role in generating support for the granting of asylum to Belgians in the early stages of the war. At county level, however, a perception of a commonality of Christian ethics was a particular feature of Cheshire's response to the refugees, further helping to cement the position of Belgians in the county as innocent 'victims' of German belligerence, and, therefore, 'deserving' recipients of philanthropic activity.<sup>392</sup>

This section has shown that the demarcation lines between friend and foe were drawn through local society, once again illustrating Wirral people's desire to be involved and to be seen to be involved in the nation's struggle, while studies of other parts of the UK imply that this was typical of what happened throughout the nation.

## **2.7 Is There a Local Great War Myth?**

Within an approximate forty-mile radius of Birkenhead there are two towns in Lancashire with powerful myths about their involvement in the Great War – Bury and Accrington. That of Bury is associated with the motto 'Six VCs Before Breakfast' and concerns the sacrifices made by the Lancashire Fusiliers at Gallipoli in 1915 and that of Accrington surrounds the doings of 11/East Lancashire Regiment (Accrington Pals) on 1 July 1916 near Serre on the

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid., pp. 237-238. Lorna Hughes makes the same point about the reception of Belgian Refugees in Wales in 'Finding Belgian Refugees in Cymru1914.org: Using Digital Resources for Uncovering the Hidden Histories of the First World War in Wales', *Immigrants And Minorities*, 34(2) (2016), pp. 210-231 (p.213). Also see T. Kushner, 'Local Heroes: Belgian Refugees in Britain during the First World War', *Immigrants And Minorities* 18(1) (2010), pp.1-28 (p.6), C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, pp.135-139 and T. Wilson 'Lord Bryce's Investigation into Alleged German Atrocities in Belgium, 1914-15', *Journal of Contemporary History* 14(3) (1979), pp.369-383 (p.371).



Somme.<sup>393</sup> Not only are the current inhabitants of the two towns aware of the significance of their forebears' involvement in these battles, but the towns' stories have been portrayed in fiction and drama and are known throughout Great Britain and possibly even the English-speaking world.<sup>394</sup> It is necessary to enquire whether Wirral or any of its towns possess similar myths and if not, why and with what implications.

Myths are easily digested interpretations which engender shared understandings of history and heritage. They can help communities to cope with periods of rapid change and trauma.<sup>395</sup> Wirral does not appear to have a local Great War myth comparable to those of the above two towns. Concrete evidence cannot be cited but it is fair to assume that most current local people might have a vague idea about the involvement of the Liverpool Pals in the Battle of the Somme and of Merseyside seamen and civilians in the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915 and the Battle of Jutland the following year, but there is no single date when local people commemorate their ancestors' involvement in one monumental event.<sup>396</sup> Research into the 334 war dead commemorated on the Grange Hill War Memorial has produced results which are representative. Firstly, the two most costly days,

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<sup>393</sup> For historical analysis of the respective units and their associated myths see G. Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations: A Town, Its Myths and Gallipoli* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), W. Turner, *Accrington Pals: The 11<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion (Accrington) East Lancashire Regiment, A History of the Battalion Raised from Accrington, Blackburn, Burnley and Chorley in World War One* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 1992) and A. Jackson, *Accrington Pals The Full Story* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2013)

<sup>394</sup> See John Harris's novel, *Covenant with Death* (London: Hutchinson, 1961) and Peter Whelan's Play *Accrington Pals* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 1982).

<sup>395</sup> See E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), R. Samuel and P. Thompson, eds., *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990) for an interdisciplinary discussion of a selection of myths and the Introduction, pp. 1-22, for a stimulating discussion of the role of myth in human experience and epistemology; also see J. Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire: Myths and Anti-Myths of War 1861-1945* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980) for analysis of military myths.

<sup>396</sup> This judgement is based on the contents of existing texts about Merseyside in the Great War – S. McGreal, *Wirral in the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014), M. Benbough-Jackson, *Merseyside's War* (Stroud: Amberley, 2015) and A. Hogan, *Merseyside at War* (Stroud: Amberley, 2014).

accounting for six soldiers each, were 16 June 1915 and 1 July 1916. The second date is unsurprising due to the Liverpool Pals' attack on Montauban on the Somme, but the first is unexpected. It was the battle of Hooge or Bellewaarde in the Ypres Salient, when the Liverpool Scots charged the German lines, apparently shouting 'remember the Lusy'.

Five hundred and forty-two officers and men went into the attack, but only 142 returned unscathed and a lieutenant had to take command of the battalion.<sup>397</sup> Due to the middle-class and professional backgrounds of the soldiers, the local press was awash with reports and images of the casualties. It is remarkable how the battle is not now commonly remembered, although a party of locals visited Hooge on the battle's centenary and a book has been published to raise funds for a memorial in Belgium.<sup>398</sup>

A possible explanation for the disappearance of the Battle of Bellewaarde from the communal memory is that, despite containing a large number of Wirral men, the regiment was more deeply associated with Liverpool. In addition, as was shown in Chapters One and Two, there was not one monolithic regiment with which Wirral people are associated and there were no garrison towns in Wirral, the nearest being Chester; this further dilutes the possibility of a common focus on one unit during a single action. Finally, the number of casualties at Bellewaarde was low in comparison to later engagements and many more Wirral people were to die as a result of general trench warfare and during the great battles of 1917 and 1918,

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<sup>397</sup> The attack came shortly after the sinking of the *Lusitania* on 7/5/1915 when many Merseysiders were killed, BN 26/6/1915, Liverpool Scottish Museum Website: <http://www.liverpoolscottish.org.uk/index.php?page=hooge> [Accessed 12/9/2017].

<sup>398</sup> LE 8/6/2015 <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/nostalgia/liverpool-scottish-remembers-battle-hooge-9413305> [Accessed 12/9/2017] and C. McEntee-Taylor, *The Battle of Bellewaarde* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014). See *An Imperishable Record* at [Grangehill1922.wordpress.com](http://Grangehill1922.wordpress.com) for detailed biographies of all the local casualties.

which accounted for just over fifty-one percent of Hoylake and West Kirby's war dead.

The next two most costly days for Hoylake and West Kirby were 15 August 1915 when five members of the 1/4/CR died at Gallipoli and 30 August 1916 when five Liverpool Pals died at Guillemont on the Somme. The 13/CR and the 15 and 16/CR (Bantams) suffered badly during the middle stages of the Battle of the Somme, but not during an action on one day which has since become (in)famous.<sup>399</sup> Furthermore, although Birkenhead MP Alfred Bigland is credited with inventing the Bantams Battalions, these units recruited men from all over the United Kingdom, so that a coherent Wirral identity might not have developed within them.<sup>400</sup>

Wirral is dissimilar to Bury and Accrington in that popular perceptions of warfare did not arise from a single battle but from a range of engagements in various parts of the world throughout the war. This fact undergirds the ensuing discussion about the relationship between the home and fighting fronts, as knowledge was exchanged between them without the filter of a single momentous myth and over the entire duration of the war, perhaps leading to a more balanced understanding on either side.

## **2.8 The Home and Fighting Fronts – How Connected were They?**

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<sup>399</sup> See B. Johnson, 'The Thirteenth Cheshires at Vimy Ridge', *Cheshire Historian*, 31 (1993), pp. 25-28.

<sup>400</sup> Details obtained from analysis of the biographies of people recorded on the Grange Hill War Memorial, published on *An Imperishable Record*: [grangehill1922.wordpress.com](http://grangehill1922.wordpress.com) .

In 2017 former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, wrote the following words which express two assumptions about Great War soldiers' communications with civilians,:

[The truth about the loss the First World War brought about] was at the most visible level – the loss of countless young [...] men, whose voices had never counted in the first place [...] even for those who survived, it meant so often the loss of the capacity to talk about it.<sup>401</sup>

This section demonstrates, by analysing primary sources from Wirral, that Williams's assumptions that soldiers' thoughts and memories were both un-listened-to and rarely expressed and that, civilians knew nothing about their experiences are ill-founded. It is important to grasp this point in order better to understand the relationship between the home and fighting fronts and thereby to become aware that people did not support the war out of ignorance. In reality, people knew full well how costly, destructive and distressing the war actually was, but their commitment remained strong, nevertheless. This is further evidence that traditional beliefs enabled people to cope with difficult circumstances.

Wirral sources corroborate Mike Finn's argument concerning the role of Merseyside's newspapers in informing local people about the fighting fronts. He referred to a 'gulf of perception myth' and states that it:

[...] hinges on the belief that the agencies of the overlapping government propaganda and censorship bureaucracy, such as the Press Bureau [...]

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<sup>401</sup> In the Foreword to R., Mann, *Fierce Imaginings: The Great War, Ritual, Memory and God* (London: Darnton, Longman and Todd, 2017), p. xi. The belief is also expressed in a wartime song called 'We'll never tell them', which features at the end of the 1969 film, *Oh what a Lovely War*.

were successful in a corporate attempt to prevent the public knowing the truth about the war.’<sup>402</sup>

Finn argued that the newspapers communicated as much detail about soldiers’ experiences as possible. Part of their motivation for this was commercial – people are always interested in novel and lurid stories and will buy the newspapers which contain them, but more importantly, families at home were hungry for accurate and up-to-date news of their loved ones, which was unavailable through official channels, so the newspapers asked readers to donate letters from and photographs of their military loved ones in order to fill the void left by the lack of official news.

Analysis of Wirral’s newspapers reveals a much more organic relationship between the home and fighting fronts than has hitherto been imagined. By October 1914, they were printing letters from local soldiers describing their experiences in remarkable detail. At this stage in the war, the public were relatively unfamiliar with warfare and, naturally, were keen to know more. A good example is in a letter written by a Corporal Piercy of Birkenhead which appeared in the BN. In it, he referred to blood running off the soldiers ‘like rain’, a phrase which was echoed in other soldiers’ letters.<sup>403</sup> In April 1915, Sergeant J. Roberts of 4/KLR from Birkenhead recounted some recent experiences in France. He described a trench raid and finished with the words:

You can hardly believe the horrors of this campaign. Along the road to the trenches we passed portions of bodies, and the ditches are full of them.

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<sup>402</sup> M. Finn, ‘Local Heroes: War News and the Construction of “Community” in Britain, 1914–18’, *Historical Research*, 83 (2010), pp. 520-538, (p. 520).

<sup>403</sup> BN 4/11/1914.

Bodies of men, French, English, Indians, and Germans. The water in the ditches being crimson.<sup>404</sup>

The BN published a letter from Able Seaman G. Rise of Birkenhead which described similar scenes in Gallipoli:

When we landed the sea was red with blood, and there was dead lying everywhere [...] I [...] went to a stream two hundred yards away [...] I found it red with blood and dead Turks lying one on top of each other.<sup>405</sup>

Following his death on 27 January 1915, the letters of Private George Sherratt from Caldy of 1/KLR were published by the WKN. They describe everything from the humdrum to the bizarre and shocking in a manner which exactly corresponds with what is now known about life and death in the trenches:

I saw about fifty graves beside them covered with flowers and crosses. One of ours was killed by a sniper and we are getting shelled all the time [...] I saw six Germans, one civilian and one of the Connaughts lying unburied; you can just peep over the trench and catch glimpses of the enemy.<sup>406</sup>

On 5 January he was in the yard of 'a big creamery' and complained of the shell fire and snipers who shot 'a fine young fellow ... clean through the head.' He described how the two lines of trenches were only 100 to 150 yards apart and how when he went into a farmhouse to get some wood:

[...] the first thing that met my eyes was a Gurkha, sitting in a chair, all bandaged up, but stone dead [...] As I am writing, seven or eight shells

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<sup>404</sup> BN 3/4/1915.

<sup>405</sup> BN 3/7/1915.

<sup>406</sup> WKN 10/2/1915.

have just missed us. It is pretty hot at present, so I am going to get flat down; so no more at present.<sup>407</sup>

Local newspaper readers, even if they themselves had not been directly affected, could not have failed to be aware of the war's bloody cost. The repeated claim that soldiers had died 'instantly and without any pain' or 'with a smile' on their faces and the numerous patriotic and quasi-religious headlines 'died like a man', 'died like a true Briton', 'died for his king and country' and 'gave up his life for his friends', in consequence of habituation, might have ceased to perform their intended function, but reveal to us the contemporary beliefs and attitudes which were deployed to assuage intense feelings of anxiety and grief.

Partly as a commercial exercise, but based on a bedrock of truth, the newspapers spoke about soldiers' eagerness to receive copies of their respective 'News' or 'Advertiser'. In October 1915, Private Jack Roxby expressed the sentiment: he was grateful for his copy of the EPA and said that it was being passed around 'like hot cakes'. He liked the articles which spoke about him and his brother and was pleased to learn that the latter had been promoted; he finished with the words, 'Tell the editor of the "Advertiser" that the boys are pleased to get hold of his paper.'<sup>408</sup> In November 1915, Private William Smith of Ellesmere Port wrote about the fame he had acquired as a result of having his letters printed in the EPA. He said that he had not known that his missives were going to be published and that if he had, he would have 'written more'. He was a cheery optimist whose accounts were published under the headings 'Scenes in the Dardanelles', 'A Holiday in

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> EPA 6/10/1915.

Turkey' and 'Real Life Pictures', which made him laugh. He said that he was glad that he had written in that way 'instead of growling'.<sup>409</sup>

Not only had the newspapers helped civilians to learn about their military friends and relations and the soldiers to be kept abreast of home news but they had also informed the soldiers about themselves. The circle has been completed: the importance of the local newspaper has been demonstrated and these soldiers' commentaries have confirmed that there was a remarkable reciprocity and interdependence between the home and fighting fronts, which contradicts the 'gulf of perception myth' introduced by Finn and discussed above. Helen McCartney had also exploded the gulf of perception myth in her *Citizen Soldiers* wherein at the end of a chapter entitled 'Links with Home', she summarised the ways in which men of the 1/6 and 1/10 KLR stayed in touch with their families at home:

Through a variety of communication channels [...] the soldiers transmitted images of the war as they saw it, whilst in return civilians sent news from home to the trenches. [...] The interchange of information and views played a vital role in maintaining the morale of the men in the trenches. It provided acknowledgment of the soldiers' sacrifice, promoted mutual understanding of the hardships and difficulties experienced both at home and at the front, and fostered a common perspective on the conflict.<sup>410</sup>

Wirral's well-developed urban infrastructure and transport network, which were discussed in Chapter One, made it a convenient place for receiving casualties.

Existing hospitals reserved large parts if not all of their facilities for sick and

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<sup>409</sup> EPA 3/11/1915.

<sup>410</sup> H.B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.117. Michael Reeve made a similar point with regard to Hull; he called it the 'myth of separation' in "'The Darkest Town in England'", p.52.



wounded servicemen and other public buildings and civilian residences were converted to medical use. George Coppard arrived at Birkenhead Borough Hospital on 29 November 1918 and later reflected, 'It was not a fancy place, but after the turmoil of war it seemed as near to heaven as I was likely to get.' He described being attended to by an Indian doctor and gradually making a recovery until he was able to 'enjoy the treats laid on by the good people of Birkenhead and Liverpool' and the 'billiard parlour' of a large Birkenhead house, where he consumed 'afternoon tea and loads of eats'.<sup>411</sup> His experiences occurred after the Armistice, but are typical of those of many soldiers during the war years and are further evidence of the extensive mixing of wounded men with civilians.

There are many accounts of soldiers being entertained and visited by local people, who must have seen their hideous injuries and disfigurements. In 1914 Ada McGuire of Wallasey mentioned seeing a wounded soldier:

I was looking into Cripps' window yesterday in town. They had some lovely blouses. Some wounded soldiers passed me [and] one on crutches said 'Will you buy me a blouse for the ball tomorrow?' They never seem to get downhearted, do they? I laughed and one wished I could take him to a ball.<sup>412</sup>

During the following year, she said:

Deane called in to see me on Thursday [...] She had just come from Tranmere Hospital [...] and they have got a batch of wounded from Hill 60.

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<sup>411</sup> G. Coppard, *With Machine Gun to Cambrai*, p. 133.

<sup>412</sup> Ada McGuire to Eva, 28/8/1914, IWM 96/31/1.

She seemed terribly distressed about them [and] said she had to go out of the ward to compose herself before she could go and speak to them.<sup>413</sup>

Such sights can only have hastened the growing awareness of the true nature of war, but there was an additional, more tragic, means by which civilians could see for themselves the effects of modern weaponry – visits by parents to wounded sons in British hospitals. An especially poignant example is Private George S. Lofthouse (born 1898) from Liscard of the 10/CR who died of mustard gas poisoning on 24 October 1918 at Balham Military Hospital in London. His service records chart, in sickening detail, his physical deterioration and how he had briefly woken and recognised his father (John S. Lofthouse) who had travelled down, with a government rail pass, to see him. John's wife, Annie died of heart failure two days later. Mother and son are buried together in Toxteth Park Cemetery, Liverpool.<sup>414</sup>

This section was inspired by Mike Finn's assessment of the 'gulf of perception myth', which for our purposes was articulated by Rowan Williams and is echoed in items of popular culture such as the film *Oh What a Lovely War*. It has been shown that the evidence from Wirral supports Finn's thesis that there was no such 'gulf of perception' mainly due to the work of the local press which published soldiers' correspondence. Evidence also shows that civilians could well have been familiar with the horrors of war as a result of seeing wounded soldiers on the home front and even of visiting them in hospitals at home and abroad. These findings are important because they show that people's commitment to the war did not result from ignorance and that their resilience was not diminished by knowledge.

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<sup>413</sup> Ada McGuire to Eva, 9/5/1915, Ibid..

<sup>414</sup> John S. Lofthouse Service Records TNA WO363 accessed via Ancestry.co.uk and CWGC.

This knowledge helped them to make the transition from peace to war and successfully to endure the remainder of the conflict.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

This discussion has demonstrated that in many ways Wirral's response to the Great War was similar to that of the country as a whole, but in certain areas, such as recruitment, was subtly different. Although the Great War was neither welcomed nor celebrated by the people of Wirral, it was met with resolution and confidence. It was a uniquely catastrophic event, but the special combination of personalities, institutions and attitudes which had become well established before August 1914 enabled the whole of Wirral society to mobilise for war. In this sense, there was continuity with the pre-war world. The first example of this was recruitment, where the social, economic and political elite, which included such people as Lord Derby, Sir W.H. Lever, Alfred Bigland and Gershom Stewart, intensified the roles they held before the war by leading the campaigns as organisers and charismatic figureheads, communicating with the people and caring for recruits, enabling them to make the transition to military life. Their personalities and interests led to the creation of three local units – the Liverpool Pals, the Wirral Battalion and the Bantams. Other aspects of local life, such as public demonstration, parades, music, oratory, clubs, societies and institutions featured in the recruitment campaigns and enabled thousands of men to become soldiers in as short a time as possible.

Volunteering for military service, however, was not the only means by which people were able to support Britain's war effort. Many civilians, especially women, volunteered for public service and charitable work. Indeed, the women's suffrage

groups redirected all their energies to charitable and welfare work. They organised the collection and distribution of funds and created the networks which linked the many philanthropic and progressive organisations which had come into being before the Great War. The nascent local welfare state which was discussed in Chapter One was shown in this chapter to have started to come into its own during the first four months of the Great War. It is remarkable how much space was devoted to discussion of this topic in the columns of the local newspapers, revealing that for the people of Wirral, the issue was almost as important as military mobilisation. In fact, it was demonstrated that one could not have existed without the other, especially when it came to providing for servicemen's families.

There were two other needs which required volunteering and financial support – medical care for the many expected casualties and the care of Belgian Refugees. Wirral people, again led by the social elite, were active and generous in these areas, showing that they were totally committed to the country's war effort, the reasons for which they both understood and agreed with. It is now clear that the people of Wirral were not benighted victims of an incomprehensible conflict which was forced upon them, but a body of people who, once the war had been declared, felt that it was just and had to be fought. Many of them, whether by volunteering for the armed forces or for civilian service or by giving money and property became actively involved in the conflict. For this reason, we must change our focus from seeing them as receivers of the effects of the Great War and more as prosecutors and shapers of it.

Comparisons were made between Wirral and two Lancashire towns which possess famous Great War myths. It was argued that, for various reasons, Wirral

does not have one overarching myth which helped the population to understand the impact of war on their world. It is possible that local people's knowledge about the conflict was based on a greater variety of information derived from a longer time span. This might have encouraged a more objective understanding of the conflict.

The above discussion has explained how Wirral society successfully made the transition from peace to war. The Great War was unprecedented in scale and horror and yet people seem to have been able to cope with it due to many of the ideas, loyalties and visions with which they had been imbued before it began. These beliefs were conducive to solidarity and resilience. In addition, a foundation was laid for coping with the increased stresses of the second half of the war and for the acts of commemoration which were to be instituted after it ended. These matters will appear in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER 3: Wirral's Working Class and the Great War**

### **3.1 Introduction**

After outlining the research questions and introducing the related historiography, this chapter is subdivided as follows: Section 3.2 introduces Wirral's working-class by showing where they worked, what they did and who they were. Section 3.3 discusses working-class patriotism; Section 3.4 explores local trades unions and industrial relations, while 3.6 analyses labour activism, apart from via the trades unions and discusses the rise of the Labour Party. The concluding section, 3.7, assesses the degree to which the Great War had caused change or continuity for the working-class.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, knowledge about the relationship between Britain's working-class and the Great War has grown and historical interpretations have, in consequence, become more nuanced. During the sixth and seventh decades of that century, some historians were keen to find evidence of a surge in working-class radicalism and rebellion. Arthur Marwick wrote about the death of an 'older society' and the emergence of a 'new one'; he dealt with the question of labour in eight pages, in a section called 'Red Clydeside and other Places'.<sup>415</sup> His brief survey implied that wartime experiences had induced Glasgow's working-class to become almost revolutionary. More recent work has shown that, despite mass support and community solidarity in Glasgow, the simultaneous occurrence of the rent and engineers' strikes of 1915 was a coincidence and that the people, far from protesting against the war, remained patriotic. In addition, the importance of the religious affiliations of the strike

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<sup>415</sup> A. Marwick, *The Deluge British Society and the First World War* (London, Macmillan 1965), pp. 68-76 and cover notes on the 1986 edition.

organisers and their inherent conservatism have also come to light.<sup>416</sup> This is just one story from a multitude of examples which further illustrates Britain's regional complexities and cautions us against over-simplification.

Englander and Osborne's 1978 article about the working-class in the British and Empire forces, in the way in which it focused on mutinies, desertions, courts martial and executions also managed to imply that the working-class were inherently resentful, radical and rebellious, although the authors confessed that, whilst in the trenches, due to their deprived backgrounds, working-class men were 'cheerful and stoical, rather than outraged and introspective'.<sup>417</sup> John Bourne's 1996 chapter about the working-class and military service was a more subtle interpretation, which asserted that the few mutinies and strikes which did occur can be seen as continuations of pre-war civilian industrial disputes. He developed Englander and Osborne's point by describing the similarities between working-class and military culture and how 'community solidarity was a product of shared adversity', which produced 'a quite extraordinary degree of mutuality', enabling a smooth transition from civilian to military life – a point which is certainly pertinent to the data from Wirral.<sup>418</sup>

Since the 1980s, numerous studies of Great War working-class history have been published and a broad consensus has emerged, which can be distilled into five points, each of which is supported by additional, more specialised research.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> I. McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh, John Donald, 1983), pp. 165-69.

<sup>417</sup> D. Englander and J. Osborne, 'Jack, Tommy and Henry Dubb: The Armed Forces and the Working Class', *The Historical Journal*, 21 (1978), pp. 593-621, p. 595.

<sup>418</sup> J. Bourne, 'The British Working Man in Arms' in H. Cecil and P.H. Liddle, eds., *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), pp. 336-352, p. 346.

<sup>419</sup> Especially, J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983), R. Wall and J. Winter, *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914 – 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); J. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain 1914-18* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991); B. Waites, *A Class Society at War* (Oxford: Berg, 1992);

Firstly, it is clear that generalisation about such a large section of society, who resided in many parts of a diverse and complex nation is ill-advised.<sup>420</sup> Secondly, the importance of working-class patriotism has been highlighted: it is wrong to assume that the working-class were *either* trades unionists and/or labour activists *or* supporters of Britain's war efforts. There are many examples of people who believed that there was no clash between loyalty to country and loyalty to their class, union or party.<sup>421</sup> Thirdly, it is clear that trades union membership increased and that, during the war, many unions amalgamated, consolidated and became more influential.<sup>422</sup> Fourthly, the Great War was a vital catalyst in the evolution of the Labour Party.<sup>423</sup> Fifthly, by 1918, the working-class had acquired more influence and rights, but, ultimately, the British class system remained undamaged and was possibly even strengthened by the Great War. In De Groot's words, in opposition to Marwick's interpretation: 'The war was not a deluge that swept all before it; it was more like a winter storm that briefly swelled the rivers of change.'<sup>424</sup>

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N. Mansfield, *English Farm Workers and Local Patriotism 1900-1930* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2001), A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), G.J. De Groot, *Back in Blighty: The British at Home in World War 1* (London: Vintage, 2014), D. Swift, *For Class and Country: The Patriotic Left and the First World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017); L. Bland and R. Carr, eds., *Labour, British Radicalism and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

<sup>420</sup> See D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), which is based on local and regional sources.

<sup>421</sup> See M. Morris, 'Peace but not at any Price: British Socialists' Calls for Peace on the Eve of the First World War' in L. Bland and R. Carr, eds., *Labour, British Radicalism and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018) Amazon Kindle e-book, Loc 682-1302 for an analysis of the patriotic views of key labour leaders before the outbreak of war.

<sup>422</sup> H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* Fifth Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), pp. 149-180 and A.J. Reid, *United We Stand: A History of Britain's Trade Unions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005), pp. 177-183.

<sup>423</sup> A. Reid and H. Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 30-44 and M. Pugh, *Speak for Britain! A New History of the Labour Party* (London: Vintage, 2011), pp. 100-127.

<sup>424</sup> G. De Groot, *Back in Blighty* p.369 commenting on A. Marwick, *The Deluge*.



A regional study provides more intimate details about working-class wartime experiences and thereby enables an assessment of the hypotheses of the abovementioned national historians. The ensuing discussion will use data from Wirral to weigh the accuracy of the five points, firstly by delineating the nature of Wirral's working-class – how numerous they were, what proportion of the population they constituted, where and how they lived, and how they were employed. Themes which were explored in the previous three chapters – the relationship between the home and fighting fronts and reasons for popular resilience will be woven into the analysis.

### **3.2 Who Were Wirral's Working-Class and How did the Great War Affect Them?**

The term 'working-class' was explained in the above Concepts and Definitions section of the Introduction.<sup>425</sup> It was shown that, in agreement with the works of several scholars, we should not regard class labels as immutable, but as attempts to describe fluid entities. It was found to be easier to list the characteristics of the working-class than to provide an all-encompassing definition. It was also explained that it is not necessary for individuals to possess all the suggested characteristics in order to qualify for the title of 'working-class'. Facts about Wirral's working-class were introduced in Chapter One and summarised in Table Two in Appendix Five. Further details are expounded here. In 1911 the largest single form of employment in Birkenhead and Wallasey (accounting for nearly eleven per cent of the workforce) was domestic service, while nearly seven per cent of the workforce were clerks and about thirteen per cent worked on the railways, docks, in shipyards and on farms and market gardens.

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<sup>425</sup> P.4

Percentages for the whole of Wirral, due to the way in which the census was compiled are unobtainable, but the WSS provides useful if not definitive information about local employment.<sup>426</sup> Because the WSS is based only on other ranks' documentation and not officers', it lists mainly lower middle-class and working-class men. Some sixty-two per cent of the men on the list did working-class jobs.<sup>427</sup> Within this portion, the most common types of employment were transport, including seamen (35.51%), general labour (23.32%), manufacturing and engineering, especially in shipbuilding, iron and steel, chemicals and detergents (9.9%), agriculture and horticulture (8.34%), rural crafts, mining and fishing (1.55%) and postal services (1.5%).<sup>428</sup> It is probable that the sample has an unrepresentatively high proportion of middle-class men due to it containing a disproportionately large contingent from Wallasey, which was primarily a residential town.<sup>429</sup> Indeed the most common single occupation in the sample is clerk (14.07% of the 1961 with known occupations) and as revealed by the 1911 census, this was the second most important form of employment, after domestic service, in Wallasey.<sup>430</sup> It is probable that, due to Wirral acting as a dormitory for Liverpool, its middle-class made up a larger proportion of the local population than was the case nationally.

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<sup>426</sup> The census did not treat either the Hundred or Peninsula of Wirral as an entity, but it did publish data for Birkenhead and Wallasey, as can be seen in Appendix Five.

<sup>427</sup> As was pointed out in the Concepts and Definitions Section above, working-class occupations included those which involved manual labour and/or received erratic, unreliable and/or low remuneration and had not required high levels of professional training or certification, although many of the occupations were highly skilled (eg. shipbuilding) and had required their exponents to complete apprenticeships.

<sup>428</sup> Only two members of the WSS were described as domestic servants. The large difference in numbers of domestic servants between the census and WSS is, of course, due to the fact that most domestic servants were females, who did not join the army.

<sup>429</sup> The bias does not result from choice but from the random effects of the 1940 London Blitz, which, for unknown reasons, left more Wallasey men's service files intact than those belonging to Birkenhead men.

<sup>430</sup> See Table 2 Appendix Five.

There are 423 men in the WSS whose places of work are evident. One hundred and fifty-three (36.17%) of them worked in Liverpool. Ninety-eight (23.17%) worked in Birkenhead, seventy (16.55%) in Wallasey, twenty-one (4.96%) in Ellesmere Port (mainly in the iron works), twenty-six (6.15%) in Port Sunlight (all at Levers' soap factory) and thirty-five (8.2%) elsewhere in Wirral.<sup>431</sup> It is clear that, although Wirral was home to a great many lower-middle class clerks, who commuted to Liverpool, it also contained a substantial population of general labourers and industrial workers employed by the transport systems, factories, docks and ship-yards situated along the shores of the Mersey. By 1914, despite a large portion of its population doing lower-middle-class jobs in Liverpool, there was a substantial cohort of working-class people living and working in Wirral.

Not least because he was the only local person of humble origins to write a memoir of life in pre-war urban Wirral, Walter Citrine's descriptions of working-class life are worth reading.<sup>432</sup> About his seaman father, Alfred (1852-1937), he said, 'He was a heavy drinker, but he had long spells of sobriety and during those periods our home life was supremely happy.'<sup>433</sup> About his home in Seacombe, he said:

We lived in a small house in Palatine Road, a neighbourhood mainly occupied by people of the artisan class. We had no gas or hot water. We used to heat water on the open fire. There was no bath; oil lamps and candles furnished illumination.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> See Appendix Eight.

<sup>432</sup> W. Citrine, *Men and Work: The Autobiography of Lord Citrine* (London: Hutchinson, 1964).

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

His education was basic and short-lived and his first job was in a flour mill at the docks. He worked ten and a half hour days and fifty-eight hours per week and was paid six shillings. He gave all his wages to his mother. The dust in the mill made him ill, necessitating a move to New Brighton Tower, where he worked as an electrician. During his leisure time, he played the cornet in a brass band and swam in the docks. He confessed to being grateful to his Sunday school teachers at Oakdale Chapel for their efforts to expand his knowledge.<sup>435</sup> He painted a positive picture of that section of the working-class he described as 'artisans' and of how, by hard work and self-education, he managed to advance his career as a trade union leader. The story of his home and working life probably represents the experiences of a great many of Wirral's 'respectable' working-class, but not of the less respectable elements, who were poorer due to more frequent spells of unemployment in consequence of being 'unskilled' or due to physical or mental disabilities, family problems or any combination of other types of disadvantage. Whilst making the point that more people were living below the poverty line in pre-war Britain than has previously been assumed, Ian Gazeley and Andrew Newell stated that:

Not surprisingly, skill and poverty are strongly inversely related, so that poverty [was in Edwardian England] concentrated among the unskilled, but the gradient of this relationship is very steep. For instance, poverty rates for labourers' households are around fifty per cent.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid., pp.22-26. See K. Burnley, 'Reaching to the Sky: An Old Booklet Published in 1912 Captures the Essential Spirit of New Brighton Tower', *The Wirral Journal*, 6 (1993 Summer), pp. 5-10.

<sup>436</sup> I. Gazeley and A. Newell, 'Poverty in Edwardian Britain', *Economic History Review*, 64(1) (2011), pp. 52-71 (p.55); the authors argued that twenty-three per cent of urban working households and eighteen per cent of all households were in poverty in 1906 and speculated that twenty-six per cent of all male headed working or unemployed households were in poverty (p.69).

One of the most graphic examples of working-class poverty was described in the BA in November 1915. Under the heading 'How the Poor Live: Consumptive Mother and Eight Children Live in Condemned House', the article described a 'courthouse' in Birkenhead, which had been condemned before the war and 'was not fit to live in and worse than a pigsty. The woman was practically living underground' and 'water was pouring out of the street into the hovel where the family was living.' The landlord was censured for callousness on the one hand but praised on the other for letting the woman have at least a basic form of accommodation. Doubtless, the poor woman was one of many people belonging to the 'bottom tenth', who had always been neglected and whose lives were only made worse by war, as housing fell to the bottom of the council's priority list.<sup>437</sup>

Bernard Waites stated that 'The working-class has never been an undifferentiated mass' and, therefore, suggested the use of the plural 'working classes'; Waites's point is manifestly applicable to Wirral, as the term 'the working-class' referred to a multitude of people doing a wide range of jobs, from 'unskilled' labouring on the docks to highly-skilled engineering work in the ship-yards.<sup>438</sup> The inherent diversity of the working-class must always be borne in mind, but, despite Waites's example, the singular noun will be used throughout this chapter.<sup>439</sup>

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The situation might have improved by 1914 due to Liberal welfare reforms, but the point is still valid – poverty amongst the working class was a serious problem. Also see A.L. Bowley, *Wages and Income in the United Kingdom Since 1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937).

<sup>437</sup> BA 25/11/15. See D. Englander, *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) for a discussion of slum dwellings and relationships between property owners and their tenants.

<sup>438</sup> See Taplin, *Liverpool Dockers and Seamen 1870-1890* (Hull: University of Hull Publications, 1974) and *The Dockers Union: A Study of the National Union of Dock Labourers 1889-1922* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986) for descriptions of the way in which the supposedly 'unskilled' dockers were in fact highly skilled.

<sup>439</sup> B. Waites, *A Class Society at War*, p.171.

As shown in Chapter Two, events following the declaration of war in August 1914, especially military recruitment, reinforced and highlighted local class divisions, insofar as middle-class men tended to join the Liverpool Scottish and Rifle Battalions, clerks the Liverpool Pals and working-class men the 1/4/CR and 13/CR; while the upper-middle-class elite acted as the organisers, recruiters and officers, fulfilling a paternalistic role towards the working- and lower-middle classes. Waites, however, identified a phenomenon which is visible in Wirral – the transitional zone between the middle and working-class, peopled by the lower-middle-class clerks. Such persons will be included in the ensuing discussion, especially as they had their own trades unions which played a part in local wartime industrial relations.

An interesting story appeared in the CC in September 1914: an Ellesmere Port ironworker called John Lodge (1878-1947) had burst into Cambridge Road Primary School and assaulted the headteacher, Mr Munro, who was secretary of the local relief committee, which was busy supporting the families of unemployed or partially employed ironworkers. Lodge was furious and used foul language in front of school children. He appeared in court the same day and:

[...] expressed his regret, said the trouble arose through the children in the streets shouting after him what wages he earned. It was scandalous that children should be told what a man was earning [...] He himself had relieved people on his street.<sup>440</sup>

The panel sentenced Lodge to one month's imprisonment. The tone of the article reinforced the traditional image of the possibly drunken, foul-mouthed working-

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<sup>440</sup> CC 15/9/14.

class thug behaving in an anti-social manner towards a respectable middle-class public servant, but further investigation reveals a more nuanced narrative: John Lodge might not have been a thug. Evidence implies that he was a hard-working iron worker. He had been working since the age of thirteen in several ironworks in at least three different towns. When war began, he was probably stressed by his duties and options – his employer was shedding labour, neighbours were in desperate need and there was pressure to join up. At the same time, he needed to preserve his dignity as a working man. The publication of his income, the taunting of local children and the misbehaviour of his own children had pushed him into a rage, which he later regretted. Some five months later, Lodge joined the CR, but never served abroad and was discharged, after working as an army cook in Shropshire in August 1916, due to ill-health.<sup>441</sup>

Lodge's story sheds light on the lives of working-class people whose experiences do not conform to the imagined stereotype of immediate enlistment in an infantry battalion, followed by service overseas and either death or injury in battle. It shows us that working-class people endured a wide range of circumstances, often involving complex navigations through the economic vicissitudes of their places of work, the charity and support systems which had been created for their benefit and uniformed service.<sup>442</sup>

Inflation was a serious problem on the home front. Food prices began to rise in August 1914 and certain items became scarce. In March 1917, the EPA reported on a shortage of potatoes in Birkenhead. The scenes were 'reminiscent in many

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<sup>441</sup> CC 15/9/1914; 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911 Censuses and British Army Pension Records TNA WO364.

<sup>442</sup> See the full story of John Lodge: <https://greatwarnorthwest.wordpress.com/2017/06/26/history-from-the-bottom-up-john-lodge-of-ellesmere-port-and-the-great-war/#more-2091>

respects of those witnessed a few weeks back in connection to the dearth of coal supplies. No potatoes came into the market and many families resigned themselves to potatoless (sic) dinners without much complaint until Saturday arrived' and there was a general 'forage around town' as people sought potatoes for their Sunday dinners. Queues grew outside the shops, tempers frayed and the police got involved.<sup>443</sup>

By 1918, the big employers like Cammell Laird's were booming due to the war. Thousands of men were employed and, apparently, reasonably well-paid, but food distribution was still a major problem. In January of that year, a delegation of workmen from the shipyard met the Mayor and Chairman of the Local Food Control Committee to complain about their diets. Some men worked seven days per week and sometimes through the night with 'nothing more to eat than bread and jam':

[...] they could not expect men to be contented with such scanty food as that, and there was a feeling that people who could afford to do with less were getting more than their fair share, whilst men engaged in hard manual work were not getting sufficient.<sup>444</sup>

The problem had ramifications for families: wives were having to leave older children in charge of their households whilst they queued for food at the weekend, when workers would come home to find a lack of tea, sugar, meat or 'anything like margarine or butter'. Some men had tendered their notices in order to be able to

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<sup>443</sup> EPA 7/3/1917. See M. Richardson, *The Hunger War: Food, Rations and Rationing 1914-1918* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2015), R. Duffett, *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and the Soldiers of the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) and R. Blom, *Hunger: How Food Shaped the Course of the First World War* (London: Uniform, 2019).

<sup>444</sup> BN 26/1/1918.



join the queues. The Mayor expressed sympathy, assured the men that he also was doing without butter and that the problem was not unique to Birkenhead but caused by national distribution problems.<sup>445</sup>

Supplies of water, coal and gas were also affected. Hoylake Urban District Council maintained a wartime press cuttings book which documents problems with the supply of all three commodities. The task of supplying sufficient water to a growing population had always been challenging, but once the war got underway it became even more so and increasingly expensive. In February 1915 the local gas and water company issued a notice warning of a rise in water rates, explaining that this was caused by the need to pay for a military guard at the waterworks. The temporary training camp for the Cheshire Bantams on the Meols dunes increased demand for water and variations in the weather added further complications. In 1917, Lord Rhondda's appeal to the population to conserve water was locally promulgated.<sup>446</sup> The same collection contains references to rising coal and gas prices, especially a clip from LE of 26 May 1915 which observed that, by that time, coal had nearly tripled in price since 1914.<sup>447</sup>

Others experienced economic stress due to the absence of wage-earners. Ada McGuire of Wallasey recorded some poignant details in a letter to her sister:

What I really want to do is to help the families of our school children whose fathers have gone to fight. There are at present five families. One mother has seven children and there will soon be eight. The eldest child is nine

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<sup>445</sup> Ibid..

<sup>446</sup> WA H/064: Hoylake Urban District Council Newspaper Cuttings Book Volume 1. Lord Rhondda was David Alfred Thomas 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Rhondda (1856-1918), Minister of Food Control June 1917 – July 1918.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

only. She only gets 1s/1d per day and 2s for each child. That does not leave much when rent is paid and all food is dearer. There are many cases like this. I want with my teachers and friends' help to aid them.<sup>448</sup>

Birkenhead Borough Council's wartime records refer to the numerous sufferings of employees whose lives had been disrupted by the war. Mr. A. McIntyre wrote on 1 February 1916 to ask for financial help because he had joined the army, leaving his fifteen-year-old sister at home. Due to suffering from tuberculosis, she had been bandaged to an iron frame for nearly two years and could only move her arms and head; she required specialist care and larger accommodation. There is no record of the outcome of his request. James Sharples, a road foreman, wrote on 24 July 1916, to explain the difficulties he was facing: he joined up on 6 June, but his wife was unwell and, due to originating in Darwen and having no local family or friends, there was nobody to help her. James finished by saying that his home would have to be 'broken up' and requested financial help, which was refused. On 18 November 1916, Thomas Bowers requested help because he was in uniform and his wife was pregnant and unable to work. Again, there is no record of his appeal's outcome.<sup>449</sup>

These examples are cited as evidence of the diversity and complexity of working-class experiences on the home front and as an introduction to the ways in which the war gave already vulnerable and struggling people a myriad of additional economic and social challenges to cope with. They remind us that this analysis is about real people – ancestors whose stories are often affecting and sometimes

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<sup>448</sup> Ada to Eva 28/8/1914, IWM 96/31/1.

<sup>449</sup> WA B/163/WP/1.

tragic. They form a factual foundation upon which the ensuing analysis can be built and a humane backdrop to sometimes impersonal analysis.

### **3.3 Workers as Soldiers: The Working-Class on the Home and Fighting**

#### **Fronts**

Chapter Two discussed the relationship between the home and fighting fronts and assessed what people in the two zones knew about each other. This contributed to the continuing analysis of the reasons why Wirral people were resilient during total war. It is necessary now to take up the same theme with regard to the working-class. It is a truism that most soldiers were and are 'civilians in uniform'. Even the majority of career servicemen have probably spent a larger portion of their lives out of uniform than in it and this was especially true for the 'citizen soldiers' of the period 1914-18. They came from particular cultural, social and economic backgrounds to which they had to return once the conflict was over. This section analyses these transitions and thereby develops the argument set out in Chapter Two that contact between the home and military fronts was more extensive than was once supposed to be the case and assesses their relevance in explaining resilience and the creation of a sense of working-class solidarity.<sup>450</sup>

Analysis of recruitment was carried out in Chapter Two and the way in which the regimental system reinforced class demarcations was therein delineated. Here we probe into the phenomenon using the WSS. Merseyside's most famous middle-class regiment was the Liverpool Scottish. Sixty-nine men in the WSS joined the battalion, at least fifty-three of whom had middle-class jobs (twenty-seven of whom

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<sup>450</sup> See N. Mansfield, *Soldiers as Workers: Class, Employment, Conflict and the Nineteenth-Century Military* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016) for analysis of the phenomenon during the previous century and C. Phillips, *Civilian Specialists at War: Britain's Transport Experts and the First World War* (London: University of London Press, 2020).

were clerks). The other two middle-class battalions were the 5 and 6/KLR (Rifles). Of the thirty-four men who joined the two rifle battalions, at least twenty-two were middle-class (sixteen of whom were clerks). As mentioned above, Helen McCartney's study of the Liverpool Rifles and Liverpool Scottish is a seminal work of social and military history, in which she quotes an extract from the diary of Captain Bryden McKinnell of the Liverpool Scottish, written the day before he died on 15 June 1915: 'we are going to justify our existence as terriers and men – we middle-class business men.'<sup>451</sup> It is a confession of a degree of insecurity about his and his men's masculinity due to them being city workers, instead of tough manual workers, as well as confirmation that the Liverpool Scottish was a middle-class unit.

Of the more working-class units, the 1/4CR accounted for eighty-eight of the WSS, at least forty-six of whom were clearly working-class, including two of the seven coalminers in the WSS. Forty-one members of the WSS belonged to the 13/CR ('Wirral Pals'); all of them except one (a clerk) were working-class (including twenty-one labourers). The data confirms that, to a large extent, men either chose or were chosen by regiments partly on the basis of their social class and in that way, the army reinforced the class system and thereby possibly engendered a sense of working-class solidarity.

The WSS contains several more insights into the phenomenon of 'soldiers as workers'. A stereotypical assumption about Great War working men is that most of them joined the infantry and were used as cannon-fodder on the Western Front.

This was not the experience of a large minority (perhaps even a majority) of Wirral

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<sup>451</sup> H.B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.205. See Bryden McKinnell's biography on *An Imperishable Record*: <https://grangehill1922.wordpress.com/2014/08/07/bryden-mckinnell/>

workers who joined the army. One thousand four hundred and twenty-nine members of the WSS (71.45%) enlisted in infantry and other combat units, including the Royal Regiment of Artillery, Army Air Corps, Machine Gun Corps, Tank Corps and cavalry regiments; but at least 222 of these did not stay in the battalions they initially joined and were later transferred to non-combat/support units, such as the Labour, Pay and Ordnance Corps. This lowers the proportion who served solely in combat regiments to 1207 (60.35% of the 1987 members of the WSS whose regiments are known).

The most highly represented unit was the CR (539), followed by the Artillery (318) and KLR (246). Thus 458 men joined support units, notably the ASC (235), the RE (220) and the RAMC (74) – the fourth, fifth and sixth biggest recruiters on the list, and fulfilled roles which in many cases were the same or related to the jobs which they had performed in civilian life.

As its name suggests, the ASC provided virtually every service which the armies needed to be able to function, from transport through supply and maintenance to food and administration. Sixty-two (26.38%) of the ASC men in the WSS were employed as drivers; thirty of these had been drivers or mechanics in civilian life. In all, forty-nine (20.85%) members of the ASC performed their civilian roles whilst in uniform. In addition to the thirty drivers and mechanics, there were eight clerks, six bakers, three carters, one saddler and a butcher. It was an even stronger picture for the RE, eighty-three (37.72%) of whom did their civilian jobs whilst in the army. These roles included twelve signallers who had been telegraphists, fourteen postmen and eight railway workers. Sixty soldiers from the sample joined

the Inland Waterways section of the RE (Figure 5); thirty-seven of these had worked on boats before joining up and seven were shipbuilders.<sup>452</sup>

A report in the EPA of 20 October 1915 about a recruiting meeting held at the Ellesmere Port Trades and Labour Hall, chaired by local trade unionist, Alex McGregor, hints at the pride felt by local canal bargemen in their trade and their sense of identity as a workforce. The men were invited to serve on the Western Front and were promised that they would be paid 3s 6d per day and that they would not have to go on any route marches; working hours would be between 07.30 and 16.30 and wives would receive 6d (for an unstated period) separation allowance. McGregor told the men that they would take part in ‘a great organisation’ and:

[...] if they joined the Corps, they would go as free men, not as conscripts and they would work at their own trade. He knew there was not another part of the country that could teach the men of Ellesmere Port what transportation was. They had the very best men, men who had been brought up and trained in the business, who would be a valuable asset in connection with the work of the Corps in France and Belgium.<sup>453</sup>

McGregor’s speech says a good deal about working-class patriotism, which is discussed below, but its message about the dependence of the army on working-class skills and the way in which the possessors of these skills would be given privileged status and be able to work together as a brotherhood of free men hints at the way in which wartime uniformed service could serve to consolidate working-

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<sup>452</sup> See Appendix Eight for statistical summaries of the WSS. Actual figures for soldiers pursuing their civilian trades whilst in the army are probably different, but unobtainable due to a great many men’s records failure to mention the actual roles they fulfilled within the ASC and RE.

<sup>453</sup> EPA 20/10/1915.

class solidarity. The RAMC employed men with a wide range of trades, but accounted for two of the three dental workers and six of the eight pharmacists and chemists in the WSS. These figures are further evidence for the porosity of the boundary between the civilian and military worlds: working-class men could perform the same or similar jobs in the army to those which they did in peacetime.

Furthermore, many took up the same occupations after leaving the forces, often having received further training whilst serving and thereby becoming better qualified in their respective fields. Individual cases illuminate the point. Both Arthur Jones of New Brighton and James Pike of Seacombe, for example, were civilian carters, who benefitted from being trained up as motor drivers by the ASC and RFA respectively and were able to work in the same roles after the war. Hugh Rowe of Greasby was an apprentice joiner when he joined up in 1916; he completed his training while serving with the Royal Engineers and, by August 1917, was a 'Proficient Carpenter and Joiner' – a trade he was still following by 1939. Charles Chesworth of Rock Ferry had been a boot maker in civilian life and was, by 1918, trained by the ASC to become a 'skilled saddler'; however, by 1939, he had reverted back to being a boot maker, probably as a result of the decline in horse transport by that date.<sup>454</sup> Details concerning John Kernan of Lower Tranmere and Thomas Wilfred Pritchard of Neston, both of the RE, appear in Figures 6 and 7.

Qualitative evidence for a contemporary vision of a close relationship between the working-class home and fighting fronts can be found in the BN of 19 September 1917, when Charles Smith, leader of the local boilermakers' union defended

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<sup>454</sup> Occupations in 1939 gleaned from the 1939 Register, TNA RG101, accessed via Ancestry.co.uk.

himself against the epistolary attacks of a correspondent calling himself 'British Soldier', who had called Smith a traitor for organising a strike. Smith said, 'Does British Soldier think I am up against the British Army? Well I am not!' He insisted that he wanted to improve the lot of serving soldiers as much as he did civilian workers, blaming the suppression of wages on exploitation by war profiteers. He claimed that 'there was no one more eager to go on strike' than him and he told British Soldier that no one was more concerned about the soldiers' welfare than him. He also averred that he 'would sooner go to the trenches and be a British soldier one thousand times than go on strike again', but explained that the strikes were necessary to create the just and peaceful world which British Soldier hoped to see when he returned home. Another correspondent calling himself 'Birkonian' supported Smith and reminded British Soldier that many Birkenhead boilermakers had already served at the front and knew what military service was like. A further contribution from 'Bomb from Mons', a man who had served on the Western Front between July 1914 and January 1916 and was by then a Cammell Laird's employee, also supported Smith's claims by pointing out the factual errors in the anti-Smith servicemen's letters and reiterating the argument that both soldiers and workers needed pay-rises for the equally important work they were doing.<sup>455</sup>

The servicemen's misconceptions about industrial workers' rates of pay and standards of living show us that mutual knowledge between the home and fighting fronts was not always well-developed, but the publication of these letters must at least be evidence of a dialogue between the two, which might gradually have given soldiers more accurate knowledge of what their compatriots were doing at home.

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<sup>455</sup> BN 19/9/1917.



This section has continued the theme begun in Chapter Two which says that the home and fighting fronts were more intimately related than has hitherto been realised. This is important for the working-class as it enabled and consolidated a sense of class identity. Workers became soldiers; many soldiers continued to be workers; and some returned to civilian life to become workers again, sometimes with improved skills, more qualifications and often with a strengthened, or at least undiminished, sense of working-class pride. The next section builds on this platform by analysing the related phenomenon of working-class patriotism.

### **3.4 Working-Class Patriotism**

As stated above, there is now a substantial body of literature about the hitherto unappreciated topic of working-class patriotism. In former times, it was popularly imagined that the workers were more interested in advancing the interests of their class and in pushing forward the cause of socialism than in supporting their country in time of war. In 1991 John Horne coined the memorable phrase 'the choice of 1914' and said that:

Nation and labour, nation and working-class, were perceived in the light of the international crisis to be intimately connected. [...] The crisis demonstrated that the nation could be claimed by labour movements as a source of their own identity.<sup>456</sup>

Professor Horne's analysis is valid, but subtly misleading, as it suggests that trades unionists and the working-class had not already claimed the nation as part of their own identity. It was shown in the Methodology section above that British patriotism was mixed with civic pride and promulgated by local newspapers.

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<sup>456</sup> J.N. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain 1914-18* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991), p.43.

During George V's coronation celebrations in 1911, for example, the BA published a special supplement describing the festivities and listing the participants in a street parade, of which pride of place was to be given to representatives of seventeen trades unions and five friendly societies (Figure 8). Patriotism and nationalism were not new to trades unionists. Bernard Waites referred to the 'flag-saluting, foreigner-hating, peer-respecting side of the plebeian mind.'<sup>457</sup> This section argues that, to a large extent, Wirral's working-class were conservative and that there was continuity between their pre-war, wartime and post-war outlooks, behaviours and commitments.

In 2017 David Swift argued that historical writing in the 1970s and 80s focused on apparently radical and revolutionary topics such as the pacifism of Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald, the soldiers' strikes of 1919, the Kinmel Park Camp Riots and courts-martials and death sentences. He argues that such issues as working-class conservatism and the importance of regional peculiarities have not been properly explored, citing the example of East Lancashire, where labour leaders tended to be Methodist teetotallers, whereas those in the rest of the county held their meetings in pubs. He cautions against monolithic generalisations, wishful thinking and concentration upon the intellectual elite.<sup>458</sup> In analysing Wirral's working-class, this study aims to follow Swift's advice by achieving a more intimate view of a representative portion of the United Kingdom and particularly by looking at both the elites and the rank and file of the local labour movement.

Starting with the elites, as David Swift points out, important British labour figureheads, such as H.M. Hyndman (1842-1921) and Robert Blatchford (1851-

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<sup>457</sup> B. Waites, *A Class Society at War*, p.181.

<sup>458</sup> D. Swift, *For Class and Country*, pp. 1-8.

1943) were outspoken patriots. The point has recently been developed by Marcus Morris, who analysed the two men's apparently 'pro-war' beliefs, showing that they were not warmongers, but believers in the importance of defending their homeland against Germany in order that it could be safe for pro-working-class reform.<sup>459</sup>

Chris Wrigley made the same point about James Sexton (1856-1938), leader of the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL), who voted in favour of the TUC motion of support of Britain's declaration of war in August 1914. The motion was carried by 1.502 to 0.602 million votes.<sup>460</sup>

In view of the importance of NUDL on Merseyside, it is interesting to look at Sexton's own words, written in 1936:

To me it seems perfectly clear that Germany was launched upon the war for more than one reason. I am convinced that one of the objects was to break, if not totally destroy, the rapidly growing power of socialism in Germany. That the class which planned this coup failed as signally as the Kaiser's ships failed to overcome the British Navy was no fault of the war-lords, who planned to defeat the enemy within the Junker gates as well as the foe on the sea and in the field. But where the Hohenzollern lost Hitler has since won.<sup>461</sup>

He expressed his pleasurable surprise that the 'high priest of Karl Marxism', Hyndman, came out in support of the war for the same reasons as Sexton and his regret at Hardie's downfall:

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<sup>459</sup> M. Morris states, 'Too often, the separate groups and individuals of the movement are considered in isolation. Labour and the ILP were not "peace-at-any-pricers", while Hyndman and Blatchford certainly did not think they were warmongering or chauvinistic', 'Peace at Any Price', Loc. 753-758.

<sup>460</sup> C. Wrigley, 'At the Crossroads: The Labour Party, The Trades Unions and The Choices of Direction for The Democratic Left' in L. Bland and M. Carr, *Labour*, Loc 1310-1932.

<sup>461</sup> J. Sexton, *Sir James Sexton Agitator* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p.236.

I mourned him as a leader, as a fighting comrade, as a dear friend whose place in my affection could never be filled. Yet today I can and do feel glad that he did not live to see the final betrayal of all that he held dear and the entire disruption of the Independent Labour Party. So the country went to war with the support of the Labour Party, whose official policy had previously been almost 'Peace at any price', and whose leader, James Ramsay MacDonald, had lost much of the personal esteem of his colleagues and followers.<sup>462</sup>

He denounced the holders of 'lofty, soul-claiming ideals' who advocated an international strike for peace in August 1914 as German stooges and all dissenters from his patriotic beliefs as 'Cuthberts'.<sup>463</sup> In March 1915, against Sexton's wishes, the Birkenhead dockers went on strike. Whilst attempting to persuade them to go back to work, at a public meeting in Birkenhead, Sexton again expressed his patriotic convictions: 'If any war is justified, this war is.' He said had never been an advocate of war, but that circumstances had 'revolutionised him.' Sexton was not warmly received by the Birkenhead dockers, who insisted that they had not received a pay-rise and would, in consequence, continue to strike. Pointedly, however, they did not demur from Sexton's support for the war. A heckler shouted, 'Let the war officials take us over and we will work for half the money.' It was an extraordinary statement, which received applause and an uproar ensued, showing that the dockers were not protesting against the war but against the way in which their 'masters', the shipowners, were conducting it.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid., p.329.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> BN 32/3/1915. In contrast to Sexton, however, Wirral's other great trade union figurehead, Walter Citrine (1887-1983), in his autobiography made no comments about either his own or the workers' attitude to patriotism during the Great War. He did not even reflect in detail upon the death

Evidence shows that lower-ranking, local leaders held similar beliefs to those of Sexton. In December 1914, the WN published an article about Robert Craig Smith, an engineer from New Brighton, who had joined the RN. He was praised as being a 'Labourist and Patriot', 'an ardent trade unionist' and 'one of the most prominent workers in connection with the Labour Party in Wallasey'. Notice how the article praises his charitable work and membership of local Masonic Lodges, thereby highlighting Craig's citizenship qualities.

Another remarkably clear expression of working-class patriotism appeared in the EPA of 27 October 1915: at an extraordinary meeting of the Ellesmere Port TLC, P. Leach told members that three of their officials - Chairman J. Tompkins, J. Roscoe and Fred Duncalf – had enlisted, showing 'an example of patriotism to the whole country'. Treasurer, J. Pearson denounced apathy in the labour movement and then J. Hughes gave a powerful speech about why he had enlisted. His words express the essence of patriotic labourism:

He had been asked why he had enlisted, and when he considered the question [...] he thought of the hundreds of thousands who had left good positions and good homes to fight for their country. He did not think it right to grasp the fruit of others' labour [...] At the present time there was a grave danger of compulsory service being adopted [...] the very thing that they all desired to obviate [...] It was their country and it must be saved and they must fight for it. They as trades unionists would choose the voluntary system, by doing which they would not only preserve the country from the

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of his brother, Arthur (b.1885), mentioning it once briefly in *Men and Work on* p.17. Arthur was a tinsmith, employed in the shipping industry and, by virtue of his mother's nationality, a member of 1/10/KLR, The Liverpool Scots. He was the first member of the latter unit from Wallasey to be killed in action, on 22/12/1914 at Loche near Ypres, WN 6/1/1915. Arthur Citrine is also one of the 2000 names on the WSS.

foreign yoke, but they would keep their liberties intact [...] Go thou and do likewise (hear hear). Mr Hughes said a sacred trust was in their hands to uphold the labour cause in Ellesmere Port, and it was up to them to see to it that when the old leaders returned – and he hoped they would return – if they had not made progress, they would at least be strongly entrenched (applause).<sup>465</sup>

Local newspapers also contain evidence of grassroots trade union patriotism, notably in the case of the Birkenhead dockers. The men were sometimes blamed by outsiders for the delays in transferring cargoes from the ships to the railways. Numerous ships were seen to be waiting to be unloaded, whilst in some cases, their cargoes perished, while the dockers supposedly did nothing. The men were easy scapegoats, but as more enlightened observers pointed out, the dockers were not to blame. An anonymous author of an article in BA entitled ‘Don’t Blame the Docker’ claimed that part of the problem was due to a large portion of them having demonstrated their patriotism by enlisting – by January 1915, some 450 out of an original workforce of 2700; he surmised that the remainder were probably too old for military service. In addition, many men, having not received a pay-rise in twenty-five years, had transferred to the shipyards, where they could earn more money for less work.<sup>466</sup>

A month later, the same newspaper reported that some dockers had actually worked ‘patriotically’ without pay in order to load ‘the China Boats’ with munitions on Thursday evening’ (29 April 1915) and a ‘well-known leading docker’ was

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<sup>465</sup> EPA 27/10/1915.

<sup>466</sup> BA 23/1/1915.

quoted as saying, 'We must do our best now and we will I assure you. But at some other time, when the war is over, we shall take the masters to task again.'<sup>467</sup>

Finally, evidence for the strength of working-class patriotism can be found in Appendix Seven which lists examples of Wirral people, named after places, battles or personalities of the Great War. Douglas (with or without the 'Haig' element) was particularly popular, along with Kitchener, French, Verdun and Ypres. Douglas Victory Roberts was born on 11 November 1918. His father was a furnace stoker at Levers' soap factory in Port Sunlight.<sup>468</sup> In this respect, Wirral was no different to the rest of the United Kingdom, where thousands of children were similarly named. There are all sorts of reasons why people choose certain names for their children, but the bestowal of such distinctly war-related personal nomenclature must at least imply a lack of objection to the war and probably a commitment to and enthusiasm for it. It is powerful evidence for the strength of working-class patriotism in Wirral and in the nation as a whole.<sup>469</sup>

On the subject of working-class patriotism, the picture from Wirral strongly supports the thrust of current historiography: evidence shows that the message of patriotism and support for the war was preached by both national and local labour leaders and that their beliefs were shared by the rank and file. In Ross McKibbins's words, 'The German invasion of Belgium converted the labour movement to a vigorous yet not uncritical, prosecution of the war.'<sup>470</sup> Wirral sources contain no evidence of significant protest against the war, although workers did protest and strike in favour of better conditions and higher pay, seeing

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<sup>467</sup> BA 3/5/1915.

<sup>468</sup> 1911 Census.

<sup>469</sup> There is evidence of a similar phenomenon in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. See M. Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)

<sup>470</sup> R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p.88.

such campaigns as equally important as the war effort and, indeed, in some cases, as part of the same struggle for a more just world. As has been seen, one of the most illuminating sources is the local press, which, as has been discussed in previous chapters, was itself supportive of the war and which aimed to publicise the accepted vision of a united and patriotic society. Judgements based solely on newspapers might not be sound, but in this case, they have been cross-referenced with other evidence, such as service files and genealogical data which have confirmed the strength of working-class patriotism in Wirral.

### **3.5 The Trades Unions**

Trade Union membership increased during the Great War from 4.145 million in 1914, to 6.533 million in 1918 and 8.348 million by 1920. In 1910, twenty-three per cent of the eligible workforce was unionised; by 1920, it had risen to just over forty-eight per cent. Labour Party membership grew concurrently because most unions were allied to the party via local TLCs.<sup>471</sup> Such figures might be deemed to imply that, during and immediately after the Great War, British workers gained more rights and better working conditions and that socialism advanced both as an ideology and as a basis for practical policies. Matthew Kidd, however, via his studies of Bristol and Northampton, has recently discovered that there were 'attitudinal and ideological continuities between pre-war and wartime labour politics.' A trajectory, begun in the 1880s, wherein Labour activists' involvement in local government was characterised by a 'commitment to extending, rather than subverting, the existing constitutional order' and by emphasising patriotism, democracy, rights, liberty and collectivism, as well as the less palatable sentiments

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<sup>471</sup> C. Wrigley, 'At the Crossroads: The Labour Party, The Trades Unions and The Choices of Direction for The Democratic Left', in L. Bland and M. Carr, *Labour and British Radicalism*, Loc. 1416-1428.



of nationalism, racism and xenophobia, was perpetuated. His thesis corroborates the importance of working-class patriotism, but also introduces the ensuing enquiry into whether the expansion of local trades unions and the Labour Party should be viewed as a perpetuation of a conservative and reactionary trajectory or as a progressive movement.<sup>472</sup>

In Chapter One, the topic of industrial relations was introduced and a speech given by, Restal Ratsey Bevis, the Managing Director of Cammell Laird's in 1911, discussed. He described his pragmatic attitude to trades unions, wherein he accepted their right to exist and even implied that they enabled the management to maintain a paternalistic role over the workforce.<sup>473</sup> Similar beliefs were enunciated by his successor, William Lionel Hichens (1874-1940), during a speech in Birkenhead in 1917. After analysing the failings of both management and the workforce, he averred:

I would postulate that both employers and employed should be sufficiently organised in order that industrial problems may receive a broader and more statesman-like consideration. In many ways labour is more efficiently organised than capital, but there are indications of a fatal defect in some organisations, which, if not corrected, will prove their undoing. I refer to the tendency on the part of the rank and file to refuse powers to their leaders, and to throw over the agreements that they have negotiated. It is not characteristic of democracy but of mob rule, that every agreement should be subject to ratification via a plebiscite, for collective bargaining and even

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<sup>472</sup> M. Kidd, 'Labour and Socialism During the First World War in Bristol and Northampton' in L. Bland and R. Carr, *Labour and British Radicalism* Loc. 2540-3113.

<sup>473</sup> Page 15 above.

collective negotiation becomes impossible unless the representatives on each side are endowed with authority.<sup>474</sup>

In other words, the trades unions, as long as they were properly organised and wisely led, had a positive role to play in ensuring industrial harmony and therefore maximum prosperity. Hichens's vision implied that the unions were important for capitalism – they were a way in which the owners could control the labour force via negotiations with 'statesmanlike' representatives. Possible mob rule could be obviated via a gentlemanly interface between two elites – one of capital and the other of labour. Far from being an inevitable force for radical reform, the unions can be viewed as an integral part of an essentially conservative capitalist framework. In Bernard Waites's words:

The recognition of the legitimacy of economic conflict, and the actual propensity to strike for a greater share of the profits of industry, strengthen rather than weaken the fundamental institutions of capitalist societies.<sup>475</sup>

This phenomenon is exemplified in Walter Citrine's autobiography, wherein he described his dealings with the management at Cammell Laird's and at Lever Bros.<sup>476</sup> Regarding the former, he said:

Meetings with the employers as a body were usually conducted in a friendly vein and seldom did end in a row. They made full allowance for the strong language we sometimes used, feeling no doubt, as Sir George Carter of

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<sup>474</sup> EPA 7/3/1917.

<sup>475</sup> B. Waites, *A Class Society at War*, p.185.

<sup>476</sup> W. Citrine, *Men and Work*, pp.43-60.

Cammell Laird's once said to me, 'I know you have got to do it: it is part of your job.'<sup>477</sup>

His more personal assessment of Carter is relevant, describing him as follows:

[...] as rugged as they make them, powerfully built with a prominent jaw and strong and somewhat hard features. He was a shipbuilder to his fingertips [...] His approach on any subject was entirely informal, and, although I never heard him use bad language, I felt sure he could have rivalled most of his workpeople in a slanging match.<sup>478</sup>

Citrine's descriptions of W.H. Lever are more detailed, reflecting his complex personality. Following his first meeting with the soap magnate, Citrine felt his confidence ebb away as he realised that Lever had outwitted him during their negotiations, but he learned from his mistakes and the two men learned successfully to negotiate with each other. At one point Lever expressed some self reflection: 'It took me twenty years to devise co-partnership in the form we have it at Levers, and now you tell me about all these defects. Perhaps my life's work has been all wrong. Perhaps I have misunderstood the minds of the workpeople.' Citrine then praised his efforts at promoting workers' welfare and building Port Sunlight.<sup>479</sup> These stories are graphic examples of those encounters between management and labour which, as explained above, Bernard Waites described as being such an important feature of a successful capitalist society, on a personal level and in a Wirral context.

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<sup>477</sup> Ibid. p.43.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid. pp.53-54. The BNVS contains a biography of Carter (1860-1922) on p.42.

<sup>479</sup> W. Citrine, *Men and Work*, p.58.

The Earl of Derby demonstrated his commitment to this framework when, in March 1915, he created the Liverpool Docks Battalion (popularly known as the 'Khaki Dockers'), a force, in his words, which would 'adhere strictly to Trade Union rules and under no circumstances will be used as a strike-breaking force.'<sup>480</sup> Only members of NUDL were allowed to join and James Sexton supported it. It was an innovation but, in effect, merely an expression of that conservative tradition of trying to ensure that essential workers were disciplined and manageable. A second battalion was formed in 1916, but the battalions never achieved a membership of more than 2000 and they were not popular in Birkenhead, perhaps because local leaders were wary of conscription and Birkenhead dockers often appear to have been more militant than their Liverpool counterparts.<sup>481</sup>

Many large local businesses manufactured war materials. Managers were anxious to ensure maximum efficiency and, with government backing, imposed stricter controls. In September 1915, a sitting of the Liverpool Munitions Tribunal exposed figures about loss of production at Cammell Laird's due to staff absence. Mr. J.W.P. Laird announced that some 1.5 million hours had been lost during the previous twenty weeks. For a workforce of 10,300 men, this was the equivalent of nearly three weeks' work. Many examples were cited and sixty-nine men were prosecuted for breaking Rule Three of the 1915 Munitions of War Act, which enjoined regular attendance at work. Laird finished with the words:

Seeing that the men have proved deaf to all persuasion and have shown no improvement in response either to appeals from ministers of the Crown, from their own trade unions, or from us as their employers, the only course

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<sup>480</sup> K. Grieves, 'The Liverpool Dock Battalion: Military Intervention in the Mersey Docks 1915-1918' THSLC, 131 (1982), pp.139-158, (p. 148); LA Earl of Derby Papers, 920.DER (17).3/1-7.

<sup>481</sup> BN 27/3/1915 and 14/4/1915 and BA 3/5/1915.

left open is to prosecute them before this tribunal with a view to having it established once and for all that workmen are not at liberty to do exactly as they like and to disregard all law and authority.<sup>482</sup>

Following the outbreak of war was in 1914, there was an industrial truce, which inevitably waned as the conflict progressed, inflation denuded real wages and government orders necessitated long working hours. However, during the years 1915-1918, the total number of days lost through strikes was just over forty per cent of the number lost in 1912. As mentioned above, there were dramatic rent and labour strikes on Clydeside during 1915, but sixty-eight per cent of lost days occurred in 1917 and 1918. There were fewer strikes when the war was going badly and more when it was going well, again showing working-class commitment to the war effort and sensitivity to military events. In Gregory's words, 'Massive opposition to the Government did not eventuate,' probably partly due to government propaganda and interventions.<sup>483</sup>

The pattern of strikes in Wirral does not conform to the abovementioned narrative, with more disputes in 1915 than in 1918. This might be due to the national figure being augmented by coalminers' strikes, while Wirral possessed only one small coalmine, employing a mere 150 workers.<sup>484</sup> Unsurprisingly, two of the biggest local employers – Cammell Lairds and the docks – feature prominently. Their strikes had familiar causes – demands for more money and shorter hours. There is no evidence of militancy and insurrection, only of demands for wages to catch up with inflation and workers not to be over exploited.

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<sup>482</sup> EPA 24/3/1915.

<sup>483</sup> Knowles, *Strikes. A Study in Industrial Conflict* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), p. 159 and A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.203.

<sup>484</sup> Ness Colliery; see Chapter 1, p. 66 above.

The newspapers contain occasional insights into the workers' sufferings. There is no suggestion that they did not want to work, but that they could not work in the ways expected of them. For example, an unnamed docker, in the abovementioned article entitled 'Don't Blame the Docker', told the interviewer that 'a docker can earn £5 a week for at least a fortnight and spend the next week preparing for his funeral.'<sup>485</sup> He and his comrades were striking simply because their work-rates were unsustainable.

Other cases included the Birkenhead gravediggers' strike of January 1915, when members of the Corporation Employees' Society asked the Borough Wages Committee for a pay rise. Labour Councillor, W.H. Egan spoke up for the men, asserting that the cost of living had risen 'sixty, seventy and eighty per cent' since July 1914 and that the gravediggers had not had a pay rise in eight years. Their work, which involved digging rock was arduous and 'the seeds of consumption were frequently sown among them [...] the conditions under which they worked were a certain death warrant.' Councillors were sympathetic and a pay rise awarded, despite the opposition of the Conservative Councillor J.H. McGaul.<sup>486</sup>

Two months later, the gas-workers struck for the same reason. Again, it was partly the result of unresolved pre-war pay disputes, whereby the employees had not received a pay-rise for many years and which wartime inflation had brought to a head. It was believed that soldiers from the newly formed 16/CR had been used as blacklegs, but discussions between their colonel, C.E. Earle, and secretary of the gas workers' union, J.R. Clynes, revealed that the soldiers had fired up the gasworks only in order to provide their comrades with hot food. True to form, the

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<sup>485</sup> BA 23/1/1915.

<sup>486</sup> BA 26/1/1915; James Hannay McGaul J.P., Founder of Tranmere Rovers Football Club and Mayor of Birkenhead 1908-1909.

gas workers replied that they did not need to do that, because, had they known that the soldiers were going hungry, they would have ensured that they received hot food – another demonstration of their unwillingness to do anything unpatriotic.<sup>487</sup>

Probably the only strikes to have had anything approaching a political agenda was that of the Birkenhead Boilermakers in December 1916 and August 1917, when on the first occasion they demanded that a minister for labour be appointed and on the second asked the government to improve food distribution, introduce an arbitration body and end profiteering. Upon the ending of the first strike, it was noted that the workers protested that they were truly patriotic and demanded that their employers act in a similar way. It was noted that they sang the national anthem before returning to work.<sup>488</sup> Despite the patriotism and good will of the average Wirral worker, however, the strikers drew criticism from serving soldiers. In March 1915, Sergeant Major E. Owens of 1/CR wrote, 'There has been nothing less than ten hells knotted into one out here. It's a pity all those chaps out on strike at home could not be bundled out here; it would soon stop the bother.'<sup>489</sup> As mentioned above, 'Disgusted British Soldier' who wrote to the BN in September 1917, called the strikers 'cowardly'.<sup>490</sup> The soldiers' feelings are understandable but, given the totally different disciplinary regimes within which soldiers and civilians lived, comparisons between the home and fighting fronts were not legitimate: both sides faced peculiar challenges and were fighting the war in their way.

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<sup>487</sup> BA 24/3/1915.

<sup>488</sup> BN 20/12/1916 and 29/8/1917.

<sup>489</sup> BN 31/1/1915.

<sup>490</sup> BN 15/9/1915.

Despite the apparent prominence of 1915 as a strike-prone year, Wirral's record of wartime industrial relations broadly corresponds with the national picture and reprises the dictum that generalisation is unhelpful. Local circumstances shaped the occurrence and nature of disputes which happened during unsettled and challenging times, which Lord Askwith himself expended over 500 pages in trying to explain.<sup>491</sup> Wirral's story also corroborates the argument of the national historians that, during the war, the unions gained a greater role in public life: as the above discussion has implied, they received a lot of coverage in the local press, not just because of strikes, but with regard to their role and place within a capitalist economy.

There is also evidence of union consolidation. In August 1917, J. McLellan, Tom Mann and Joseph Cleary addressed members of the Warehouse and General Workers' Union at Birkenhead Park Gates, expounding the virtues of becoming affiliated to the National Transport Workers' Federation and to the TUC. Mann announced that, 'the advance of solidarity must be (our) watchwords.'<sup>492</sup> In August 1919, the EPA described the creation of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters, Joiners and Cabinet Makers, commenting that it was 'a new and changed era' that saw so many Birkenhead tradesmen united in the campaign for a two-shillings per hour pay rise. Interestingly, one of the organisers of the union, John Roberts of Wallasey, received praise in a now familiar format – his work as vice-chairman of the local Labour Party, his dedication to recruiting skilled men for the army and determination always to see both sides of a dispute were lauded and his cry that,

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<sup>491</sup> George Ranken Askwith, First Baron Askwith KCB, KC, Chair of the Government Arbitration Committee, set up by the 1915 Munitions of War Act. See G.R. Askwith, *Industrial Problems and Disputes* (London: John Murray, 1920), especially pp. 362-366, for an attempt at a thorough analysis of the causes of industrial problems.

<sup>492</sup> BN 25/8/1917. Meetings were also held in Liverpool; see LE 14/8/1917 for an advertisement calling on all members to attend.



‘every ounce of effort should be put into the workman’s cause, and always striving that results obtained should be real, and if possible, lasting benefits.’<sup>493</sup>

This section has confirmed that the membership and influence of trades unions increased. Several unions consolidated and strikes and demands for better pay and conditions were frequent at times of inflation. However, the trade unions should not be viewed as radical, as both their leaders and the employers envisioned them as pillars of the capitalist system and as upholders of wartime patriotism. The trades unions also contributed to the story of continuity and not of change between the pre- and post-war worlds.

### **3.6 Ex-Servicemen**

Before focusing upon the labour movement and the ‘rise’ of the Labour Party in Wirral it is necessary to explore the role and experiences of local ex-servicemen during the period 1917-1921. Active ex-servicemen’s organisations of the region cannot strictly be designated as part of the labour movement, as they were neither exclusively working-class nor supporters of the Labour Party, although they had interesting relationships with both. In 2004 Nick Mansfield, whilst discussing ex-servicemen’s organisations in the Marches, suggested that the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers (NFDDSS) – a precursor of the British Legion (BL – founded in 1921) – was something of an enigma and that there was ‘scope for community-based studies to rescue this often contradictory body from obscurity.’ Professor Mansfield observed that the NFDDSS had received brief attention from other historians such as Graham Wootton and Neil Barr, who mentioned it only ‘in passing’ when discussing the rise

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<sup>493</sup> EPA 13/8/1919.

of the BL and that its politics were 'ambiguous'.<sup>494</sup> This section of the thesis is a response to Professor Mansfield's challenge and one which somewhat contradicts his and the other historians' assertion that the NFFDDSS was enigmatic and contradictory. It appears that the Birkenhead and Wirral branches of the NFFDDSS had clear aims and efficient organisation and that its attitudes to politics were obvious and well thought-out. Arguably, it modelled the role that the national organisation was supposed to fulfil.

The NFDDSS emerged during 1917 in response to the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act, which aimed to 'comb out yet more manpower by the army by reviewing the one million men who had previously been passed unfit for service.' It was led by Liberal M.P.s, James Hogge and William Pringle, at its base in London.<sup>495</sup> Its first meeting in Wirral was held at *Saronie's Electric Theatre*, in July 1917. At this point, the ex-servicemen were referred to as 'Silver Badge Men'. Labour Councillors, Vaughan and Egan also attended. The latter urged them to unite with any existing ex-servicemen's groups and to work with the local war pensions committee. Chairman Walter Butler addressed the audience 'in the name of human brotherhood' and 'prayed for complete victory for the empire and their allies' and urged them to 'keep up their patriotism.'<sup>496</sup> By November 1917, its ranks

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<sup>494</sup> N. Mansfield, 'The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Soldiers and Sailors 1917-1921: A View from the Marches', *Family and Community History*, 7(1) (May 2004), pp. 19-31 (p.21). N. Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy: British Veterans, Politics, and Society, 1921-1939* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2005) and G. Wootton, *The Official History of the British Legion* (London: Macdonald and Evans, 1956).

<sup>495</sup> N. Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy*, p.12.

<sup>496</sup> BN 11/7/1917. *Saronie's Electric Theatre* was a cinema belonging to James Roberts Saronie (1872-1967), a photographer and Conservative town councillor who supported the NFDDSS from its inception. 'Silver Badge Men' were ex-servicemen who had been awarded the Silver War Medal in consequence of being discharged due to wounds or ill-health. It was worn on the left breast of civilian clothing to show that its owner was not 'shirking'. Robert Walter Butler (1878-1934) was a schoolteacher and former member of 1/6/KLR, discharged on 8/1/1916, pension index card number 3/MB/18988, accessed via The Western Front Association Website: <https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/pension-records/>.

had been swollen and it held street processions and church parades.<sup>497</sup> By December 1917, it had acquired a recreation room at 70 Argyle Street and requested 'writing materials, books, periodicals, games, a tea-urn and trestle tables'.<sup>498</sup> Other branches were in existence at Ellesmere Port by April 1919, at Hoylake and West Kirby by August 1919, and at Heswall by January 1920.<sup>499</sup> In September 1918, a meeting at Birkenhead YMCA Hall was addressed by James Hogge, who articulated the aims of the NFDDSS:

Asking at the outset, what was the reason for the existence of the NFDDSS, he said one would have thought naturally, that, men having served their country, their country would have served them (hear, hear); that there would have been no adequate reason permitted to exist for these men joining together, breaking down every barrier that previously separated them – the barrier of Liberalism, of Conservatism, of Labour politics, of Socialism, of differences of creed – and coming together on one basis only (hear hear). The fact that this Federation existed was in itself ample testimony to the fact that the State had not yet done what it ought to do in meeting the needs of the discharged man (hear, hear).<sup>500</sup>

Its purpose, was clear – to promote the welfare of ex-servicemen and their families whilst remaining politically neutral. It was a pressure group. As has been shown above, it was patriotic and did not support pacifism, although at a post-war church

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<sup>497</sup> BN 10 and 14/11/1917.

<sup>498</sup> BN 15/12/1917. Such a facility would no doubt remind many ex-soldiers of the YMCA clubs and even *Talbot House* near Ypres, whose comforts they had enjoyed whilst serving in Flanders.

<sup>499</sup> A Mr. P.R. Robertson of the FDDSS ran for election on the Ellesmere Port Town Council and came last with sixteen votes, BN 9/4/1919; the Hoylake and West Kirby branch organised a street parade and flag day, BN 27/8/1919; the Heswall branch organised a smoking concert and hot pot supper for 100 'comrades', BN 31/1/1920.

<sup>500</sup> BN 14/9/1918.

parade in July 1920, members were addressed by Joseph Maland who urged them to support the League of Nations.<sup>501</sup>

In theory at least, there was no ambiguity about the NFDDSS's philosophy and aims. It is likely that confusion and lack of clarity emerged in regions where the leadership interpreted their aims differently or became embroiled in conflict with other ex-servicemen's groups, such as the Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers (ADSS) and the Comrades of the Great War (CGW). Evidence for the existence of the former in Wirral has not been found and the latter appears to have been stronger in the middle-class suburbs, such as Heswall and Little Sutton, and to have concentrated upon commemoration and social gatherings rather than on welfare campaigns.<sup>502</sup>

An important reason why Wirral's NFDDSS remained focused was the professionalism of its leadership. The ex-rifleman and teacher, Walter Butler, has already been mentioned, but the most important local figurehead was the pre-war Liberal activist, Joseph Frederick Lister (1886-1966, later 'Sir') of Birkenhead, who acted as local vice-chairman and national chairman for most of the Federation's existence. Lister was one of the founder members of the BL and its chairman between 1921 and 1927. He had been discharged from the RGA on 6 December

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<sup>501</sup> Walter Butler made this clear in a speech during November 1917, BN 28/11/1917 and 28/7/1920.

<sup>502</sup> The ADSS originated in Blackburn in early 1917 and was led by James Howell; it was sympathetic to the Labour Party, although its relationship with the labour movement was not always positive. The CGW was created at the suggestion of the Earl of Derby (a well-known Conservative politician as well as aristocrat) in 1917; from the start, most of its members were Conservatives and many were officers; it received financial backing from wealthy businesspeople, N. Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy*, pp.11-13. Wirral's branches of the CGW are recorded as having organised concerts and acts of commemoration and to have entered teams in local football and billiard leagues, BN 13/2/1918, 27/3/1920, 16/10/1920, 6/11/1920 and 4/12/1920.

1917 having been wounded by a shell in his forearm.<sup>503</sup> He was a popular leader and clearly very competent, partly due, no doubt, to his experience as Liberal campaigner before the war and as a clerk.<sup>504</sup> Other leaders are mentioned in the local press and their backgrounds have been traced. All were ex-servicemen and most were lower middle-class, the most common occupation being clerk.<sup>505</sup> This is an important point and recalls Geoffrey Crossick's commentary on the role of the middle-class as being 'essential to social peace because it was the middle, the average, the *Moyenne* and 'a buffer between rich and poor', which stood for 'moderation and good sense' and which moderated and stabilised society.<sup>506</sup> Their class status as well as their avowed patriotism and political neutrality negated any suspicion with which the leaders of the NFDDSS might have been viewed by the traditional establishment, while their military and working credentials probably endeared them to working-class ex-servicemen. Two of their leaders were not ex-servicemen: the aforementioned James Roberts Saronie (1872-1967) and Denis Joseph Clarke (1873-1934), both of whom were town councillors (the former Conservative and the latter Liberal) and well-known businessmen in the entertainments industry. Saronie ran a cinema and Clarke the *Argyle Theatre*; both venues were regularly used by the Federation.<sup>507</sup> Such patronage doubtless

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<sup>503</sup> Details obtained from his pension index card No. 3/ML/1991, accessed via The Western Front Association Website: <https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/pension-records/>.

<sup>504</sup> There are numerous descriptions of his speeches and of the way in which the membership supported him, for example in the BN 14/6/1919, when the membership celebrated his re-election to the national committee.

<sup>505</sup> Including the aforementioned Butler and Lister, there were three clerks, a schoolteacher, a commercial traveller, a shipyard timekeeper, a railway stoker and a motor fitter.

<sup>506</sup> G. Crossick, 'Metaphors of the Middle: The Discovery of the Petite Bourgeoisie 1880-1914', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6 (1994) pp. 251-279 (pp. 259, 260 and 277).

<sup>507</sup> H. Dickman, 'The Argyle: Birkenhead's Lost Theatrical Heritage', *Wirral Champion Journal*, 7 (2001 Autumn), pp. 49-51.

raised the profile of the Federation as well as increasing its resources and giving it respectability.<sup>508</sup>

The BN published numerous articles which described the Federation's activities in considerable detail and paint a picture of an extremely active, largely successful organisation which treated the ex-serviceman as a whole human being – as someone who, in addition to welfare advice and advocacy, also needed support, fellowship, leisure and entertainment.<sup>509</sup> He also needed to be able to mourn and to commemorate his fallen comrades and thereby to make the transition from war to peace, from a military life to a civilian one. The Federation made this possible by co-ordinating some significant acts of remembrance in the days before the war memorials and their associated liturgies had been established.<sup>510</sup>

Dave Craddock, by means of his study of the Peace Day Riots in Luton in 1919, has given us the opportunity to compare his hometown with Birkenhead.<sup>511</sup> In Luton the town hall was burned down by ex-servicemen and others who were angry about unemployment and by being excluded from official celebrations. Craddock's detailed analysis of the event shows how, despite there being a national economic crisis which undergirded the discontent, it was a peculiar collection of local circumstances which conspired to provoke disorder. These included the unpopularity of certain town councillors, disputes within the Food

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<sup>508</sup> For example, the BN 29/3/1919 describes both men's roles in the Victory Ball.

<sup>509</sup> Examples of its activities include obtaining fare reductions on the tramways for disabled veterans (BN 3/9/1919), finding work for unemployed men in shipyards and organising a ladies' football match at *Goodison Park* (BN 1/12/1920), taking an active role in the local War Pensions Committee (BN 3/2/1919), organising a pre-Cenotaph remembrance service in Birkenhead in January 1920 (BN 3/1/1920) and hosting well attended and inclusive Victory Balls at the town hall (29/3/1919).

<sup>510</sup> In this regard Bob Bushaway, as will be explained in more detail below, talked about acts of remembrance being 'rights of passage', B. Bushaway, 'Name Upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance' in R. Porter, ed., *Myths of the English* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 136-167 (p.158).

<sup>511</sup> D. Craddock, *'Where they Burnt the Town Hall Down': Luton, The First World War and the Peace Day Riots of July 1919* (Dunstable: The Book Castle, 1999).

Control Committee which reappeared in the Peace Day Committee, rivalry between the two main ex-servicemen's organisations and the banning of the FDDSS's drumhead service in the public park.<sup>512</sup> Birkenhead's Peace Day celebrations proceeded without interruption on Saturday 28 June 1919. There is no evidence of protests of any kind occurring at that time.<sup>513</sup> As a result of the above analysis of the work of Wirral's NFDDSS, the probable reasons for this should now be apparent, as the organisation did not clash with rival bodies, enjoyed a high profile, was able to lead acts of remembrance, was well organised, was accepted by the establishment and, probably most importantly of all, it took ex-servicemen's morale seriously and thereby fomented a relatively high level of contentment and unity amongst a body of people who could easily have become disillusioned and angry. Finally, in relation to the thesis's main argument – it was a moderate organisation which combined the liberal characteristics of commitment to welfare and social justice with the conservative principles of patriotism and militarism. In addition, it was a triumph for lower middle-class leaders, who, by engaging in public voluntary work and promoting good order and philanthropy, showed themselves to be citizens. This was a departure from the pre-war situation, wherein such activity was dominated by the upper middle-class elite, but another example of the fossilisation of traditional attitudes towards patriotism, social hierarchy and Christianity.

### **3.7 Labour Activism**

Wirral's labour movement was introduced in Chapter One, where it was shown that socialism was widely mistrusted and that local left-wing groups received

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<sup>512</sup> D. Craddock, *'Where they Burnt the Town Hall Down'*, pp. 42-43 and 133-139.

<sup>513</sup> BN 6/8/1919.

relatively little support before 1914. In March 1919, Labour won all but one of the five seats on Ellesmere Port Town Council and in November, it gained five seats on Birkenhead Town Council; with a total of fifteen seats, it was now the second largest group after the Conservatives, who had twenty-eight seats; there were eleven Liberals and two Co-operators.<sup>514</sup> In Wallasey, Labour contested four of the seven wards and won one seat on the Town Council.<sup>515</sup> Wirral's other district councils were run entirely by independents. At the parliamentary level, during the 1918 'Coupon Election', Labour won 26.7 per cent of the vote in Birkenhead West and thirty-one per cent in Birkenhead East, coming second in both constituencies. Clearly, Labour had made progress by 1919, but more so at the municipal than at the national level.<sup>516</sup>

There are two opposing interpretations about Labour's post-war rise. The first was argued by J.A. Kay et. al. to be 'The Franchise Factor' and the second was proposed by Duncan Tanner to be a result of grassroots developments in the districts where the party campaigned.<sup>517</sup> Both sets of scholars suggested that local studies could throw light on the issue; the data from Wirral contributes to the debate. The 'Franchise' Factor argument suggests that increased numbers of voters brought about by the 1918 Representation of the People Act benefitted the Labour Party, as more urban working-class males were enfranchised. They point out that in 1911, 65.6 per cent of English and Welsh Males were able to vote and that after the Act, the proportion was 94.9 per cent.<sup>518</sup> Unfortunately, due to the

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<sup>514</sup> EPA 23/4/1919 and S. Davies and B. Morley, *County Borough Elections 1919-1938: a Comparative Analysis, Volume 1* (London: Routledge, 2016), unpaginated e-book. BN 9/4/1919.

<sup>515</sup> LE 1/11/1919.

<sup>516</sup> See Appendix Six for a full summary of all local parliamentary election results.

<sup>517</sup> J.A. Kay, H.C.G. Matthew and R.I. McKibbin, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', *English Historical Review* 91 (1976), pp. 723-752 and D. Tanner, 'Elections, Statistics and the Rise of the Labour Party', *The Historical Journal*, 34 (1991), pp. 893-908.

<sup>518</sup> J.A. Kay et. al., 'The Franchise Factor', pp. 728-730.



wholesale redrawing of Wirral's electoral boundaries prior to the 'Coupon Election', it is impossible to make definite judgements on the effects of increased enfranchisement on Birkenhead's elections, although it is highly likely that it was a factor in Labour's rise.<sup>519</sup> The creation of two Birkenhead constituencies, giving Labour a greater chance of being elected in the more working-class west of the town must also have been a factor. However, local data suggests that Tanner's grassroots argument has more merit. He argued that:

As a result of research on municipal politics, it is now frequently argued that beneath the compliant contained Labour parliamentary campaigns lurked a municipal monster, whose tentacles reached across the country. The Edwardian Liberal Party, it is suggested, was being strangled and devoured at its roots.<sup>520</sup>

The abovementioned Labour successes in Birkenhead and Ellesmere Port, which knocked the Liberals into third place, support Tanner's point; it was Labour's wartime activism which enabled its electoral progress.

The Birkenhead TLC was regarded by its sister organisation in Liverpool as being moderate.<sup>521</sup> It might have been moderate in an ideological sense, but, just like its counterparts in other Wirral districts, it was not inactive. Its members were involved in campaigns for reform and in welfare work, inspiring more local support in the immediate post-war years. Labour also benefitted from good leadership in a similar way to that which was true for the NFDDSS. Councillor William Henry Egan

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<sup>519</sup> Birkenhead was split into two constituencies – East and West and the new constituency of Wallasey was created. There was no Labour candidate in Wirral constituency. See Appendix Six for full details.

<sup>520</sup> D. Tanner, 'Elections, Statistics and the Rise of the Labour Party', p.894.

<sup>521</sup> D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p141 fn.

(1869-1943) was the most important contemporary left-wing figurehead in Wirral. He was born in Birkenhead, the son of impoverished Irish parents and later worked as a boilermaker at Cammell Laird's; he served twice as Labour M.P. for Birkenhead West and twice as Mayor of Birkenhead.<sup>522</sup> During the Great War, Egan was chairman of the Birkenhead TLC. In this role he represented working people's interests to the Borough Council and was a voice for reform, especially with regard to practical welfare issues such as housing, food distribution and wages. As shown above, he was present at the foundation of the Birkenhead and Wirral branch of FDDSS in July 1917 and secured a minimum wage for council employees, basic rights for tenants and care for soldiers' families; he worked for the Birkenhead Military Tribunal and represented individual servicemen in difficulty.<sup>523</sup>

Egan appears briefly several times in the records of the War Emergency Workers' National Committee held at the People's History Museum in Manchester.<sup>524</sup> In March 1917, he wrote to head office asking for help for the families of three soldiers who had died whilst in uniform but not on active service and in November of that year he highlighted the case of a Birkenhead sailor, called James Robinson, whose vessel, SS *Flamenco*, had been sunk and who had been forced to join the army. In support of his claim, Egan said that Robinson's father was a member of the Plumbers' Society. The way in which Egan's achievements were celebrated, both in his election manifesto of November 1918 and his obituary in 1943 partially corroborates Ross McKibbin's observation that, 'the aims of the trades councils were always primarily industrial and they frequently behaved as if

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<sup>522</sup> MP 1923-1924 and 1929-1931; Mayor of Birkenhead 1939-1940 and 1941-1942.

<sup>523</sup> EPA 11/7/1917, BN 7/12/1918 and LE 11/9/1943.

<sup>524</sup> See Harrison, 'The War Emergency Workers' National Committee' in Briggs and Saville, *Essays in Labour History*, (1971), pp. 211-259.

politics were an irritating distraction from the real business'; but Egan's following words reveal his possession of a shrewd political eye as well as a philanthropic one: 'The coming electoral reform act will give Birkenhead two members and we are proposing to go for the new seat. We are building well here, and want to add this pension scalp to our belt if it can be done.'<sup>525</sup> As Duncan Tanner said, 'Substantial campaigning produced results as supporters came out in greater numbers.'<sup>526</sup>

The EPA dedicated more of its column inches to labour matters than did the Birkenhead papers. This either reflects the interests of the newspaper's staff (in contradiction of its Conservative loyalty) or the relative prominence of such issues in the newer, smaller but heavily industrialised town of Ellesmere Port. Many of the articles contain verbatim reports of Labour leaders' speeches, giving insights into the ideology and activities of the TLC. In October 1915, at an extraordinary meeting of the TLC, Treasurer J. Pearson spoke out against indifference and apathy in the local labour movement, declaring that:

He was ashamed of the indifference shown by the working classes of the district to the movement of labour and hoped that they would all cling tenaciously to the council while the war was on. He had noticed how the work had devolved upon a few whilst others, under the pretext of having other business on, had been spending their time on the bowling greens.

That was not the way to work for the success of the labour movement.<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>525</sup> R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party*, p. 33; PHMA: WNC/33/1/54 and WNC 2/5/20/1.

<sup>526</sup> D. Tanner, 'Elections, Statistics and the Rise of the Labour Party', p.895, where he cited the example of Norwich, where Labour gained three council seats between 1906 and 1913.

<sup>527</sup> EPA 27/10/1915.

In March 1915, Tom Robinson, organising agent of the Riverside Dock Labourers and General Labourers Union and member of the TLC, denounced the council's relief committee: 'They were supposed to assist in preventing distress, but they seemed to work along the lines of how little they could give rather than make the lives happy of wives and children of the men who had gone to the front.' He complained of how non-Labour councillors had treated the TLC representatives with 'contemptible snobbery'; he accused independent councillors of being 'little Liberals and little Tories' and announced that 'Labour was the first group to introduce politics into the council.'<sup>528</sup>

As local industries expanded due to wartime demand, so union membership increased and the Ellesmere Port TLC grew. By April 1918, it had over 2000 members – equivalent to ninety per cent of the district's workforce.<sup>529</sup> Its biggest ever meeting was held on 1 October 1919, when members expressed their determination to elect a Labour MP for Wirral (there was no Labour candidate in 1918):

The time was riper today for a Labour government than ever it had been in the past. The only salvation for the working classes, for a decent wage and decent homes, was by direct Labour Representation in the Houses of Parliament'.<sup>530</sup>

The dream was not, however, achieved until 1983.<sup>531</sup> Labour's success on Ellesmere Port's Town Council can, in addition to the wartime activism of its

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<sup>528</sup> EPA 17/3/1915.

<sup>529</sup> EPA 24/4/1918.

<sup>530</sup> EPA 8/10/1919.

<sup>531</sup> Walter Citrine reflected on this phenomenon in his autobiography: 'I didn't realise then as clearly as I do now that trade unionism and political activity, whether on the local or national plane, were

supporters, be attributed to the homogeneity of the community, insofar as most people were working-class employees of local manufacturing firms. Many people had recently arrived from other districts, especially Staffordshire as a result of the ironworks' relocation from Wolverhampton.<sup>532</sup> Indeed, of the four named activists on the TLC who have been traced, three – John Henry Hope, Tom Perceval and Alfred Trawford – were born in Staffordshire and employed by the ironworks.<sup>533</sup> Perhaps their common origins and occupations engendered a sense of solidarity which translated into teamwork and enthusiasm for left-wing politics.

The newspapers contain a good deal of helpful analysis. The Liberal BN reflected on the way ahead and tried, in the spirit of Gladstone, to be even-handed and rational about Liberal defeats in the local elections, which must have been difficult to accept. In a fascinating editorial, the paper said:

A very widespread feeling is represented by the current remark – 'throw responsibility upon them.' One idea put forward is that the other two parties should coalesce against Labour, in the interests of wise and safe government. We have no hesitation in saying that we feel any movement such as the latter would in the end prove a very serious mistake. For one thing, we are strongly opposed to Liberalism sinking its individuality. It may be under a cloud municipally at present, but Liberal principles must remain at the foundation of the government of this country, nationally and municipally. After all, the Labour party's social and domestic programme at

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complementary to each other and that each had its separate sphere, working in close co-operation with the other', *Men and Work*, p.63.

<sup>532</sup> See Page pp. 69-70 above.

<sup>533</sup> Information gained from the decennial censuses TNA and Ancestry.co.uk.

the present time is largely drawn from reforms that the Liberal party have long advocated.<sup>534</sup>

On the same page, there is a report of a Labour Party meeting at which W.H. Egan echoed the above sentiments by saying that the new Labour Councillors were 'prepared to take their share of responsibility (applause)' and that he foresaw Labour gaining control of the council in the next election (in 1920).<sup>535</sup>

The next edition of the BN published an interesting letter from an anonymous 'esteemed correspondent with full knowledge of matters municipal and political with Birkenhead'. He said that he had watched the electors in the Argyle Ward 'from morning 'til night' and noticed that 'men and women of pronouncedly Orange opinion, who have invariably voted Conservative in previous elections went solidly for Labour on this occasion.' He compared Argyle Ward with others with far fewer Orangemen and noticed that they stayed Conservative. His next point, however, was his most revealing and one which supports the so-called 'war argument' mentioned by the aforementioned Labour historians.<sup>536</sup> The commentator argued that:

Throughout the war, political bias was completely set aside as far as the two older political organisations were concerned [...] The machinery was allowed to rust on both sides, whilst the Labour party were quietly working, organising and educating their followers. [...] The last three years have brought about a radical change [...] No longer do they enthuse over 'red' or

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<sup>534</sup> BN 8/11/1919.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid.

<sup>536</sup> J.A. Kay et.al., 'The Franchise Factor', p.723, in which it is argued that 'it has never been satisfactorily demonstrated'. Perhaps this evidence takes us one step nearer to its verification.

'blue'. They want such tags dropped and the best men that can be found, irrespective of party, to guide our local affairs.<sup>537</sup>

It is now apparent, based on the above analysis of Wirral evidence about the post-war rise of Labour, that, even though the 'Franchise Factor' argument cannot be discounted, the stronger argument would appear to be the one made by Tanner, which emphasises the wartime roles of grassroots politicians and activists such as Birkenhead's W.H. Egan and the Ellesmere Port trades unionists and TLC leaders.

Davies and Morley stated that Labour's rise in Birkenhead was 'meteoric'.<sup>538</sup> As has been shown, this was also the case in Ellesmere Port. However, the same epithet cannot be applied to its fortunes in the whole of Wirral. There were no Labour MPs (even though three candidates had come second, beating the Liberals into third place in each constituency), only one Labour councillor in Wallasey and none in the other district councils. In 1922, in common with many other English boroughs, Labour lost many of its seats (seven in Birkenhead).<sup>539</sup>

At the parliamentary level, Birkenhead East did not get a Labour M.P. until 1945 and Birkenhead West until 1923, when Egan was elected with 55.8% of the vote. The new constituency of Wallasey returned a Conservative M.P. in 1918; Labour's Walter Citrine came second with 16.6% of the vote. He recalled the event as follows:

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<sup>537</sup> BN 12/11/1919. This explanation for Labour's rise is the same one as is made about Labour's success in 1945 – that wartime co-operation and collectivism and the activities of Labour ministers had made the party more attractive to the electorate. See R. Pearce, *Attlee's Labour Governments 1945-1951* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.9-17.

<sup>538</sup> S. Davies and B. Morley, *County Borough Elections 1919-1938*, unpaginated e-book.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.* See C. Howard, 'Expectations Born to Death: Local Labour Party Expansion in the 1920s', in J.M. Winter, ed., *The Working Class in Modern British History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 65-81.

I knew from the beginning that it would require a miracle for me to win such a notoriously Conservative seat as Wallasey, but I had heard that sometimes miracles do happen. The enthusiasm of my workers and supporters was infectious [But] There was little hope for us poor novices.<sup>540</sup>

Wallasey did not get a Labour M.P. until 1992. Wirral did not even get a Labour candidate until 1923 and, in 1931, Labour came second for the first time with 18.5% of the vote.<sup>541</sup> Wirral's representative character is evident here – it contained a cross-section of British society and, therefore, an insufficient preponderance of working-class people to enable Labour success at the parliamentary level. This was unlike more uniformly industrialised districts which have been analysed by other scholars, such as Wednesbury, where Paul Fantom has described the rise of Labour. He argued that working-class Tories changed their allegiances due to industrial disputes and wartime experiences, leading to the election of the town's first Labour MP in 1918:

Industrial action during 1913 and 1917 caused many in the working-class to re-evaluate their position and the war's emphasis on equality of sacrifice tested assumptions about the fitness to govern of the established political class.<sup>542</sup>

These words are probably also true for the portions of Wirral's electorate who lived in urban and industrialised areas such as Ellesmere Port, but not for the majority of the area's inhabitants due to the range of social classes who dwelled there.

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<sup>540</sup> W. Citrine *Men and Work*, p.64.

<sup>541</sup> See Appendix Six for full details.

<sup>542</sup> P.A. Fantom, *Community, Patriotism and the Working Class in the First World War: The Home Front in Wednesbury, 1914-1918*, Unpublished PhD. Thesis, (University of Birmingham, 2015), p. 255.



However, it is clear that where the Labour Party was successful in Wirral, it was partly due to effective leadership and organisation and that the wartime work of councillors in Birkenhead and TLC members in Ellesmere Port had shown many electors that Labour politicians could be trusted with power and, if given the responsibility, would likely improve the quality of their lives. Some have described Labour's apparent rise at this point as 'meteoric'. This might have been true for Birkenhead and Ellesmere Port, but was not for Wirral as a whole. It was also short lived, as a great many council seats were lost in 1922 and not recovered until 1926. No Labour M.P. was elected anywhere in Wirral until 1923. The above analysis adds further weight to the argument that, whilst it did bring about changes, the Great War did not precipitate a social and political revolution.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that, as stated in Chapter One, Wirral was home to a representative cross-section of the population of the United Kingdom, but that, despite the large numbers of working-class people living on the peninsula, there was probably a higher proportion of lower middle-class people than in the population as a whole. It is difficult accurately to generalise about how the war affected working-class people and a number of individual cases was explored in order to demonstrate the point. In line with Chapter Two's conclusions about the relationship between the home and fighting fronts, it has been shown that the same phenomenon is noticeable in working-class military service: many men performed their civilian trades whilst in uniform and took them up again after demobilisation, sometimes better qualified in their fields. The boundaries between the civilian and military worlds were blurred, reinforcing a sense of class solidarity.

With regard to working-class patriotism, the Wirral picture very much confirms current historiography which emphasises its importance in British society. It has been shown that, although working people could at times be militant, they rarely expressed anti-war or unpatriotic sentiments. Strikes often resulted from unresolved pre-war problems being brought to a head by wartime challenges, such as inflation and over-work, a good example of which is the abovementioned gravediggers' dispute.

It is known that, due to industrial expansion and the resulting growth of the labour force, trade union membership increased during the war years. Evidence for this can be seen in Wirral, as can the growing influence of trades unions on the local economy and society. However, trades unions were seen to fulfil a vital role within the capitalist system, as a way of managing the labour force and enabling negotiations, which essentially kept the workers in their place and the class system intact. There is also evidence in Wirral of the consolidation of unions and of the growth of TLCs. The latter concentrated upon representing the interests of the working-class, serving on local welfare committees, encouraging recruitment and campaigning for a fairer society. Attention has been given to ex-servicemen's organisations, particularly the NFDDSS which had a high profile in Wirral. It was not explicitly a part of the labour movement, but its activities were important for the working class. It was argued that its success in Wirral helped to sustain working-class morale and thereby prevent the kind of extreme protest which occurred in Luton and other places. The rise of labour was not meteoric, but it was steady, such that, by 1919, Labour candidates had come second in three of Wirral's four parliamentary constituencies and Labour had taken over Ellesmere Port Urban District Council and increased its representation on Birkenhead and Wallasey

Borough Councils. Individuals such as W.H. Egan had demonstrated their essential decency, trustworthiness and energy. Labour's rise in Ellesmere Port is particularly noticeable and probably results from the fact that it was a highly industrialised new town with a large proportion of people who had come together from Wolverhampton to work in the ironworks and had a sense of identity and solidarity.

Regarding the five points from the consensus surrounding the history of working-class during the Great War: firstly, by focusing on a smaller region within the United Kingdom and by studying small-scale examples such as local organisations, events and individuals, a sensitivity to society's diversity has been maintained. Secondly, working-class patriotism has been exemplified. Thirdly, the growth and consolidation of the trades unions has been corroborated with facts from Wirral. Fourthly, the rise of the Labour Party has been demonstrated; but, fifthly, it is clear that a revolution did not occur. Labour had done well by 1919, but it had not taken over and the capitalist economy and the class system were still in place. The argument that the Great War did not precipitate enormous social and political change has been sustained.

## **CHAPTER 4: Women, Citizenship and Patriotism in Great War Wirral**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In 2013 Alison Fell described the way in which gender had appeared in traditional Great War scholarship:

In terms of gender roles, the War Story goes like this. War is a man's affair. Women stoically keep the home fires burning and/or nurture the nation's future populace in their role as mothers. Men, courageous and aggressive, leave to fight the enemy in order to protect their women and children. The importance and persistence of the War Story has not only produced gender stereotypes that have been reproduced with slight variations across the centuries (and which have shaped individuals' behaviours and attitudes to a greater or lesser degree), but has also had a profound influence on scholarship.<sup>543</sup>

This chapter uses data from Wirral in order to challenge the above 'War Story'. It explores the roles, contributions and experiences of women in Wirral during the Great War in order to produce a nuanced analysis.

This section introduces the topic by means of three contemporary advertisements (Figures 10, 11 and 12) which graphically express contemporary views about the role and image of women as wives and mothers. The rest of the chapter, in five sections, compares these visions with data from the primary sources in order to see whether that monolithic and traditional view of female roles was adhered to.

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<sup>543</sup> A. Fell, 'Gendering the War Story', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 1(1) (2007), pp.53-58 (p.53).

By this means, the central question about whether the Great War had a radical or a reactionary influence on local society will continue to be addressed.

In Section 4.2, as a caution against generalisation, the wartime letters of the McGuire family of Wallasey are analysed and the complexity both of local society and of individual reactions to events and developments further explored. Section 5.3 discusses contemporary ideas about femininity and the traditional roles of motherhood, wifeliness and girlhood at which women were expected to excel. It will be shown how these roles were believed to be essential for the local and (by implication national) war effort. Section 5.4 reviews women's continuing involvement in public service. Partly because the most active women belonged to the upper-middle-class elite, it will be shown to have been a continuation of pre-war trends and therefore an example of continuity, not of change. Section 5.5 takes the discussion further by exploring the importance of heroines. Section 5.6 surveys the employment of women in local industries and argues that, even though this was a significant change for local society, from the start, women envisioned it to be a temporary measure, which would be reversed when the men returned. Section 5.7 concludes the discussion by evaluating the degree to which change had really taken place.

Figure 10 is an advertisement for Sunlight Soap, manufactured by Lever Bros.. It is one of many produced by the firm and published in British regional newspapers throughout the Great War. It contains clear images with carefully composed text. There are no witty aphorisms or wordplay, rather a solemn reflection on the importance of motherhood during wartime, supported by a quote from a Labour politician, and an implication that Sunlight Soap both supports traditional values

and enables mothers to do the best for their families. The advertisement has a lot in common with wartime propaganda.<sup>544</sup> The woman is shown doing the laundry at home while two boys play at soldiers outside and reference is made to 'our gallant Soldiers and Sailors', whom, by implication, the woman is supporting by doing her domestic chores and using Levers' products. The quote by Labour M.P. Will Crooks (1852-1921), a strong advocate of working-class patriotism, provides a striking link with Chapter Three which dealt with that topic.<sup>545</sup>

The second advertisement (Figure 11) shows a friendly soldier explaining his rifle to the housewife and making a play on the word 'foresight'. Military and civilian entities are combined and men and women's distinctive roles delineated, implying that, when women were not doing the housework, they were passive observers of men's military activities. The third advertisement (Figure 12) appeared in 1919 and refers to the 'light' created by Levers' soap powder, entering the woman's world. A delicate female figure is being advised by a male shopkeeper in front of an image of the globe. Again, there are propagandistic undertones, as 'light' might refer to the recent allied victory and the globe, with its images of women and children hanging out the washing, recalls the British Empire and the way in which it has been saved by women performing their traditional roles as housewives and

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<sup>544</sup> See D. Pope, 'The Advertising Industry and World War One', *The Public Historian*, 2 (1980), pp. 4-25; and D. Clampin, *Commercial Advertising as Propaganda in World War*: <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/commercial-advertising-as-propaganda> [Accessed 7/10/2019].

<sup>545</sup> P. Tyler, *Labour's Lost Leader: The Life and Politics of Will Crooks* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). Crooks was also an advocate of eugenics. Amongst the Earl of Derby's Dock Battalion Papers there exists a clipping from *The Mersey Workers' Magazine*, of June 1915, which contains a poem called *The Mother*; it describes the mother thinking about her son serving overseas and finishes with the words. 'She breathes the prayer that once he lisped beside her – Father thy will be done.' Liverpool Archives 920 DER (17) 3/2.

mothers.<sup>546</sup> The image also exemplifies the language of moral and physical cleanliness in contemporary propaganda.<sup>547</sup>

Although it is not known whether the advertisements were personally approved by the company's founder, W.H. Lever (from 1915, Viscount Leverhulme), they clearly contain imagery of which he would certainly have approved – clean and dutiful women at home and cheerful male warriors outside, creating a harmony which ensured victory and the preservation of empire. Lever's importance in the economic development of Wirral and as a community leader and figurehead have been referred to in previous chapters. He was Wirral's *de facto* aristocrat and lord of the manor – what he believed in and advocated was of no little importance to the people of the region. Perhaps, for the people of Wirral the advertisement's association with the great man gave weight to its message. Even though common sense tells us that the images on the advertisements cannot possibly represent the roles of all of Wirral's women, they act as starting points for a journey through the primary sources in pursuit of a nuanced understanding of contemporary beliefs about the roles and status of women and how these were affected by the Great War.

#### **4.2 Women through the Eyes of the McGuire Family**

The inner thoughts and feelings of all classes of people during every era are difficult to discover, but those of women and girls of non-elite backgrounds are especially elusive. In the case of Wirral during the early twentieth century, the

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<sup>546</sup> J.M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985) pp. 25-6 for a discussion of the role of advertising in the promotion of imperialism.

<sup>547</sup> L. Mugglestone, 'Next to Godliness: Exploring Cleanliness in Peace and War', *History of European Ideas* 45 (2019), pp. 332-337.

search for women's stories has been rendered slightly more achievable by the survival of a collection of letters written by three women of the McGuire family of Wallasey.<sup>548</sup> The McGuires were typical middle-class Wallaseyians. Their first home was in Mossley Hill, but, by 1911, they were living in a ten-roomed house with one servant in Liscard. Their father, James, was a retired registrar and Ada was a headteacher in a council school.<sup>549</sup> As such, they possessed a good deal of local knowledge. The women's missives provide insights into wartime life from a female perspective. Several themes are discussed here.

Firstly, even though the women found the war to be horrifying, depressing and destructive, they also found it interesting and exciting. Hannah in particular confessed that she was fascinated by it and frequently gave long accounts of recent global developments and judgements on how the war was going for the allies, even commenting on the role of Japan and developments in the Far East. In May 1915 she mentioned 'our brave Canadians', who filled the gap after the German gas attack at Ypres on 22 April that year.<sup>550</sup> Her comment is evidence for the way in which the war stirred up the imperial enthusiasm, which, perhaps, until that point had been lying dormant in the hearts of many locals and is corroborated by Ada when, in August 1915, she said, 'We are tremendously eager to show how loyal we are. We all think imperially now.'<sup>551</sup> There is no doubt then that women

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<sup>548</sup> The letters were found in a loft in a house in California and donated to the IWM (catalogue number 96/31/1). See Appendix Nine for notes on the McGuire family and their letters.

<sup>549</sup> 1911 Census: Registration District 452, Registration Sub District 3, Enumeration District 16, Schedule 282. Only ten years earlier she was a 'pupil teacher' in a board school. Ada was trained at the North Wales Training College in Bangor; her schools were Manor Road Council School (1905-1907 and 1916-1931), St. Mary's CE School (1907-1916) and Poulton Council School 1931-?) all in Wallasey.

<sup>550</sup> Hannah to Eva, 'Sunday Evening' May 1915. Four months later, the McGuire women would have a personal connection to the Canadian Army when Hannah's son Edgar Harcourt McGuire (1884-1966), who had emigrated sometime earlier, joined the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force and went on to fight in France the following year. See Appendix Nine.

<sup>551</sup> Ada to Eva 31/8/1915.



thought about the empire and saw the war as having an imperial dimension, partly supporting the implied sentiment evident in Figure 12.

Three months later, after complaining about the unseasonable weather, Hannah opined that, 'all that shooting half over the world has affected the atmosphere' and asked, 'What do you think of the Welsh miners going on strike for paltry, selfish considerations and the country at stake!' She finished with the words, 'Well I will conclude my lecture on the war.'<sup>552</sup> Ada was equally forthright. In May 1915, she explained how the war had resulted from people breaking 'God's laws' and expressed contempt for the *Daily Mail* because it was 'criticising the government' and said that the paper:

[...] does a lot of harm. Liberty of opinion is all very well, but when it develops into licence it is an evil. The working man of course echoes its opinions. It seems as if military government is the best thing in war time. It certainly makes for unity. I think our Govt has done splendidly, though I never had a good word to say for Lloyd George before – but in France and Germany the public do not criticise the Govt because it is a military government and the people do as they are told.<sup>553</sup>

Ada also shared details about her and other women's war work. During August 1914, she reported that 'Mrs Hughes has been making parcels for the POWs in Germany' and in November, she said that she was not going to celebrate Christmas because she had been 'collecting things for the soldiers instead. I sent off a big box of leather bootlaces and am now collecting chocolate for them and

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<sup>552</sup> Hannah to Eva 31/8/1915.

<sup>553</sup> Ada to Eva 9/5/1915. For the context see J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict 1915-1918* (London: Yale University Press, 1992).

the children and knitting mittens.<sup>554</sup> Ada's charitable activities were mentioned in Chapter Three and, in December 1915, she said that she had just 'come home from the care committee.'<sup>555</sup> During the following August, she said that she was 'busy knitting woollen helmets for the soldiers but of course have not time to do as much as many.'<sup>556</sup> She expressed her motivation for doing such work with the words, 'I wish I was a man. I would be off if it were possible for me to go.'<sup>557</sup> Although he was referring to Australian women, Scates's comments on this kind of activity are relevant:

War work was much more than a tiresome tally of socks, balaclavas and pyjamas. Enormous emotional labour was invested in even the most prosaic commodities. [...] It was a chance to do something practical' in order to feel connected to relatives overseas.<sup>558</sup>

The point was also made by Janet Watson, who argued that women 'adopted' soldiers on the front or in German captivity, thereby effectively absorbing them into their extended families and extending their 'private responsibility into social work.'<sup>559</sup> This phenomenon will be discussed in greater depth below.

Unsurprisingly, Ada wrote a lot about tragedy and bereavement, supplying moving details about the sufferings of neighbouring women. In December 1915 she reported that:

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<sup>554</sup> Ada to Eva 22/11/1914.

<sup>555</sup> Ada to Eva 2/12/1915.

<sup>556</sup> Ada to Eva 31/8/1915.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid.

<sup>558</sup> B. Scates, 'The Unknown Sock Knitter: Voluntary Work, Emotional Labour, Bereavement and the Great War', *Labour History*, 81 (2001), pp. 29-49. He explained how the individual sock knitter conformed to the image of the 'lady bountiful' and how groups of knitters became 'a noble sisterhood' and 'adoptive kin' to the soldiers overseas.

<sup>559</sup> J.S.K. Watson, 'Khaki Girls VADs, and Tommy's Sisters: Gender and Class in First World War Britain', *The International History Review*, 19 (1997), pp. 32-51, pp.36-37.

there are quite a lot of widows about. Some are quite young. One girl I saw in widow's weeds was certainly no more than 20. Harveys of Sefton Park have had their two sons killed and someone else has lost three sons.'<sup>560</sup>

Other stories remind us of the complexity of local society and reveal how women's sufferings did not always result from the death of loved ones at the front, but from war's economic and social disruptions. In May 1915, she reported on the tragic death of Mrs Wachhorst (Gladys Evelyn, née Marsh, 1878-1915) of Gerrard Road in Wallasey. Her husband, Otto Hermann Wachhorst (1868-1915) was a German whose business was wiped out after the outbreak of war and who died of consumption. The couple had let their house to Belgian refugees. Ada said, 'They were a devoted couple and poor thing, last week she took laudanum and died. Dr Barker was called in and under the pillow he found a photo of her husband. She was only 36.'<sup>561</sup>

The above story appeared immediately after Ada's observations on Merseyside's anti-German riots of May 1915 and is evidence for her mixed feelings as her identification with the rioters' anger clashed with her sympathy for innocent Germans like Otto Wachhorst and his widow. Ada admired the crowd's energy and desire for vengeance against the 'German brutes', who had sunk the *Lusitania*:

The Scotland Road women I believe were just like the women of the French Revolution. So I was told by an eyewitness. They came from the seafaring quarters. [...] They boarded a car after a German who had escaped them. I

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<sup>560</sup> Ada to Eva 2/12/1915.

<sup>561</sup> Ada to Eva 11/5/1915. The story was also reported by the WN of 28/4/1915, which said: 'An overdose of laudanum: A Woman's comfortless grief over the loss of her husband, followed by constant visits to his graveside and sleepless nights which led to the taking of drugs was the pathetic story told.'

believe it would have gone badly with him if they had caught him. But it is horrible. Of course they will be punished, But I think we all feel the same only we are more restrained.<sup>562</sup>

The immorality of wreaking vengeance on peaceful fellow citizens (some of whom were not even German, but either immigrants from other parts of Europe or merely indigenous pork butchers) did not concern Ada (perhaps because she did not know).<sup>563</sup> But more importantly, her feelings can be seen as symptoms of her desire, and that of other women, to be more physically involved in the war. To this extent, the image in Figure 11 of the passive and domesticated woman listening intently to the jolly warrior as he explains the intricacies of his rifle, represents a superficial reality and widely held ideal, but not the truth about what a lot of women were feeling.

Indeed, the BN reported that, during the riots in Birkenhead, it was the women who showed the most aggression, in one case by smashing down a door and taking a sword off the householder who attempted to defend himself. It was also noticed that women seemed to have concocted a plan of attack and to have ensured that the crowds followed their instructions.<sup>564</sup> Ada McGuire was never going to behave in that way because she was more 'restrained', but the way in which these 'bull

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<sup>562</sup> Ada to Eva 11/5/1915. See M. Reeve, "'The Darkest Town in England": Patriotism and Anti-German Sentiment in Hull, 1914-1919', *International Journal of Regional and Local History* 12(1) (2017), pp 42-63 for analysis of Hull's anti-German riots, which were also stirred up by the sinking of the *Lusitania*, but made even more vitriolic by German naval attacks and Zeppelin raids.

<sup>563</sup> P. O'Mara, *Autobiography of a Liverpool Slummy* (Reprinted Liverpool: Bluecoat Press, 2009) pp. 203-210, especially p.209, where he says, 'If Germany had torpedoed the *Lusitania*, we certainly torpedoed everything German in our immediate vicinity – certainly all the pork butchers' shops.' See P. Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain During the First World War* (Oxford: Berg, 1991), and *Prisoners of Britain: German, Civilian and Combatant Internees During the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>564</sup> BN 12/5/1915.

dog' behaviours resonated with her own feelings of anger and frustration at not being able to do as much as men in the war are apparent.

The McGuire letters expose some of the complexities of local society and the whirl of emotions experienced by women on the home front – everything from anger, frustration, grief, weariness and depression to excitement, fascination and spiritual contemplation. By expressing their feelings, the McGuire women also provide insights into the equally diverse, experiences and activities of some of their female neighbours. It is clear (unsurprisingly) that the images in the advertisements do not represent the range of roles fulfilled, emotions experienced or behaviours demonstrated by women during the Great War. In the ensuing sections the McGuire letters and a range of other sources will be used in order more fully to explore the true nature of women's lives in wartime Wirral.

### **4.3 Mothers, Girls and Wives**

Women were officially admired and even celebrated when they performed traditional roles well. The first of these, of course, was, motherhood (and by implication grandmother-hood and matriarchy in general).<sup>565</sup> It was one way in which working-class women could receive favourable public attention. A striking example dates from March 1915, when a Mrs Miller of Birkenhead's profoundly working-class North End, was celebrated in the BN for giving birth to triplets. Her

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<sup>565</sup> See S.R. Grayzel, *Gender Motherhood and Politics in Britain and France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp.86-120; M. Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 101-102 and 167-170 and D. Thom, *Nice Girls, and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War 1* (London: Taurus, 1998), pp. 164-186.

thanks to the 'ladies and gentlemen' who had helped her is significant (Figure 13).<sup>566</sup>

In the same year a Wallasey woman, Elizabeth Hockenhull (1834-1922) was celebrated for having achieved her eighty-first year. The WN referred to her as 'an interesting personality', who lived at 'The Farm' on Limekiln Lane; she had come to the area sixty-five years previously, been widowed at forty-four and been blessed with forty-seven grandchildren and twenty-one great grandchildren.<sup>567</sup>

Both women were viewed as being virtuous due to having nurtured, large families. They were paragons of matriarchy and citizenship and, as implied by Mrs Miller's thanks to the ladies and gentlemen, they also knew their place.

When war began, in order to build solidarity and to recruit men for the armed forces, local society drew on its reverence for motherhood and combined it with its belief in sacrifice. Newspapers celebrated the heroic families who had surrendered multiple members to the armed forces. Figure 14 shows a typical example of an exemplary mother, whose story upheld the desired matriarchal virtues. Other examples include Mrs Price of Shropshire Row, Ellesmere Port who had seven named relatives in the army,<sup>568</sup> Mrs Cheetham of Cambridge Road, Ellesmere Port, who had seven relatives, including three sons, in the army, one of whom was only eighteen and had been taken prisoner within a month of arriving at the front.<sup>569</sup> These families and thousands of others in Wirral, must have experienced many more much less pleasant emotions than pride – dread, anxiety and grief

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<sup>566</sup> BN 6/3/1915. Mrs Miller was Annie Mabel (née Boundy, 1877-1947), who was married to Isaac Miller (1875-1942); the article fails to comment on the most remarkable thing about the family – that they already had six children.

<sup>567</sup> WN 8/5/1915.

<sup>568</sup> EPA 20/10/1915.

<sup>569</sup> EPA 8/9/1915.

being amongst the most common and the most painful, but such feelings were superficially subsumed by the emphasis of patriotism and traditional views about motherhood and sacrifice.

Women were expected to accept their losses selflessly. In Michael Roper's words, it was mothers who managed 'the networks' between the 'home and battlefronts [...] effectively underwriting the war effort. The maternal, and the military were allied.'<sup>570</sup> Two letters from the front contain extraordinary words. The first was published by the BN in May 1915 and was written by Sergeant-Major M. Quigley to Mrs Evans of Camden Street, Birkenhead whose son, Private H. Williams, had been killed; he said, 'I know it is a sad and hard blow to those at home when they lose their dear ones, but is the penalty that mothers and wives must pay.'<sup>571</sup> The fact that Mrs Evans had submitted the letter to the newspaper implies that she approved of a sentiment, which twenty-first century readers might find incomprehensible or even offensive. The second appears in the service records of Private Samuel Andrew of Liscard, killed in action on 27 March 1918. It was lovingly written by an Australian soldier called Harry Sharpe who described discovering and burying Samuel's body on the roadside. He said, 'It is very hard for you dear women to lose your dear ones, but your dear husband has paid the great penalty in the cause of his king and country. No finer death could be possible.'<sup>572</sup> The same sentiments were still prevalent by 1922 when the Grange Hill War Memorial in West Kirby was being dedicated and Mrs Johnstone, who had lost six sons in the war, laid the first wreath, prompting the DA to say:

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<sup>570</sup> M. Roper, *The Secret War*, p.6; A. Gregory, *The Last Great War British Society and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 152-186.

<sup>571</sup> BN 26/5/1915.

<sup>572</sup> Private Samuel Andrew Service Records TNA WO363, accessed via Ancestry.co.uk.

Such a family is entitled to be remembered with affectionate pride wherever the English Language is spoken. [...] surely never did one family give an example more glorious of the qualities which made the Empire and can alone preserve it.<sup>573</sup>

The concept of motherhood is entwined with that of family. Mothers were depicted as the figureheads of individual families as well as the pillars of the larger extended family which was the local community, the nation, the empire and of the allied nations. The BNVS celebrated the hospitality offered by local people to American soldiers during 1918 by publishing a list of those who had hosted and entertained them, a great many of whom were women, who probably had spare beds due to the absence of their menfolk. The section finishes with a description of a thanksgiving party which they hosted at the Cunard Buildings in Liverpool, when a thousand 'boys' were invited to meet a thousand local 'ladies'. This was not a match-making exercise, but a way of ensuring that the Americans, by virtue of their addition to the allied family, were adopted by local mothers.<sup>574</sup>

The evidence from Wirral indicates the preservation of a traditional vision of the role of women as mothers – a vision which sustained the people throughout the war and was still firmly in place four years after its conclusion. Indeed, to emphasise the point, women who failed to live up to this ideal were vilified and punished. An example was described in the LDP in December 1914: under the heading 'Seacombe Woman's Drunken Conduct', the story was told of thirty-six-year-old Ethel Muncaster of Victoria Grove, who was charged at Wallasey

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<sup>573</sup> DA 22/12/1922. For biographies of the Johnstone Brothers: <https://grangehill1922.wordpress.com/2016/03/01/5-johnstone-brothers/>

<sup>574</sup> BNVS pp. 150-154.



Magistrates Court with 'wilfully neglecting her three children.' The details were as follows:

Before her husband joined the army in August, he was in regular work, receiving 35s a week. The woman was of drunken habits and neglected her children, frequently leaving them all day while she went out drinking. [She was] abusing government money [and] the children were now in the workhouse. The chairman said he was surprised that people would have anything to do with such a horrid person.

Ethel desperately pleaded, 'If you will give me another chance, I will never taste, touch nor handle again, and if I am seen in drink again you can give me twelve months.' To which the chairman replied, 'It was no use wasting words on such a woman. The maximum penalty was six months' imprisonment with hard labour, and she would have to undergo that.'<sup>575</sup> The middle-class male magistrate did not have the ability to offer any help or rehabilitation to Ethel, but his contempt for and impatience with such people are strongly evident.<sup>576</sup> The woman had not only failed to be a good mother, but had also misused government money in the form of her separation allowance. The latter point corresponds with Pedersen's analysis of the relationship between separation allowances and female citizenship, arguing that this particular benefit solidified the man's traditional status as citizen and the

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<sup>575</sup> LDP 17/1914. Ethel Muncaster (née Bennett, 1879-1943) was married to Thomas George Muncaster (1879-1916), a bricklayer and former regular soldier, who was killed in action and is commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing at Ypres, *Soldiers Died in the Great War*.

<sup>576</sup> See P. Harling, 'The Centrality of Locality: The Local State, Local Democracy and Local Consciousness in Late Victorian and Edwardian England', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9 (2004), pp. 216-234 (p.226) for discussion of 'municipal nanny-statism' towards working-class women.

woman's role as dependant, which gave the state the role of 'surrogate husband' and arbiter of moral rectitude.<sup>577</sup>

Several Wirral soldiers' service records do, however, contain evidence of women challenging the state's preparedness to sacrifice their sons, by suggesting that the sacrifices they had already made were sufficient. On 11 November 1917, for example, Mrs. Zillah Ann Lewney of Egremont wrote to a colonel concerning her son, Arthur, then serving with 68 Training Reserve Battalion, requesting that he be discharged and engaged in some form of less strenuous war work. She said:

Sir, I want to bring to your notice the facts of my case and respecting 21707 Pte. Lewney of your battalion. When my son joined the army 5 weeks ago I was left only with my daughter who is not very strong. I am a widow and suffer with severe V.D.H. (valvular disease of the heart) and am 65 years old. [...] He is only CII and is troubled with his heart. I would not write this letter, sir, only I feel so ill and after all the trouble I have had I thought that if I appealed to you perhaps you would let him come and do work of national importance where he could still do his duty to his country and be able to attend to me in my declining years. [...] I have had one son killed in ? and another one just returned from France with appendicitis and now in hospital, and yet another son in France who has been three years there. I cheerfully gave my sons to my country, but I think that my last son might have been left at home with me.<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> S. Pedersen, 'Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship in Britain During the Great War', *The American History Review*, 95 (1990), pp. 983-1006, especially p. 984.

<sup>578</sup> Arthur Lewney Service Papers TNA WO363, accessed via Ancestry.co.uk.

Arthur was discharged on compassionate grounds and employed as a clerk by the West Lancashire Territorial Force. The letter is remarkable for its quietly assertive dignity and command of military terminology. Another, less dramatic, example is Private William Allen Edge of Birkenhead and the ASC, whose mother wrote to his adjutant in November 1915, asking, due to his supposed weak constitution, that he be reassigned as a clerk. The officer wrote politely back, explaining that he had about 1400 clerks in his company and could not find appropriate posts for all of them. He finished by saying that ‘there must, of necessity, be a great number of clerks who cannot be so employed, and who must be drilled and otherwise exercised in order to keep them fit and disciplined.’<sup>579</sup> The two stories are evidence that women were prepared to challenge the authorities when they thought it necessary and, in some cases, were successful. However, the phenomenon represents no radical departure from tradition, as these exchanges occurred within a familiar framework of devoted, vulnerable, and yet articulate and respectable, mothers corresponding with gentlemanly officers who were eager to do the right thing in the context of shared traditional values.

The second most obvious traditional female role was that of being a wife. Again, the BNVS with its potted biographies of local worthies, especially the town’s mayors, provides ample evidence of the phenomenon. Firstly, in common with the newspapers and all contemporary media, it referred to married women by their husbands’ first and second names. Thus, for example, Councillor David Roger Rowlands (mayor 1918-1919) was married to Letitia Roberts, but Letitia is only

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<sup>579</sup> William Allen Edge Service Papers, TNA WO363, accessed via Ancestry.co.uk.

ever recorded as 'Mrs. D. Roger Rowlands'.<sup>580</sup> (The actual work carried out by women like Mrs Rowlands is discussed in the next section.)

In May 1915 Ada McGuire commented on the wife of a friend's son:

[Mrs Richardson] is in great trouble about poor Brownie. Her son also is very ill and not expected to recover. He has several children, lovely kids, but his wife is not much good – not bad you know, but a great worldling and I think Mrs. R. will probably have to almost keep the children if he dies. Mrs. R. says she has had such a placid peaceful life that now the trouble comes all at once when she is less able to bear it.<sup>581</sup>

Two casual remarks expose two contemporary phenomena – the belief in 'good' and 'not much good' wives and the sudden requirement for grandmothers to become carers. Concerning the former, Mrs. Richardson's daughter-in-law was inadequate because she was a 'worldling' – someone who did not deny herself for the sake either of her husband or of her children and, by implication, for her country. As shown above, Ada, although she was unmarried, had always scrupled to mention that, in her cancellation of Christmas celebrations and rationing of holidays, she was not a worldling and was closer to achieving the feminine ideal. Concerning Mrs Richardson's new role as parent, we see how the exigencies of war were placing a burden on grandmothers.

Sources contain evidence of reverence for good and vilification of bad wives. An event, typical of many, set the tone: in March 1915, soldiers' wives were entertained at a large gathering in Wallasey, organised by two 'well-known local

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<sup>580</sup> BNVS p.24. The couple were from North Wales and married in 1904; Rowlands was a chemist and druggist; both he and Letitia died and are buried in Birkenhead.

<sup>581</sup> Ada to Eva 31/5/1915 IWM 96/31/1.

ladies', Mrs White and Mrs Sandie.<sup>582</sup> If wives released their husbands to fight, cared for their homes and children, remained faithful and virtuous, they could expect thanks, possible celebration and financial compensation. If they deviated from the ideal, welfare benefits could be withdrawn and vilification and punishment could follow.<sup>583</sup> A colourful story appears in both the local press and in service records. It is that of Jessie Burt (née Crossfield) of Highfield Road, Ellesmere Port and her supposed husband, John Sadler of the Royal Engineers. In September 1915, the local police had put Jessie's home under surveillance and found it to be 'a disorderly house'. Superintendent Ennion reported that 'men were seen continually to go to the house. Most disgusting language was heard in the course of the conversations. Really it was not fit for women to hear what actually took place.'<sup>584</sup>

The newspaper shows how much effort the police invested in the operation: four officers watched the house for at least three nights and recorded everything that they saw and heard. There was frequent mention of drink and bad language, but precise sexual details were merely alluded to with the words, 'Witness continued his evidence, which contained similar facts which were disgusting and disgraceful.' The article obviously pandered to the prurient imaginations of the readership as well as condemning the type of decadence which was believed to undermine the nation during wartime. Many locals lined the streets and 'booed' Jessie and her accomplice, Annie Debanks, as they were led to and from the court. Jessie, who did not have a record of similar offences, was sentenced to a month's

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<sup>582</sup> WN 24/3/1915.

<sup>583</sup> See S. Pedersen, 'Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship in Britain During the Great War', *The American History Review*, 95 (1990), pp. 983-1006 for detailed discussion of this phenomenon.

<sup>584</sup> EPA 15/9/1915.

imprisonment and Annie, who had a long record, was given three months with hard labour, both at Knutsford Gaol.<sup>585</sup>

Characteristically, the two women's receipt of separation allowances via the soldiers with whom they were cohabiting were also commented upon, as was the fate of two children in Jessie's care – the offspring of John Sadler: George and Fred. The failure of the authorities to punish either the men who visited 'the disorderly house' or John Sadler is noticeable, even though, as his service records reveal, Sadler lied about his marital status: he claimed to have married Jessie Burt in 1909, which he never did; he was still married to Elizabeth, who, by that time, was cohabiting with another soldier and receiving *his* separation allowance. Sadler claimed that Jessie had deserted *him* and her separation allowance was withdrawn in November 1915.<sup>586</sup> Here was another example of a world in which women were expected to live moral lives, whilst the sins of their menfolk were overlooked. It is not evidence of progress, but of preservation of a deeply conservative male-dominated world.

However, men were not immune to prosecution and disapproval for abusive behaviour. Ruth Adam said, with reference to 'Black Friday' (18 November 1910) when Suffragettes were beaten by police, that the officers 'reverted to the traditional methods of the bullying husband showing his wife who was boss. Judging from the grins on male faces, in photographs of the scene, it was being found highly enjoyable.'<sup>587</sup> Her comment introduces a lamentable theme in local court reports – the bullying husband. Horrific cases of wife abuse were regularly

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<sup>585</sup> Ibid.

<sup>586</sup> John Sadler Service Papers, TNA WO363, accessed via Ancestry.co.uk..

<sup>587</sup> R. Adam, *A Woman's Place*, p.31. See T. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010) Amazon kindle e-book Loc 18097-18317, for discussion of male violence towards women.

described in both the pre- and post-war press. Drink was often cited as the cause of male misbehaviour. An example appeared in the WN during the first week of the war, when Mary Bates of Palermo Street, Seacombe complained to magistrates that her husband, Joseph, had deserted her eight times in two years, had deprived her of money and was aggressive. Mary concluded by announcing, 'I cannot live with him and I am not going to live with him anymore.' The magistrate told the couple to 'talk it over' and they would reconvene after a month.<sup>588</sup> Five years later, the Police Court column in the BN reported similar stories, including Harold Tweedie, who had deserted his wife, Florence, of Borough Road, Birkenhead, for another woman. When told by his mother-in-law that he was breaking her heart, he replied, 'Yes I know and I'll break it more before I've done.' The magistrates made him pay court fees, costs and two pounds per week to his wife.<sup>589</sup>

Domestic violence and abuse were and are problems in British society.<sup>590</sup> There is no evidence either that the problem was worsened or improved by the war, although, as a result of wartime stresses, it sometimes led to incidents with a military dimension. An example occurred in Birkenhead, in 1917, when Private Arthur Christopher Morton, based at Chester Castle, wrote to his wife, threatening to 'blow her brains out.'<sup>591</sup>

Young and unmarried women were also expected to conform to an ideal.<sup>592</sup> As mentioned by Marwick, wherever women gathered, the subject of morality was

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<sup>588</sup> WN 8/8/1914.

<sup>589</sup> BN 2/8/1919.

<sup>590</sup> See P. Ayers and J. Lambert, 'Marriage Relations, Money and Domestic Violence in Working-Class Liverpool 1919-1939' in J. Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1986), pp. 195-219; M. Roper, *The Secret*, p.6.

<sup>591</sup> LE 25/10/1917. Hart, *1918* (2008) pp. 512-13, asserted, with no evidence to support his claim, that many wives and children suffered physical abuse from disturbed veterans during the post war years.

<sup>592</sup> S.R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, pp.121-156.

never far off.<sup>593</sup> Some six weeks into the war a Miss Cherry, in an address to Wallasey Women Liberals, spoke of the importance of philanthropy, cheerfulness and companionship and urged 'women and mothers' to use their 'moral influence with young women and men at this time of unprecedented temptation.'<sup>594</sup> In Angela Woollacott's words, such views led to 'movements and legislation to control the sexuality of the poor' and 'dislocation of old structures and massed location of men caused anxiety.'<sup>595</sup> Sexually active young women were looked upon as belonging to an 'unfortunate class' and, as will be explained in the next section, caused the mobilisation of middle-class women for their protection and reform. In August 1914, a 'story of a very sordid character' appeared in the WN. It concerned Kathryn Hetherington and Florence Francis, who were charged with being drunk and disorderly and of soliciting in a hotel in New Brighton. The landlord was asked if he felt 'it desirable that girls of this age should come into licensed premises and make the acquaintance of men.' He claimed that he thought they were 'respectable shop girls'. When the girls attempted to explain themselves, the magistrate was asked 'not to accept the evidence of this unfortunate class.'<sup>596</sup>

Cases of 'indecent behaviour' (either public sex or sex with prostitutes) litter the law and order columns of the newspapers. For example, in May 1915, Martin Conroy and Mary Clarke were charged with indecency for their activities in a 'public passage' behind Friar's Gate in Birkenhead. He was fined ten shillings and given six days' imprisonment and she was sent to prison for a month's hard

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<sup>593</sup> A. Marwick, *Women at War 1914-1918*, p. 12.

<sup>594</sup> LDP 15/10/1914.

<sup>595</sup> A. Woollacott, 'Khaki Fever: and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Home Front in the First World War' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (1994), pp. 325-329.

<sup>596</sup> WN 8/8/1914.



labour.<sup>597</sup> It seems that the woman was seen as being more culpable than the man, hinting at a degree of male hypocrisy, especially when the service records are searched for clues about sexual health amongst local soldiers. Four soldiers from the WSS were treated for Syphilis while on active service. One of them (Savage) had two doses of the disease and another (Jones) had gonorrhoea as well. All were married men, but there is no record of how their infections affected their wives when serious problems in their respective relationships are likely to have arisen during the post-war years.<sup>598</sup> This phenomenon was beautifully described by ex-officer, Charles Carrington in 1965:

Throughout the solid core of English society, fifty years ago, there was one moral code for men and another for women. Propriety, decency were the outworks and the safeguards of virtue for both sexes, but private lapses from the high standard maintained in public might be overlooked in men, whereas in women they were unpardonable.<sup>599</sup>

The message of this section is one of conservatism, tradition and continuity: women were expected to conform to certain ideals concerning motherhood, wifeliness and girlhood. Primary sources show that such ideals were enforced by the law, by leadership from middle-class women and by communal judgement. Whereas men were not immune from similar condemnation for abusing their

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<sup>597</sup> BN 22/5/1915.

<sup>598</sup> Leonard Painter of Hoylake, Herbert Savage of Seacombe, Thomas Jones of Willaston and James Middleton of New Ferry, Service Records TNA WO363, accessed via Ancestry.co.uk. See Marshall, *The British Army's fight against Venereal Disease in the 'Heroic Age of Prostitution'*, <http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/body-and-mind/the-british-army%E2%80%99s-fight-against-venereal-disease-in-the-%E2%80%98heroic-age-of-prostitution%E2%80%99/> [Accessed 14/12/2016] and M. Harrison, 'The British Army and the Problem of Venereal Disease in France and Egypt during the First World War', *Medical History* 39 (1995), pp. 133-158.

<sup>599</sup> C. Carrington, *A Soldier from the Wars Returning* (London: Hutchinson, 1965). Carrington gives a detailed exposition of the sexual behaviour of British soldiers on the Western Front, which confirms many of the observations made here about the use of brothels and the prevalence of venereal disease.

positions as husbands, it was still a male dominated world in which men received lighter punishments and were often sexually promiscuous while on active service, leading to unknown but assuredly unpleasant consequences for wives. Andrews's comment that women's 'domestic and emotional responsibilities for nurturing and supporting men were sustained, re-worked, stretched and developed in Britain' are accurate.<sup>600</sup> Local evidence confirms that the implicit messages of the three advertisements about the importance of female domesticity, motherhood and purity were indeed accepted as ideals, even though society was much too complex to be able to ensure their universal achievement.

#### **4.4 Women's Public Service**

Chapter One introduced Wirral society and argued that by 1914 not all women lacked influence or purpose. Many women (mostly from the upper middle-class elite) were active in local political groups, charities, committees and campaigns, such as those for women's suffrage, social reform and peace. Martin Pugh stated that, by the 1890s, 729,000 women could vote in local elections and that 'By 1900, 1147 women were serving as elected poor law guardians, 270 sat on school boards and 170 on rural district councils.'<sup>601</sup> In 1907 women could stand for election for town councils. Chapter Two showed how women threw themselves into the war effort and how important was women's public service in enabling the people of Wirral both to prosecute and to survive the conflict. Kate Adie described the phenomenon on a national scale:

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<sup>600</sup> M. Andrews, 'Ideas and Ideals of Domesticity in the First World War' in A. Andrews and J. Lomas, eds., *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences Since 1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) pp. 6-20 (p.11).

<sup>601</sup> M. Pugh, 'Suffrage and Citizenship' in F. Carnevali and A. M. Strange, eds. *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 97-110 (p.99). See A. Logan, 'In Search of Equal Citizenship: The Campaign for Women Magistrates in England and Wales, 1910–1939, *Women's History Review*, 16(4) (2007), pp. 501-518.

There was an army of experienced charity workers, battalions of women who saw their duty as service to others, ranks of bazaar veterans and untold numbers of knitting and sewing experts. Added to this were the hardened warriors of the suffrage movement, skilled at publicity, public speaking and confronting prejudice.<sup>602</sup>

Krista Cowman, confirming one of this thesis's most important themes, attributed women's involvement to a desire for citizenship:

Many [feminists] viewed their public war work as part of longer-term claims on citizenship. [...] They were able to direct their activities through familiar organisations that adapted to the new situation. [...] The variety of activities encompassed within these wider claims to citizenship matched the number of organisations.<sup>603</sup>

Krista Cowman went on to describe women's groups active on both sides of the Mersey, including the Women's Home Service Corps, designed to assist local police and formed in Birkenhead in 1915 by 'Colonel' Phyllis Mary Lovell (1887-1972), who 'was a very energetic worker in harassing the government in the suffrage campaign.' She later resigned from her role because her force was not granted the right of arrest.<sup>604</sup> The following extract from Lovell's contribution to the *Home Service Corps Review* of 4 January 1916 highlights some of her beliefs:

It was easy to picture oneself standing in [the man's place] holding up the flag of home duties, while [the man] held up another flag abroad [...] The

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<sup>602</sup> K. Adie, *Fighting on the Home Front: The Legacy of Women in World War One* (London: Hodder Paperbacks, 2014), p. 25.

<sup>603</sup> K. Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother: Women in Merseyside's Political Organisations 1890-1920* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), p. 141.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid. p. 143 and BN 21/8/1915. Lovell's service whistle is on display at the IWM North, Catalogue Number EPH 4142.

women who offered themselves in the service of their country are finding now the meaning of real work. They are finding that pluck is needed at home just as much as in the trenches. They are finding that they have a battle to fight with themselves in order to keep their flag floating and unstained.<sup>605</sup>

Another formidable group was the Women's Patrols Movement, created in November 1914 by members of the National Union of Women Workers. Its primary aim was to protect girls from falling into immorality by supplying 'wholesome, well-regulated recreation for both sexes together.' The Wirral branch was well supported and hosted open-air concerts and a tea canteen on New Brighton Promenade.<sup>606</sup>

The BNVS describes numerous local worthies who performed important work.<sup>607</sup> Unsurprisingly, the majority of the illustrated biographies are of men.<sup>608</sup> However, in the section entitled 'Personal and Official Services', there appear twenty-one illustrated biographies of women and fifteen of men. This reveals a greater female presence than is often envisaged. Six of the women were pictured next to their husbands (for example, the four Lady Mayoresses); eight were married, but not shown alongside their husbands and seven were unmarried. Within an untitled section dealing mainly with nursing services, five men and seven women are shown, three of whom were married, but appear alone and one of whom appears

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<sup>605</sup> J. Marlow, ed., *The Virago Book of Women and the Great War* (London: Virago Press, 1999), p.159.

<sup>606</sup> Cowman, *Mrs Brown*, pp. 153-154. Woollacott 'Khaki Fever' and R.A. Voeltz 'The Antidote to "Khaki Fever.": The Expansion of the British Girl Guides During the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27 (1992), pp. 627-638 for further discussion of middle-class women's obsession with protecting the morals of lower-class girls.

<sup>607</sup> BNVS pp. 17-39.

<sup>608</sup> Especially within the section entitled 'Winning by Shipbuilding' (pp.40-73) which celebrates thirty-nine men and no women.

with her husband (Mrs James Moon). The other three were single.<sup>609</sup> All of the females were involved with charities, voluntary social work, fund-raising and nursing and a great many of them belonged to genteel families such as the Jacksons, Willmers, Chambres and Duckworths. Todmorden in Yorkshire produced a similar commemorative book to the BNVS, which also contains tributes to active local women who appear to have belonged to the same upper middle-class elite as those in Birkenhead. This evidence combined with the work of historians implies that the experiences of Wirral women were representative of the nation as a whole.<sup>610</sup>

Local newspapers describe other women's organisations. Wallasey had a Women's Citizens (non-political) Association (formed in 1913) and a Women's Suffrage Society, both of which, after November 1914, devoted their energies to war work.<sup>611</sup> The Birkenhead Women's Citizens Association provided 'enumerators and clerical workers' to assist the Town Clerk with the administration of the 1915 National Registration Act, enrolled and trained women for war work, collaborated with the Home Service Corps and Women's Patrol Movement and provided a Police Aid Detachment.<sup>612</sup> According to the WN, in August 1914, the Wallasey Women's Unionist Association, under the chairmanship of Mrs Chesshyre Blythe, declared, 'At the present time the country needed not only the help of the men, but also of the women, and it was proposed to offer them a great

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<sup>609</sup> BNVS pp. 102-107.

<sup>610</sup> In addition to the societies appearing in subsequent paragraphs, groups included the Belgian Soldiers' Fund, the YMCA, The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), the SSFA, the Birkenhead Charities' Ladies' Committee and the Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD). See Appendix Four. Todmorden's equivalent of the BNVS, J.A. Lee, *Todmorden and the Great War 1914-1918: A Local Record*, contains similar pages, such as portraits of the mayor and mayoress (p.xi) and images of members of the Queen Mary's Needlework Guild (pp.32-33) and nurses (pp.72 and 81), demonstrating a similar local social hierarchy and concept of the accepted roles of women.

<sup>611</sup> WN 12/8/1914 and LDP 13/11/1914.

<sup>612</sup> WA YPX/98. Its wartime work is summarised in the BNVS pp. 158-159.

sphere of helpfulness that afternoon.<sup>613</sup> In September 1914, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies introduced a Wirral Work for Women Fund. In a rented room in Birkenhead, unemployed women were able to sew commodities for the Red Cross. Their chairman was Mrs A.C. Duckworth of Eastham.<sup>614</sup>

Birkenhead Women's Liberal Association held its annual general meeting in February 1915 and the president, Mrs J.H. Ziegler, reported that, 'while they had done nothing in Birkenhead as an association, all the members were engaged in some way or another in relieving those who were in distress owing to the war or in doing something in the way of sewing or knitting things for those at the front.'<sup>615</sup> It will be noticed that the above women came from privileged middle and upper middle-class backgrounds.<sup>616</sup>

About this phenomenon, Adie observed:

Upper-class women seemed to dominate [...] not surprisingly, considering that they had confidence, expected to be taken note of, and were used to being patrons, chairwomen and presidents of a raft of charities and welfare organisations. At the top of the social tree, a remarkable number were related.<sup>617</sup>

Apart from the fact that Wirral's leading women were from a lower class, few of whom had titles, the above assertions about the women's privileged status and

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<sup>613</sup> WN 12/8/1914. Annie Clementine Chesshyre Blythe (née Boulton, 1867-1954), wife of John Chesshyre Blythe (1856-1918) of Birkenhead.

<sup>614</sup> CC 19/9/1914. Mrs Duckworth was Ada Christiana Sanderson (1862-1930), who was given her own initials in the article because she was, by then, the widow of Joseph Battersby Duckworth (1848-1912). See Appendix Four.

<sup>615</sup> BN 3/2/1915, LDP 9/10/1914. Mrs Ziegler was the wife of John Hastings Ziegler (1851-1927) of Noctorum, after whom she is named in the article; her actual name was Charlotte Caryl Eustaphieve (1852-1929) and she was born in America, the daughter of the Russian Consul.

<sup>616</sup> See appendix Four for further details.

<sup>617</sup> K. Adie, *Fighting on the Home Front*, p. 26.

genealogical links is supported by the family histories delineated in Appendix Four. The nearest to aristocratic patronage of women's endeavours in Wirral occurred in May 1915, when the Duchess of Westminster (who resided at *Eton Hall* near Chester) inspected Red Cross facilities in Wallasey (Figure 15). The Duchess presented a Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) to Private Ward of the Royal Irish Fusiliers and 'Having inspected the hospital and having expressed both her pleasure and satisfaction with the visit, her Grace left.'<sup>618</sup> It was up to the likes of the lower-ranking, but still elite, Mrs C.H. Birchall (the wife a newspaper proprietor) and Mrs Douglas Agnew (the wife of a sea captain) to continue the day-to-day work.<sup>619</sup>

In 1917, this kind of civic work led to the appointment of Birkenhead's first female town councillor, Annie Laird (1865-1927).<sup>620</sup> David Maclver, son of David Maclver MP (1840-1907), resigned his seat on the town council in November 1917.<sup>621</sup> Annie came from Birkenhead's founding family: her father, John (1834-1898) had been the town's first mayor and her grandfather, John (1804-1874) had been its first MP. Maclver's seat was simply offered to her. Her 'energy and wide views of the wellbeing of the ratepayers' meant that she was expected 'to have a very beneficial influence on public life.'<sup>622</sup> The Mayor's words are revealing:

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<sup>618</sup> WN 29/5/1915.

<sup>619</sup> LE 17/5/1915. Mrs Florence Birchall (née Read, 1867-1936) was married to Charles Herbert Birchall (1870-1943) of Wallasey, whose posthumous estate was valued at £66,226; Mrs Helen Louise Ann Agnew (née Thorne, 1878-1962) was married to Captain Douglas Agnew (1869-1953) of Liscard and founded the Wallasey Red Cross Society in 1914. LE 3/9/1935.

<sup>620</sup> See P. Harling, 'The Centrality of Locality: The Local State, Local Democracy and Local Consciousness in Late Victorian and Edwardian England', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9 (2004), pp. 216-234, especially pp. 222-223 for discussion of women's roles in local government and of the 'ladies elect'.

<sup>621</sup> His sister, Edith Eleanor Maclver (1882-1954) had run for election as a councillor in 1913 (BN. 1/11/1913) and she married her cousin, John Colin Maclver (1883-1953) whilst serving on the Board of Guardians in July 1917; BN. 28/8/1917.

<sup>622</sup> LDP 17/11/1917. Appendix Four.

He said that some had misgivings about the advisability of placing women in such responsible positions as that, but the action of women since the war began had shown the great things they were capable of, especially since the days of stress have been entered upon. Women had thrown themselves into the breach and done magnificent work.<sup>623</sup>

She was to serve on the Education Committee and with the Red Cross Society. The mayor went onto say that: 'It was very appropriate that Miss Laird should occupy the seat her father held, and that she should take the very seat in the council chamber in which her father sat.' The other councillors stood up and applauded.<sup>624</sup> This report says a great deal about the extent to which women were 'rewarded' for their war work – their endeavours were clearly appreciated and led to promotion for *one* woman, but only a woman from a distinguished family and privileged background.

Some women of a slightly lower class, belonging to more modest dynasties, were also involved in public work. Examples include Frances Thompson who belonged to a Birkenhead Quaker family and who was deeply involved in charitable work and peace campaigning and Margaret Josephine Warlow, daughter of Joseph Warlow of Birkenhead, who founded the Birkenhead Spiritualist Church.<sup>625</sup> Margaret married Albert James Thompson, son of Charles Thompson, who

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<sup>623</sup> LE 6/12/1917.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> Frances Thompson is mentioned in the LE of 13/7/1914 as being President of the Liverpool and Birkenhead Peace Arbitration Society and in Birkenhead's Quaker Records, which mention her parents and siblings as being active in the group. Joseph Warlow's Papers, WA Acc.1908. See page 156 below for further discussion of the Birkenhead Spiritualist Church.



founded the Charles Thompson's Mission, which performed and still performs charitable work in the Birkenhead area.<sup>626</sup>

In December 1918, the BN observed that there were far more women nominating candidates for local council elections than ever before.<sup>627</sup> At the same time, more women were being voted into leading positions. Miss Mary Hickey (1880-1950), an economic historian, educated at Liverpool University and adult education tutor, was selected as a Labour candidate for Birkenhead's Borough Council elections in 1918.<sup>628</sup> By 1919, she was serving on the council's education committee.<sup>629</sup> She was still active on the council during the 1930s.<sup>630</sup> Birkenhead's first female mayor, Mary Mercer, was elected in 1924 and was present at the dedication of Birkenhead's War Memorial (Figures 16 and 30).<sup>631</sup> Ellesmere Port's first female councillors, Ellen Eyre (1883-1978) and Phoebe Bond (1867-1942), were elected in April 1925. Both were independents who defeated sitting Labour councillors. These four women were clearly from lower classes than had been the case for pre-war and wartime female politicians and public servants, indicating the limited extent to which class barriers had been weakened by the war. Again, the greatest change had occurred in Ellesmere Port, perhaps, once again, reflecting its

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<sup>626</sup> BNVS pp. 164-165. Charles Thompson's Mission Website:

<https://charlesthompsonsmision.org.uk/>

<sup>627</sup> BN 7/12/1918.

<sup>628</sup> BN 26/10/1918.

<sup>629</sup> BN 1/3/1919.

<sup>630</sup> S. Davies, and B. Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales 1919-1938 a Comparative Analysis, Volume 1* (London: Routledge, 2016), unpaginated e-book.

<sup>631</sup> *The Vote: The Organ of the Women's Freedom League*, 19/12/1924 and the BN 8.7.1925. Mary Mercer (1883-1945, née Chettar) was married to Ernest William Mercer (1888-1950), a ship's joiner at Cammell Laird's. Mary was not the first British female mayor, as between 1908 and 1923, nine had been elected. She was one of seven to be elected in 1924. The others were in Dunstable, Stoke Newington, Acton, Bath, Cambridge and Great Yarmouth. Five of this number were independents and one was a Conservative; Mary was the only Labour mayor. See the *Manchester Guardian* 11/11/1924.

relatively recent foundation around large new factories and its consequently stronger working-class identity.<sup>632</sup>

With regard to women's civic status, the Great War did cause a degree of change, insofar as the type of women who had been publicly active before the war, were able to be even more active, possibly either in order to release their pent-up energies or to establish their credentials as citizens. However, in view of the fact that most of the women who experienced this development had, in many cases already been involved in such work, belonged to established local political and business dynasties, had privileged backgrounds or had benefitted from their husbands' patronage, on balance the phenomenon must be seen as an example of continuity rather than of change.<sup>633</sup> During the post-war years, a number of female councillors from slightly more humble origins were elected in Birkenhead and Ellesmere Port. The public appear to have supported them because of their previous faithful service in related fields. They were perhaps the harbingers of a gradual rise in the status of women in Wirral, but they were not precursors of a revolution.

#### **4.5: Heroines**

Many of the women mentioned above, who performed civic voluntary work and paid jobs, possessed undoubted heroic qualities, but others, who were perceived to be more intimately involved in the fighting war, thereby putting their own lives at risk were given explicitly heroic status and were celebrated by the local press.<sup>634</sup>

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<sup>632</sup> EPA 10/4/1915. Ellen Harrison Eyre (1883-1978) was a teacher from a Methodist background who had shown great organisational abilities during Ellesmere Port's economic downturns. Phoebe Bond (1868-1940, née Salter), with her husband, Joseph Bond (1868-1940), was manager of *The Sportsman's Arms* in Ellesmere Port.

<sup>633</sup> See K. Cowman, *Mrs Brown* p. 163, where she agrees with this interpretation.

<sup>634</sup> G. Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 154-172.

Probably the most exciting example of female heroism appeared in the BN in May 1915. Under the heading 'HEROINE OF "BOAT 13". Hoylake Stewardess's Stories', the newspaper reported an interview with Miss May Bird and Mrs Moorcroft, who, ever since they had met while working for Cunard had lived together in Hoylake. The women gave a graphic account of the sinking of the *Lusitania*. They were the only females on deck while the ship listed. They threw children into the arms of men in the lifeboats and eventually jumped into the sea and were picked up. Mrs Moorcroft insisted that Miss Bird was 'the heroine of "Boat 13"', helping to row it and tearing up her dress to act as bandages for wounded children.<sup>635</sup> The importance of this story for local morale is clear – two ordinary hard-working and devoted friends doing their job well during a horrific disaster, risking their lives for other people and displaying a physical robustness not usually associated with women.

However, the women most frequently cited for heroism were nurses.<sup>636</sup> In fact, on 5 August 1916, the BN printed a graphic summary of 'A Nation Organised For Victory', in which a female nurse features prominently beside women munitions workers and the phrase 'God Bless Our Women!', emphasising women's importance, but implying that their fulfilment of caring roles was slightly more important than their industrial war work (Figure 17).

In January 1917 the BN celebrated the three local women mentioned in Sir Douglas Haig's New Year Dispatch: Miss Winifred Adela Beausire, Miss M.E. Boyd and Miss A.V.R. Kydd. The women were praised for having gone to France

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<sup>635</sup> BN 15/5/1915. The two women were Marion May Bird (1875-1975), member of an important Hoylake fishing family, and Mrs Moorcroft (unknown dates and maiden name), the widow of a Liverpool solicitor.

<sup>636</sup> J.S.K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 59-104.

early in the war and to have worked faithfully in several hospitals, enjoying few spells of leave.<sup>637</sup> Ten months later Miss M.M. McMillan of Birkenhead Borough Hospital and Sister Helen Ryder of Mersey Park Military Hospital, Tranmere were awarded Royal Red Cross Medals for their work with the wounded.<sup>638</sup> In 1919 four VAD nurses, who had performed relatively humble roles in the catering and clothing departments in Bromborough Auxiliary Hospital were mentioned in dispatches.<sup>639</sup> Donner's comments about VAD nurses are relevant: she questioned the notion that 'the Great War was a modernising force' and argued that the VADs:

[...] were poured into an already modernised environment supported by a streamlined system of organising, training and deploying a professional voluntary sector. Indeed, the war did not cause but reflected a process of modernisation of Britain which had been underway for half a century.<sup>640</sup>

Her argument began with an assertion which corresponds with the findings of this project – that, in volunteering for medical work, women were conforming to a traditional stereotype of themselves as sensitive carers. Perhaps some volunteers hoped that service might have hastened women's liberation, but in reality their work had 'nothing to do with emancipation.'<sup>641</sup> The fact that the abovementioned nurses had begun work so early in the war and been able to perform so efficiently,

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<sup>637</sup> BN 13/1/1917. The women were Winifred Adela Beausire (1885-1977), who was eventually awarded five service medals; Miss Boyd's details cannot be found, but her father was a yard manager at Cammell Laird's; and Annie Vanett Robertson Kydd (1879-1975), who was born in Scotland and had worked as a Sunday school teacher at Stuart Road Mission in Birkenhead.

<sup>638</sup> BN 20/10/1917. The two ladies were professional nurses; Sister Ryder had spent some time in France in 1914.

<sup>639</sup> BN 12/4/1919. The women were Misses D.H. and Rita Hosie from Sligo in Ireland, Miss Burns Gemmill from Liverpool and Miss E. Montgomery; their details have not been traced.

<sup>640</sup> H. Donner, 'Under the Cross: Why V.A.D.s Performed the Filthiest Task in the Dirtiest War: Red Cross Women Volunteers, 1914-1918', *Journal of Social History*, 30, No. 3 (1997), pp. 687-704 (p. 700).

<sup>641</sup> *Ibid.* p. 664.

to the benefit of so many wounded men also corroborates her argument that the medical system, with its mix of professional and volunteer staff, had been modernising for half a century and was quickly able to mobilise in August 1914. The fact that the women were awarded medals by the military authorities is not evidence of them having achieved a new, more equal, status, but simply an expression of gratitude for the way in which they had performed traditional roles exceptionally well. The newspapers and commemorative publications perpetuated this understanding by the wording of their articles and by the images they printed, showing the delicately featured and immaculately dressed young ladies, who, despite the rigours of their work, looked vulnerable and perhaps still in need of male support and protection (Figure 18). This experience was the local manifestation of a national phenomenon, which achieved its focus in the near apotheosis of Nurse Edith Cavell, who was also commemorated in Wirral.<sup>642</sup>

More recently, other historians, notably Andrews and Lomas, have explored different ways of conceiving female heroism, particularly by seeing it take place in the domestic sphere.<sup>643</sup> Of course, in Wirral the evidence for this is difficult to locate as the humdrum details of daily life were rarely explicitly commented upon. However, reference has been made in previous chapters to women taking their places in food queues, cooking, caring for children, waiting for separation

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<sup>642</sup> For example, in December 1915, an Edith Cavell ward was opened at Leasowe Hospital for Crippled Children and, in December 1918, a bust of Cavell unveiled at Birkenhead Borough Hospital, when the Mayor commented that Cavell 'symbolised the spirit of British womanhood', the BNVS pp.141-142, *The Westminster Gazette* 14/12/1915 and the LDP 18/12/1918. See A. Fell, 'Remembering French and British First World War Heroines' in C. Hämmerle, O. Überegger and B. Bader Zaar, eds., *Gender and the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 108-126 and A.M.C. Hughes, 'War, Gender and National Mourning: The Significance of the Death and Commemoration of Edith Cavell in Britain', *European Review of History* 12 (2005), pp. 425-444. An eyewitness description of Edith Cavell's death appears in J. Marlow, ed., *The Virago Book of Women and the Great War* (London: Virago Press, 1999), p.138.

<sup>643</sup> K. Hunt, 'The Heroine at Home: The Housewife on the First World War Home Front' in A. Andrews and J. Lomas, *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences Since 1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) pp. 73-91.

allowances and advocating for sons and husbands. The balancing of all these duties and roles was, in itself, heroic but only hinted at by the official media. One of the ways in which they did this was via advertisements, such as those appearing at the beginning of this chapter, where women were invariably portrayed as cheerful, hard-working housewives, whose greatest joy was to produce clean laundry.

When women performed brave acts near the fighting fronts or at sea, were employed as nurses or displayed faithfulness and stoicism by performing their daily tasks under trying circumstances, they were seen as being heroines. This might be viewed as evidence of women's improving status, but it is not, as in all cases, women were praised for performing traditional roles well. An old-fashioned vision of feminine virtue was thrown into sharp relief by the war. Female heroism is another example of continuity with Victorian society and of the bolstering of traditional virtues.

#### **4.6 Women In The Workplace**

On 28 September 1914 the LE printed a letter from J. Bleasdale of Liscard who complained about 'foolish women of the Wallasey district who have taken to themselves the right of calling men cowards because they have not gone to the front.' He described seeing a young man sitting on the Seacombe Ferry, enjoying 'a quiet read and a smoke' when a group of women approached him and suggested he was a coward. He politely pointed out that all his brothers were serving, that he was a widower and had to care for his own child as well as a niece or nephew. He would have loved to have joined up but was unable to do so. He later confessed that he had been approached several times in this way before and

Bleasdale observed that many young men were avoiding the ferries due to such female harassment. The story of such recruitment tactics, often involving the giving of white feathers, is well known.<sup>644</sup> Perhaps the women who behaved in that way did so out of desire to be involved and as a means of releasing their energies and frustration. Local evidence shows that women enjoyed increasing opportunities to leave the home and perform paid jobs, previously only done by men. Perhaps some of the women involved in the above incident were able to do so, finding a more constructive outlet for their desire to get involved.

By early 1915 people were realising that women could do the jobs vacated by men who had joined up.<sup>645</sup> In April of that year, at a meeting in Wallasey Town Hall, a Miss Knowles, organising officer for Women's Work and Labour Exchanges, described the 'many openings there were at the present time for women.' A register was made and women were assured of equal pay and free training at the government's expense.<sup>646</sup> Two months later, a similar gathering was held in Birkenhead Town Hall. Following a patriotic address by the mayor, the same Miss Knowles 'issued an appeal' to the large and mainly female audience 'to come forward for work, with the view of releasing more men for military service.' She explained that paid jobs were open to women of all classes in agriculture, (for which women could be trained at local agricultural colleges), local councils, railway companies, shops and schools. She continued:

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<sup>644</sup> See N.F. Gullace, 'White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War', *Journal of British Studies* (1997), pp. 178-206 and L. Ugolini, *Civvies: Middle Class Men on the English Home Front 1914-18* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>645</sup> See G. Braybon, *Women Workers*, pp. 44-113; G. Braybon and P. Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (London: Pandora, 1987), pp. 31-56; D. Thom, *Nice Girls*, pp. 24-77; S.R. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (Harlow: Pearson, 2002), pp. 27-50.

<sup>646</sup> WN 17/4/1915.

[...] there were women carriage cleaners and she ventured to say that this latter was an occupation in which women were perhaps doing even better than men (applause). Speaking of the difficulties that might be encountered, Miss Knowles urged that there must be no class prejudices, but they must be prepared to work side by side with any worker with whom they were put to work. Further, when the men came back to their work, the women must retire automatically from the positions they held, and give place to the men. She was afraid that there would be a great many vacant places, with the terrible wastage of life that was taking place at the front, and consequently there would for some years to come be work which women must carry on; but where, after the war, there was a man for the job, that job must be vacated by the woman (applause).<sup>647</sup>

This report conveys a sense of patriotic fervour, but also the women's excitement as they saw opportunities to do something different and to earn money. However, although Miss Knowles abjured the women to forget about class, her appeal was set within an essentially conservative framework wherein the women were seen to be enabling men to fight and were not to expect to keep their jobs after the war. The applause implies that the audience had no objection to this stipulation.

Later newspaper reports inform us about the progress of women's employment. By September 1915, women had been working as tram cleaners and, on Monday 13 inst., six women began work as conductors (Figure 19). All of them were soldiers' wives and it was stated that future recruits would have to have the same status. The BN commented that, 'the women like the work and, apparently, have

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<sup>647</sup> BN 2/6/1915.



been well received.<sup>648</sup> The EPA was even more enthusiastic, quoting an inspector who said that, the women were ‘first rate: a lot better than a lot of the men we have had recently’ and that they had ‘thrown themselves into the work heart and soul.’<sup>649</sup>

In November 1915, at Wirral Rural District Council’s meeting, several farmers complained of losing labourers to the army and struggling to complete seasonal tasks. They demanded exemptions for their skilled employees. Mr J.R. Turton said that he had been employing women on his farm ‘all the summer’. His following remarks are interesting:

There was certain work they could do very well, some jobs as well as a man, but they could not undertake to do heavy manual work. It was impossible. They could not follow a team of horses and do the ploughing. They could do the potato picking, but that won’t last all the year round.

He went on to claim that they had had a good autumn, but that he had not been able ‘to clean the land’ due to the women’s physical weakness and that the ‘country would suffer for it.’<sup>650</sup> So, by this stage of the war, women were being urged to go to work in order to fill the gaps, and responses to their efforts, except in roles where physical strength was required, were largely positive. Everyone assumed that female employment was a temporary development necessitated by a massive war. In the words of the EPA:

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<sup>648</sup> BN 15/9/1915.

<sup>649</sup> EPA 15/9/1915.

<sup>650</sup> BN 20/11/1915. T. George, ‘Female Agricultural Workers in Wales in the First World War’ in M. Andrews and J. Lomas, eds., *The Home Front in Britain: Myths and Forgotten Experiences Since 1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), pp. 92-107. P. Horn, *Rural Life in England in the First World War* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1984).

To be responsible for even the remotest ripple of excitement in such stirring times as these is certainly some accomplishment. And that it has taken the ladies to accomplish it is only further evidence of the change in the relation of man and woman that is being wrought by the war. There is an old saying to the effect that 'Man is an adaptable animal', but recent events go to show that woman is equally so.<sup>651</sup>

In other words, these changes in gender roles and relations were exciting, but temporary – pragmatic acts of patriotism with a relatively short-term aim – to win the war. The impermanence of the women's new roles was emphasised by Birkenhead's mayor and a visiting female evangelist at a rally in the town hall in September 1916 when they agreed that the 'best place for a woman is in the home' and reminded women to be regular church attenders. Their vision for the post war world was one in which, once again, women were good Christians, mothers, wives and carers. There were no predictions of female enfranchisement, improved job opportunities or equal pay.<sup>652</sup>

Further evidence of women's employment includes pictures of munitions girls queuing (at the time of the National Eisteddfod) at Birkenhead Town Hall in September 1917 and a munitions girls' football team at Port Sunlight (probably Levers' employees) in December of that year (Figures 20 and 21).<sup>653</sup> At the IWM, there is also a collection of photographs of young women workers at the Joseph Rank Flour Mill at Birkenhead Docks. An indication of the dangers of women's

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<sup>651</sup> EPA 15/9/1915.

<sup>652</sup> BN 16/9/1916.

<sup>653</sup> BN 12/9/1917 and 17/11/1917. A. Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Although rare, coverage of female sporting achievements was not unknown, a good example being the career of golfer, Gladys Ravenscroft (1888-1960) of Rock Ferry, who won the British Ladies' Amateur and US Women's Amateur Trophies in 1912 and 1913.

work and of the sacrifices women made occurred in May 1918, when, at the Woodside Ferry Approach, a twenty-one year-old conductress, Edith Jones, was crushed between two tramcars and killed. Her funeral resembled the burial of a military hero.<sup>654</sup>

This section has expounded a wartime development which has traditionally been seen as evidence of real changes in female roles and status. It cannot be denied that in the short term the employment of women in so many previously male roles was a big change for everyone to get used to. It was discussed by a lot of people and many saw it in a positive light – women, such as the tram staff and farm-workers – coming in for particular praise. In addition, as shown in the above illustrations, female employees made a striking visual impact on the social landscape and were objects of fascination, but, they themselves admitted that they were not going to occupy those positions for ever and that men would reclaim their jobs when the war was over. Finally, no local evidence has emerged which supports the traditional argument that women were rewarded for their labours with the vote. In effect, this section has continued the theme begun in earlier ones, that women, in the long run, would continue to do what women had always done.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has supported the argument of the entire thesis, that, even though the Great War was, in itself, a change which precipitated a huge range of individual and collective changes, such as social and economic disruption, military service, voluntary work, employment, death, injury, grief and loss, it led to very

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<sup>654</sup> BN 11/5/1918. Edith Jones (1897-1918, née Cattrell) was married to a serving soldier, Sergeant John Henry Jones of the Royal Engineers. The photograph of her funeral belongs to a family member and cannot be published here.

little change in beliefs about morality, how society should be organised, religion and the importance of citizenship and patriotism. Indeed, the war bolstered traditional attitudes and structures, especially when it came to the place and role of women. Ideals of good motherhood, wifeliness and girlhood were utilised in the preservation of order and unity during critical times. Deviants from these ideals were vilified and punished.

It has been shown that upper middle-class women, who had been active in civic life before the war, were able to be even more active during it, but only within a framework created and led by men. Such women were probably motivated by altruism and a desire to be recognised as citizens and there is some evidence that this was achieved. There was a small increase in female representation on local councils and, at Ellesmere Port at least, a rise in the number of female councillors from humble origins. Heroism was explored in Chapter Three and picked up again here with respect to women, where it was shown that some women, especially nurses, were elevated by the local press as heroines and were rewarded as such by the military authorities. It was argued that the use of women in the medical system was yet another example of the preservation of traditional female roles and images within a system which had been modernising for some time. In addition, as argued by historians such as Andrews, Hunt and Lomas, the majority of women who kept their families together, queued for and cooked food, managed budgets and cared for damaged menfolk should also be seen as heroines.<sup>655</sup>

During the second year of the war, women began to enjoy increased opportunities in the workplace, especially in the transport system, in agriculture and in munitions

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<sup>655</sup> The argument for continuity in the status of women is supported by historians such as Adam, *Woman's Place*, pp 64-82; T. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, Loc. 18097; De Groot, *Blighty*, pp. 385-396.

works. On the whole, with some reservations about their suitability for physical labour, their contributions were welcomed. Remarkably, right from the beginning, officials urged and women seemed to accept that they would have to give their jobs back to the men when they returned. Working women made a significant visual impact and caused a degree of excitement and praise. The novelty of seeing them wearing masculine clothes and playing football seems to have amused some people, but these developments did not herald any long-term structural change in women's roles and status and no causal link between female service and suffrage was enunciated in contemporary sources. In all it can be said that women experienced change during the war years, but no obvious trajectory of long-term change for the subsequent decade appears to have been initiated.

## **CHAPTER 5: Resilience**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Preceding chapters have analysed the ways in which Wirral people both believed in the war and were eager to become completely involved in it. It has been shown that traditional attitudes, beliefs and structures both enabled and sustained an apparent dedication to total war and that, contrary to popular belief, despite civilians' detailed knowledge about the sufferings of servicemen on the fighting fronts, their commitment to the struggle barely wavered. In order more fully to understand how and why people were able not only to survive but perhaps even to flourish during the war years, it is necessary to explore the experiences of service people and their families in more depth.

This chapter analyses commitment to the war and the reasons why people were able to cope with death, bereavement and economic vicissitudes. It presents the evidence for continuing local support for Britain's war efforts and discusses the roles of religious, moral and metaphysical beliefs as well as economic developments. The argument that these sustaining factors arose from traditional understandings and institutions and that the Great War had a conservative impact on British society is sustained.

By means of studying examples arising from the primary sources, Section 6.2 introduces some of the ways in which local people suffered during wartime while Section 6.3 delineates some of their responses. Section 6.4 analyses the value of economic 'prosperity' and welfare provision for keeping body and soul together. This area has not been explored in depth since 1986, when Winter presented the case for improved living standards for the working-class, being criticised a year

later by Bryder, who questioned his choice of primary sources.<sup>656</sup> As much as the author would like to contribute to the debate on the basis of evidence from Wirral, it is not possible as hard statistical data from the region is not available. Instead, only relatively vague and usually anecdotal evidence gleaned from the newspapers must be employed in order to gain a general idea about people's wellbeing.

Section 6.5 moves into an area which is replete with interesting and recent historical writing, which challenges the belief in the decline of religion in early twentieth century Britain. Writers such as Robert Beaken (Colchester) S.J.D. Green (Yorkshire) and S.C. Williams (Southwark) have explored regional experiences and broadly agree that, although formal religion and 'churchmanship' might have declined, spirituality in its broader sense, via a phenomenon they call 'diffuse Christianity' did not.<sup>657</sup> The role of diffuse Christianity's offshoots, such as Spiritualism, soothsaying and astrology as well as superstition and folk religion have also been explored by scholars such as Winter, Hazelgrove, Byrne and Davies.<sup>658</sup> This chapter sets the Wirral data against these hypotheses.

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<sup>656</sup> J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987) and L. Bryder, 'The First World War: Healthy or Hungry', *History Workshop*, 24 (1987), pp. 141-157.

<sup>657</sup> R. Beaken, *The Church of England*; S.J.D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996); S.C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark c.1800-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>658</sup> J. Winter, 'Spiritualism and The First World War', in R.W. Davis and R.J. Helmstadter, eds., *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 185-200; Everyday Lives in War Website: <https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/2015/01/supernatural-beliefs/> [Accessed 10/12/2019]; Oxford University World War One Centenary Website: <http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/body-and-mind/a-solace-to-a-tortured-world-the-growing-interest-in-spiritualism-during-and-after-ww1/> [Accessed 10/12/2019].

J. Hazelgrove, 'Spiritualism After the Great War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10 (1999), pp. 404-430; G. Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism and the Church of England 1850-1939* (Martlesham: Boydell and Brewer, 2010); O. Davies, *A Supernatural War: Magic, Divination and Faith During the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Section 6.6 explores dissent and finds few examples of the phenomenon in Wirral. Section 6.7 covers commemoration and remembrance, which also has a large body of recent associated literature, again typified by the works of Winter and by local studies such as Connelly's work on London's East End.<sup>659</sup> Finally, the role of rituals and memorials in enabling the management of grief and mourning in Wirral is explored and local cases compared with other historians' findings. Section 6.7 concludes the chapter by assessing the degree to which any of the aforementioned developments can be thought of as examples of change or of continuity.

## **5.2 The Challenges of War**

In order fully to appreciate the intensity and variety of people's sufferings during the Great War, it is appropriate to explore them in depth via case studies. As indicated in Chapter Two, the biggest challenge faced by everybody was, of course, death and bereavement. Believing that public perceptions of the Great War are dominated by excessive contemplation of death, revisionist historians have tried to put it into context. They have shown that a relatively small percentage of Britain's population died and that other European nations suffered much higher rates. The myth of 'the lost generation' has been challenged.<sup>660</sup>

However, Dan Todman said:

Questioning the myth of universal bereavement is not the same as claiming that the impact of wartime deaths was insignificant. Far from it [...] and that

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<sup>659</sup> M. Connelly, *The Great War: Memory and Ritual Commemoration in the City and East London 1916-1939* (Boydell and Brewer, 2001 and The Royal Historical Society, 2015).

<sup>660</sup> See G.J. De Groot, *Back in Blighty The British at Home in World War 1* (London: Vintage, 2014), pp. 347-367, especially p.352 where he calls Vera Brittain an 'egotist, elitist, mistress of self-pity and spokeswoman for the Lost Generation' and D. Todman *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (Hambledon: Continuum, 2006), pp. 43-72.



‘quantitative judgements [...] are of course completely useless if we do not also use qualitative data to attempt to judge the impact of war deaths.’<sup>661</sup>

That is precisely what this study of the people of Wirral is aiming to achieve. It is impossible to calculate exactly how many Wirral people died during the Great War. The district’s war memorials bear some 4477 names. Assuming that the population of the peninsula was about 275,000 during the war years, it may be said that roughly 1.6 per cent of the population died, which corresponds exactly with the figure offered by Jay Winter for the nation as a whole. Despite many reservations about the accuracy or relevance of war memorials in a statistical enquiry, the point is made that it was indeed a tiny proportion of the local population who died as a result of the Great War.<sup>662</sup> Exactly twenty per cent (200 men) of the WSS died during the war years, which also corresponds with the national figure.<sup>663</sup> As Todman says, figures do not tell the whole story. Most, if not all local people, either as the result of being relatives, friends, neighbours, schoolmates or colleagues of the victims must have been affected by death and bereavement. An example is Ada McGuire of Wallasey whose letters, despite her family apparently not having been directly bereaved, make many references to neighbouring families who had lost loved ones and the effects that this had on her emotions. On Whitsunday in May 1915, not long after the sinking of the *Lusitania*,

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<sup>661</sup> Todman, *The Great War*, p.46.

<sup>662</sup> See table 1 in Appendix Five; J. Winter, *The Great War*, pp.65-99, especially Table 3.4 on p.75, which states that sixteen in every 1000 British people died; war memorials cannot be relied upon to record everybody in a district who died and sometimes record people who either did not die or lived elsewhere; individuals might appear on more than one memorial; a good example is the Grange Hill Memorial in West Kirby which bears the names of 334 people, when research has shown that the total war dead for the district numbers over 400; see [grangehill1922.wordpress.com](http://grangehill1922.wordpress.com)

<sup>663</sup> J. Winter, *The Great War*.

she wrote to her sister in Boston saying, 'I do not suppose I will be playing much golf – so much sadness about one feels it is wrong to be frivolling.'<sup>664</sup>

Losses were unevenly distributed amongst the population: certain families and neighbourhoods lost more people than others. By the time of the dedication of the Grange Hill War Memorial on 16 December 1922, for example, the Johnstone Family of West Kirby had lost six of their seven sons and were asked to lay the first wreath.<sup>665</sup> Certain streets (such as Lee Road in Hoylake, which suffered ten dead from about forty closely packed terraced houses) were disproportionately affected. The West Kirby Book of Remembrance records twenty-two pairs of brothers amongst the area's war dead in addition to the six Johnstone brothers. Birkenhead School lost ninety-six old boys, including a set of three brothers, the sons of Lt. Colonel Eugene V. MacSwiney of Birkenhead.<sup>666</sup> By means of the local press and of formal commemoration, the wider community learned about these tragedies and were affected by them.

It is important to realise that the manner in which casualties were communicated could be extremely distressing. Numerous soldiers were posted as 'missing', their deaths not being confirmed until many months later. An example is William Holmes of Lee Road, Hoylake of the South Lancashire Regiment who was killed on 14 November 1916 at Grandcourt on the Somme, but whose death was not confirmed for seven months; he left a wife and seven children.<sup>667</sup> Another is Raphael Kenzie of Ellesmere Port who died on 18 September 1918 and whose

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<sup>664</sup> Private Papers of Misses A. and R. McGuire, IWM 96/31/1.

<sup>665</sup> DA 22/12/1922; see biographies of the Johnstone Brothers on *An Imperishable Record*, [grangehill1922.wordpress.com](http://grangehill1922.wordpress.com)

<sup>666</sup> The *West Kirby Book of Remembrance* is on permanent display in West Kirby Library; C.A. MacVicar, *Memorials of Old Birkonians* (Liverpool: Henry Young and Son, 1920).

<sup>667</sup> DA 22/11/1918.

mother was still appealing for information by 18 December of that year, five weeks after the Armistice.<sup>668</sup>

Additionally, families' sufferings were often enhanced by the ways in which information about loved ones was communicated. The newspapers abound with tragic stories, such as that of Frederick Parr of Hoylake whose family found out about his death on 7 March 1917 by tortuous means: telegrams reporting his death were sent to a completely different family – the next of kin of a namesake, Frederick Edwin Parr from Bootle, who had died a year earlier; eventually Fred's uncle, Joseph Sherlock, caretaker at Hoylake Town Hall, received a telegram apprising him of Fred's death. Earlier that day, the family had been warned that he might have died by a neighbouring family whose son had written a letter which described Fred being taken to hospital.<sup>669</sup> Sapper Ulric Williamson also of Hoylake died on 29 October 1918. His mother received a telegram telling her that he had been wounded on 21 October and taken to hospital; two days later, she received a letter from Ulric saying that he was 'not so bad, but jolly weak from loss of blood'. Mrs Williamson immediately travelled to France, hoping to visit Ulric in hospital but 'quickly learned the sad fact that her son had passed away and was, even then, lying in a soldier's grave.' The bereaved woman stayed in a YMCA hostel in Boulogne, which was 'full of people who had crossed the "silver streak" on similar business to her own.'<sup>670</sup>

Ada McGuire observed a similar case and hinted at her vicarious pain:

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<sup>668</sup> EPA 18/12/1918.

<sup>669</sup> BA 13/3/1917 and Service Papers for Frederick Parr and Frederick Edwin Parr, both of 20/KLR; the two men's documents have been mingled not just because they shared the same name but because they joined the battalion in the same week and had similar ages, TNA WO363, accessed via Ancestry.co.uk.

<sup>670</sup> DA 8/11/1918.

One hears of a lot of suffering through the war. Our caretaker's wife is in great trouble. Her youngest boy has been 'missing' since the first week in October. I suppose he is killed though he may possibly be a prisoner. She says that if she could only hear of someone who spoke a kind word to him or who saw him buried she would be content – but not to know anything at all that is the hard part.<sup>671</sup>

Reports of wounding or of being taken prisoner could be almost equally shocking. The BN of 5 May 1917 described how a Mr. Nevitt of Smithy Cottages in Spital was proud to have five sons serving in the army, all of whom had at some point been wounded. The newspaper did not comment on the less favourable emotions which Mr. Nevitt must have endured. Herbert Adams of Birkenhead was severely wounded on the Somme on 21 September 1916; the reactions of his family upon receiving the news have been recorded: his mother 'reeled along the hall passage saying "Oh my poor lad, oh my poor lad"', but her spirits were lifted when Herbert himself sent her a telegram saying he was 'alright' and on his way home.<sup>672</sup>

This section has exemplified the appalling nature of war and shown how it caused stress, anxiety, grief and depression. It has reminded us that we are talking about real people who endured unprecedented sufferings and demonstrated the importance of qualitative historical analysis. It lays the groundwork for the next section which will show that, within the Wirral evidence, there is little sign of disillusionment with the nation's war aims or of a desire to give up. Every shock, outrage, loss or disappointment seemed to provoke the people to increased levels of determination and endurance.

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<sup>671</sup> Ada to Eva, McGuire Papers IWM 96/31/1.

<sup>672</sup> Private Papers of Herbert Adams, Wirral Archives YPX/27.

### **5.3 The People's Response**

On 7 May 1915 the war became personal for the people of Merseyside when the Cunard liner *Lusitania* was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine with the loss of 1198 lives, many of whom came from Merseyside. In Chapter Three it was shown how the tragedy motivated the Liverpool Scots to charge into battle, on 16 June 1915, shouting 'Remember the Lusy!' The event had the same effect on civilians. Again, the McGuire family give us insights into the local mood. On 9 May 1915 Ada wrote, 'There seems nothing but death and destruction everywhere' and 'fancy to think we will never see that lovely ship in the Mersey again – what a cruel shame.' She described a neighbour, Miss Hunter, who had drowned and whose father had been told that her body had been identified, only to have the news contradicted shortly afterwards. Ada was enraged, referred to the Germans as 'brutes' and expressed sympathy with the anti-German rioters in Wallasey and Liverpool. She believed that women from the seafaring neighbourhoods resembled the women of the French Revolution, as they rampaged through the streets. She expressed increased determination to get involved in the war, saying that she felt 'too fierce' to cry about it and her mother said, some three months later that, 'everyone must do what they can to help during the war.'<sup>673</sup>

Andrew Carlyle Tait (1878-1964) was curator of the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight. Despite appeals against his enlistment on the grounds of his professional responsibilities, from 1916, he served enthusiastically with the ASC. His private papers contain many reflections on the war, including the following verses written on the third anniversary of its declaration:

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<sup>673</sup> McGuire Papers: Ada to Eva 9/5/1915 and her mother, Hannah Jackson McGuire (nee Evans, 1845-1943) to Eva 31/8/1915.

Many a man will ask tonight,  
'Must we continue?' and 'Were we right?'  
But I think as I used to do,  
We could do nothing less, we must see it through.  
Our foe is weakened but powerful still  
And quite unchanged in his evil will.<sup>674</sup>

Sentiments explored in Chapter Two, such as conviction that the Kaiser's Germany was evil and that the war had to be prosecuted with self-denying vigour, emerge again in the above stanzas, making a poem, written in the middle of the war by a serving soldier, evidence of widespread and sincere commitment to its aims and of people's preparedness to make sacrifices.

At about the same time as Tait wrote his verses, the vicar of Ellesmere Port gave a sermon on the same subject: he told the congregation to be grateful that Germany's advance through Europe had been stopped by 'divine interposition' and praised the solidarity which the war had engendered throughout the empire. He was thankful that 'practically everyone was doing something in the service of their country' and stated that the loss of so many men from the town was terrible and heart-rending, but was also 'glorious' because the men had 'willingly given the

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<sup>674</sup> Andrew Carlyle Tait's Papers, Wirral Archives YCT/1-4. This poem, and the many amateur efforts like it which were published by the local press, express completely different sentiments to those found in the verses of war poets like Sassoon and Owen and are more accurate representations of popular feelings. See De Groot *Back in Blighty* pp. 428-429, where he refers to Jessie Pope whose 'patriotic doggerel', published by *Punch*, captured the true public mood, D. Todman *The Great War* pp. 153-186 and J. Potter, "'A Certain Poetess": Recuperating Jesse Pope 1868-1941' in A.K. Smith and K. Cowman, eds., *Landscapes and Voices of the Great War* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2017), pp.97-114.

sacrifice of their lives for our sakes and in order that we should be spared the devastation of our country by warfare.<sup>675</sup>

Even when it came to domestic challenges, there was a common desire to push on regardless and to revile anybody who deviated from the consensus. The pattern was set early on when Richard Henderson of Conway Street interrupted a recruiting meeting at Birkenhead Haymarket in September 1914 with the words, 'It's all b..... fine for you to stand there asking us to go to the front, but who the b..... h... is going to keep our wives and families while we are out there?' He was tackled by others in the audience, arrested and fined twenty shillings the following day at the Borough Police Court.<sup>676</sup> In late March 1917 a meeting was held in Ellesmere Port to discuss labour issues. Council officials and Gershom Stewart M.P. were on the platform and the audience was told about the many successful endeavours by the authorities to provide welfare. A man stood up and asked why the professional man was treated differently to the labouring man and whether the panel thought that twenty-five shillings a week for a man and eighteen shillings for a woman was enough. 'There were cries of "put him out" and "he's a conscientious objector."' A woman, accompanied by a discharged soldier, advanced towards the man and spoke 'in emphatic tones' asking him 'why he was out of khaki' when her husband had given up a five pounds per week job for a shilling a day in the army and had fought in Gallipoli, whilst she subsisted on a separation allowance. There were further cries of 'chuck him out' before timely 'singing of the national anthem' prevented any further embarrassing scenes.<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>675</sup> EPA 8/8/1917; A. Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp. 152-186.

<sup>676</sup> BN 9/9/1914.

<sup>677</sup> EPA 28.3.1917.

Building on the foundations laid in Chapter Three, it has been shown that, despite their sufferings (and perhaps partly because of them), the people of Wirral were determined to carry on supporting the war. Clearly, it was a different world to the one in which we now live. Such selfless determination to continue fighting a costly and protracted war needs to be explained. That is the task of the ensuing sections, dealing with ‘the body’ (economic reasons) and ‘the soul’ (spiritual or psychological reasons) for resilience.

#### **5.4 Body – Economic Reasons for Resilience**

Body and soul have to be kept together, making a steady food-supply, adequate incomes, decent housing, medical care and welfare essential. Since the 1980s, historians have argued that standards of living either did not deteriorate or even improved during the war, implying that the relative comfort enjoyed by a large portion of the population bolstered their resilience.<sup>678</sup> Winter in particular argued that standards of living and nutrition improved and that ‘there was a levelling up of wages which benefitted most precisely those groups whose mortality declined rapidly during the war.’<sup>679</sup> In addition, thanks to government planning, the calorific value of wartime diets were the same as they were before the war, unemployment ceased to exist and employees received war bonuses and larger amounts of overtime pay.<sup>680</sup> In 1992, Waites argued that increased taxation of the better-off and a rise in real wages caused ‘the pyramid of economic inequality [to be] perceptively flattened by the war.’<sup>681</sup> This optimistic view was summed up, in 2014,

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<sup>678</sup> J. Winter, *The Great War*, pp. 103-244; P.E. Dewey, *Nutrition and Living Standards in Wartime Britain* in R. Wall and J. Winter, eds., *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914 – 1918*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); B. Waites, *A Class Society at War*; De Groot, *Back in Blighty*, especially pp. 380-383.

<sup>679</sup> J. Winter, *The Great War*, p. 213.

<sup>680</sup> J. Winter, *ibid.* pp. 215, 216.

<sup>681</sup> B. Waites, *A Class Society at War*, p.113.



by De Groot, when he said, 'Pacified by a better diet and slightly warmer homes, the poor had no truck with revolution.'<sup>682</sup>

In 1987, due to his choice of primary sources, Bryder criticised Winter's thesis, pointing out that he should have taken account of local and individual experiences.<sup>683</sup> But Winter himself had already observed that 'if local price movements were not uniform in this period, neither were household diets or patterns of food consumption. For this reason, blanket statements about changes in wartime standards of living must be treated with considerable caution.'<sup>684</sup> His words highlight the necessity for a local study. This section aims to do so by deploying mainly anecdotal, and not statistical, data derived mainly from the newspapers. A thorough critique of Winter's arguments is not possible but some light will be cast on the relationship between economic wellbeing and resilience.

Chapter One introduced the way in which an incipient 'welfare state' was quite well established by 1914, how women were an integral part of its work and how philanthropy and self-help cushioned many people from destitution. Chapter Two showed how these pre-war features of local society functioned with increased vigour during the first year of the war. Later evidence shows that the trajectory was maintained. Local newspapers contain detailed articles about official welfare provision, where and how it could be maintained and how funds could be used. Separation Allowances were a vital benefit for women whose menfolk had joined the forces. The EPA published a touching picture in 1915, showing dependants queuing outside Ellesmere Port Post Office in order to collect their allowances (Figure 22)

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<sup>682</sup> G. De Groot, *Back in Blighty*, p.382.

<sup>683</sup> L. Bryder, 'The First World War'.

<sup>684</sup> J. Winter, *The Great War*, p.229.

The same paper, in October 1918, printed an article laying out the exact sums which could be claimed, by whom and when, making it clear that these allowances had kept pace with inflation and were designed to fit a range of circumstances. By that time, the maximum allowance was twelve shillings and sixpence for one dependant and seventeen shillings and sixpence for two dependants. Grants were also available to meet the rising costs of existing 'contractual obligations' such as rent, mortgages, hire-purchase agreements, rates, insurance premiums and education. Thus, to some extent, the challenge of rising prices was dealt with by central government.<sup>685</sup> It must also be remembered that numerous employers, such as Lever Bros. and Birkenhead Borough Council had promised to supplement their former employees' service pay to the degree where it became equal to their peacetime salary. The abovementioned requests for extra financial help from the borough, found in its wartime files, must be seen in this context.<sup>686</sup>

Voluntary and self-help organisations continued to support the vulnerable. In 1917, the Ellesmere Port branch of the Co-operative Society reported on its healthy accounts and that it had managed to expand as far as Eastham. Sugar was believed to be vital and the society boasted that, despite supplies having halved since 1914, it had been able to meet customer demand, hinting at them having performed a similar role with other foodstuffs.<sup>687</sup>

The war caused a greater degree of government control, delegated through local councils, which was designed to enable fair and efficient distribution of food, ensuring that the people remained healthy enough to keep working. Each local council was required to create a Food Control Committee to implement

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<sup>685</sup> EPA 30/10/1918.

<sup>686</sup> Birkenhead Borough Council War Period Files, WA B/163/WP/1-3.

<sup>687</sup> EPA 5/4/1917.

government laws and to explore ways of improving food supplies. There is evidence in the newspapers of most of Wirral's local authorities working hard to meet their obligations by prosecuting lawbreakers, making land available for allotments, offering advice and education about food production and introducing rationing during the early part of 1918. In the popular imagination, these activities did not occur until the Second World War, which is remembered for its collectivism and communal spirit. It is not widely realised that they were so strongly evident during the First World War.<sup>688</sup>

As the war progressed, local industries expanded and thereby not only reduced poverty by employing previously idle workers, but also fuelled a possible rise in living standards by paying higher wages and war bonuses. Due to increased demand for new ships and for repairs to old ones, Cammell Laird's boomed. In April 1916 directors said that 'the firm's output has been far in excess of anything hitherto achieved during the history of the company' and, after the war, reported that the firm had employed an average of 14,000 men and spent over seven and a half million pounds on wages.<sup>689</sup> In 1918 the company was still advertising for extra staff and talking of a critical labour shortage. New employees were offered emergency accommodation and 'good wages'.<sup>690</sup> All employees received war bonuses, including 'boys and women', who by January 1918, were receiving an extra shilling and sixpence to five shillings per week.<sup>691</sup> Lever Bros. also

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<sup>688</sup> Articles about these topics can be found in the EPA of 14/3/17 (land for allotments and how to make food go further), 30/5/1917 (food preservation), 10/1/1917 (keeping pigs and poultry), 5/12/1917 (a free lecture about vegetable-growing), 6/2/1918 (plans for food rationing) and 20/3/1918 (prosecutions of infringers of food regulations eg. selling cheese at inflated prices). Also see the BN 26/1/18, 10/7/18 and 27/7/17 which talk about the efficacy of rationing and 12/5/17, which bears a photograph of women working on a new plot in Birkenhead. See Birkenhead Food Vigil Committee WNC 16/2/153-158 at the PHMA.

<sup>689</sup> LDP 11/4/16; BNVS, p.49; K. Warren, *Steel Hips and Men*, pp.173-200.

<sup>690</sup> Advertisement in the LDP 13/4/18.

<sup>691</sup> Cammell Laird Minute Book Volume 10, WA 16/1/18.

flourished, due to glycerine manufacture. In March 1916, Lord Leverhulme reported that despite 'possibly the most difficult conditions they had ever had to face', the company was 'progressing' and that during the previous year, they 'had shown the biggest increase in all departments they had ever had.'<sup>692</sup> By the middle of the war, even Ellesmere Port's struggling ironworks were once again booming. In addition, Levinstein's Dye Works had prospered due to increased demand for indigo and planned to expand. The Manchester Ship Canal cement works also flourished following a change of ownership in June 1915. The LDP of 4 September 1918 stated that 'Ellesmere Port is not merely keenly interested in the advent of the new industry but already has visions of becoming a great industrial town.'

Unfortunately, there are no primary sources which can provide a statistical analysis of the efficacy of the above developments. Indeed, the industrial disputes which were discussed in Chapter Four show that working people enduring long working hours, food shortages and declining real wages, were neither universally nor perpetually happy with their economic circumstances. But it is highly probable that the economic benefits of a wartime economy combined with increased government intervention and welfare provisions were essential for maintaining the people's commitment to the war effort. Indeed, regardless of their relative success, it is probable that the multifarious government and voluntary welfare measures at least bolstered the sense of communal endeavour. Finally, if the population had been starving, impoverished and diseased (as indeed were a great many of the people of Germany by 1918), the people of Wirral (and, by implication, of Britain

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<sup>692</sup> LDP 31/3/16.

as a whole) would have found it difficult if not impossible to carry on fighting and morale might have collapsed.<sup>693</sup>

### **5.5 Soul – Mind, Spirit and Faith**

Amongst the primary sources, the views of the atheist cannot be found. This might well result from the sources' bias, but more probably from the scarcity of the non-believer and, given the ferocity with which orthodox views were defended, the individual's unwillingness to advertise his or her lack of faith. Religious belief was an essential part of most people's lives. Preceding chapters have shown the importance of local churches and of religious leaders, but the persistence and development of individual belief and its role in enabling resilience must now be explored.

Recent research has argued that the assumption that religion declined in early twentieth century Britain is a myth. It is true that church attendance diminished, but this quantitative truism is not evidence of a decline in religious belief. Neither is it evidence of the disappearance of a 'Christian society', as, in the words of Michael Snape, 'British society was still identifiably and self-consciously Christian' and, 'the norms of Christian morality were still very much embedded in British law on questions such as abortion and homosexuality.'<sup>694</sup> S.C. Williams referred to a 'secularisation myth', said that there were many 'subtle and nuanced dimensions of belief' which 'regulated ethical behaviour and provided a symbolic system whereby individuals and communities made sense of their world', while Robert

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<sup>693</sup> The point was made in article in the EPA of 20/3/1918 wherein a repatriated prisoner of war revealed that the Germans were subsisting on much more meagre rations than the British.

<sup>694</sup> M. Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Soldier in the First and Second World Wars* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 20.

Beaken asserted that 'In order to understand life in Britain during World War One, one must take account of the role played by Christianity.'<sup>695</sup>

Scholars also agree on the existence of 'diffusive Christianity' or the 'inarticulate Christianity of the working man', whose central tenet could be summed up as 'doing good to one's fellow man.'<sup>696</sup> In Snape's words, it was 'proud of its ignorance of theology', based on works, was a form of 'invincible if unconscious Pelagianism', 'folk religion' instead of 'conscious churchmanship' and often involved 'an uncomprehending use of the Bible' as an artefact or charm rather than the source of doctrine.<sup>697</sup> It was this informal or generalised spirituality which recent research tells us did not decline and even prospered in consequence of the Great War. It is argued here that both diffuse Christianity (as well as its innovatory offshoots such as Spiritualism and Astrology) and formal Christianity helped sustain the people of Wirral during and after the Great War.

To begin with, the frequency with which spirituality appears in local soldiers' records is remarkable. Amongst the service papers of Wirral men who died, there are forty-one lists of personal possessions which were returned to families. Amongst these, often pathetic, collections can be found religious items: seventeen men had at least one religious book on his person, while two men owned religious jewellery in the form of a crucifix and a 'Roman Catholic medallion'. These items could well be evidence of folk religion, as the fondness of British soldiers for carrying testaments in their breast pockets to ward off enemy bullets and the

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<sup>695</sup> S.C. Williams, *Religious Belief*, p.1; R. Beaken, *The Church*, p.3.

<sup>696</sup> S.C. Williams, *Religious Belief*, pp. 119, 123.

<sup>697</sup> Snape *God*, pp. 22-35.

increasing tendency amongst Protestant soldiers to carry Roman Catholic amulets as lucky charms are documented.<sup>698</sup>

However, soldiers' own words, recorded in diaries, letters and memoirs, reveal the importance of more formal faith in sustaining them, reflecting the importance of the same convictions for the families at home. Cecil Tomkinson (1895-1992) of Hoylake and Wallasey kept a detailed diary, covering his voyage out to the Middle East and service in the Dardanelles with the RAMC, in which he described his religious activities. On 23 March 1915, he held 'a little bible study' on the deck of his troopship and listed six fellow participants. On the following day they met again and agreed to convene at the same spot every night.<sup>699</sup>

Herbert Adams (1895-1985) of Birkenhead was a deeply religious man. On 18 April 1917 he wrote this to his fiancée:

I have been praying very earnestly and I know all at home have done likewise. Now my dear girl it must be God's will that it should be so and it behoves us like Christians to submit ourselves to his divine will. Praise be to Him that I am conscious that He is ever near to me now and I have His assurance that he will keep me safe through hidden dangers and bring me home again to my loved ones.<sup>700</sup>

The Reverend C.M. Chavasse appeared in Chapter Three because he preached at Christ Church, Cloughton in February 1915. He made a return visit in October of that year and preached another powerful sermon, based on his experiences as a

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<sup>698</sup> Ibid. p. 35 and 'Supernatural Beliefs' on *The Everyday Lives in War* Website: <https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/>

<sup>699</sup> Diary of C.R. Tomkinson.

<sup>700</sup> Herbert Adams Papers.

military chaplain. Amongst many memorable observations, he offered the following:

He had never found a man out there who had scoffed at Christianity. They read their testaments. Officers had told him with some astonishment, that they had found their men reading Bibles. He knew one company where the men sang hymns on Sunday nights; another where a corporal held services in a dugout.<sup>701</sup>

Ada McGuire confirmed this perception when she wrote, 'They say the soldiers are deeply religious and that the chaplains at the front are doing a fine work. Fancy them having holy communion in ruined barns, sometimes with shells flying about.'<sup>702</sup> And, 'They say the men are showing a keen desire for spiritual things and pray most earnestly. Of course, it might not be all of them – but it must make a difference being on the verge of the fighting front.'<sup>703</sup> Furthermore, Ada believed that the war would have the beneficial effect of awaking 'England from the pursuit of pleasure into which her people were sinking' and, presumably, draw them back to God.<sup>704</sup>

Tenets of the Christian faith gave people the mental equipment to deal with death and bereavement. The most important of these was the doctrine of sacrifice.<sup>705</sup>

Modern readers are probably inured to the frequent use of the bible verse John 15:13 – 'Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends' on war memorials and in obituaries and epitaphs and the phrase 'paid the ultimate

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<sup>701</sup> EPA 27/10/1915.

<sup>702</sup> Ada to Eva 31/5/1915, IWM 96/31/1.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid. Ada to Eva 23/7 unknown year, probably 1915.

<sup>704</sup> Ibid. Ada to Eva 28/8/1914 IWM 96/31/1.

<sup>705</sup> Gregory *The Last Great War*, 'Religion and the Languages of Sacrifice', pp. 152-186.



sacrifice' leaves many twenty-first century people unmoved. Such indifference must be peeled away so that the true power of this sincerely held belief may properly be understood. People believed that Jesus died on the cross to save mankind and that a great many people would have to emulate him by suffering and dying in the war, in order that a better world would come about – not an idealistic 'New Jerusalem', but the old world with its traditional hierarchies and values, only with less materialism, more spirituality and an absence of the German threat. In the words of Bob Bushaway:

Simple contexts of victory and defeat no longer provided a sustaining ideology for British society. The belief that the efforts of their dead had contributed to some higher purpose was to offer more consolation.<sup>706</sup>

Sir Douglas Haig, the Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, famously expressed his belief in the concept when he wrote this in a letter to British newspapers in May 1916:

The lessons which the people of England have to learn are patience, self-sacrifice, and confidence [...]The aim for which the war is being waged is the destruction of German militarism. Three years of war and the loss of one-tenth of the manhood of the nation is not too great a price to pay in so great a cause.<sup>707</sup>

Judging by the evidence from Wirral it appears that Haig was preaching to the converted. Contemporary local media are replete with references to this vision.

Amongst most of the personal papers explored for this enquiry, there lie memorial

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<sup>706</sup> B. Bushaway, 'Name Upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance' in R. Porter, ed., *Myths of the English* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 136-167 (p.143).

<sup>707</sup> Douglas Haig's Diaries and Letters, TNA WO256/10.

cards, epitaphs, dedications, poems and prayers which contain the word 'sacrifice' and related phrases and sentiments. Figure 23 is the example which was found within the McGuire papers and contains the phrases 'laid down their lives for the future welfare of humanity' and 'having made the supreme sacrifice'.<sup>708</sup> Captain L.I.L. Ferguson's papers contain a poem called 'The Supreme Sacrifice' by John S. Arkwright, the fifth stanza of which says:

Still stands his cross from that dread hour to this:

Like some bright star above the dark abyss

Still, through the veil, the victor's pitying eyes

Look down to bless our lesser calvaries.<sup>709</sup>

The newspapers contained many similar items and tributes to fallen soldiers which used synonymous terminology. A list of casualties in the EPA begins with the words 'Killed on Easter Day' when talking about the death of John Pore of West Kirby, implying a parallel with Christ's Passion. Further down, Private J. Jackson of Hoylake is said to have 'died the best of deaths, a death for others' and typically is described as having been 'killed instantly, without any pain.' Stanley Kennaugh of Heswall received special praise because he combined deference to his superiors with a willingness to die when he wrote in his last letter that he admired his officer and felt that 'a chap could follow him anywhere.' The paper said, 'It is in that spirit that Private Kennaugh has laid down his life nobly and willingly.'<sup>710</sup>

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<sup>708</sup> McGuire Papers undated with no message. Bob Bushaway developed this theme when talking about the development of remembrance and commemoration: 'Simple contexts of victory and defeat no longer provided a sustaining ideology for British society. The belief that the efforts of their dead had contributed to some higher purpose was to offer more consolation.' B. Bushaway, 'Name Upon Name', p.143.

<sup>709</sup> Papers of Captain Lionel Leslie Irvine Ferguson (1886-1976) of Birkenhead and New Brighton, IWM 7154.

<sup>710</sup> EPA 8/5/1917.

Officers acquired almost saintly status when they died leading their men into battle. Captain Arthur Twentyman (1876-1914) of the Liverpool Scots is a classic example. His death, according to the BN came as 'a great shock' to local people. Two weeks later, the same newspaper published a letter from Private Sydney Adams of Poulton, who was one of six soldiers who carried Twentyman's body back to the lines. He left us with a poignant image of the devoted soldiers bringing their beloved leader home for burial: 'We lost a very fine man in Captain A. Twentyman [...] We had a pretty warm time carrying the poor chap away from the firing line.'<sup>711</sup> This is not to say that such terrible blows could easily be absorbed by the bereaved families: on 22 November 1918 (eleven days after the war's end), for example, Edith M. Carline (b.1894, née Hallam) of Port Sunlight wrote to Herbert Adams, thanking him for his condolences on the death of her husband, Second Lieutenant Thomas Carline (b.1888), which occurred on 30 September that year. Her words are touching:

My dear husband was indeed one of the very best – always. It is very very hard for me to realise that he has really gone – I don't know whatever I shall do without him ... One feels so thankful to think that no more of our brave boys' lives will have to be sacrificed. If only peace had come two months earlier.<sup>712</sup>

One of the most heart-rending tributes to a lost son appeared in September 1918 on the second anniversary of the death of Bugler Harold Wilkinson of Ellesmere

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<sup>711</sup> BN 5 and 12/12/1914.

<sup>712</sup> Herbert Adams Papers, Wirral Archives YPX/27. Thomas Carline served in 18/KLR (Second Pals) and 15/Lancashire Fusiliers. He was promoted from the ranks and is named on the war memorials at Backford, Chester Town Hall, Hoole and Port Sunlight. See Backford, Mollington and District Local History Society, *Beneath the Surface Volume Two: Essays from the Cheshire Townships of Lea-by-Backford, Backford, Caughall, Chorlton, Mollington* Volume Two (n.p., Backford, Mollington and District Local History Society, 2014), p.184 for a fuller biography.

Port. The image of his youthful face above the sorrowful verses (Figure 24), written by his mother, hint at the unspeakable pain which his family probably endured for the rest of their lives and remind us that the sharp edges of grief might well have been dulled by theology and patriotism but were never fully erased.<sup>713</sup>

Allied to the belief in the value of sacrifice were specific beliefs about death. Due to lower life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality and the unavailability of free hospital care for the terminally ill, early twentieth-century people were much more familiar with death than their current descendants and, in consequence, often appear to have been more willing to discuss it. Ada McGuire's mother, Hannah, wrote about death in a letter to her daughter, Eva in 1917: 'Death is everywhere.' She described a book, 'written by a doctor', called *The Adventure of Death*, which she said was 'a scientific exposition of what death really is and its meaning and I suppose its necessity. Before further changes or developments death must occur.' She had seen the book reviewed in 'the paper' and was eager to get a copy.<sup>714</sup>

People who faced death with equanimity were admired: Ada McGuire told a story about her neighbour, Mrs Musgrave-Brown, whose nephew had a:

[...] miraculous escape. The bullet passed between his stomach and his heart! The doctor said to him, 'My boy, you have never been nearer to death, ever – were you prepared?' He replied, 'Yes Doctor, I am thankful to

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<sup>713</sup> EPA 4/9/1918. Bugler Wilkinson (b.1893 in Bilston, Staffordshire) joined the Cheshire Regiment on 26/8/1914 in Chester. He died on the hospital ship *Nevassa* the day after being wounded in the Dardanelles.

<sup>714</sup> Hannah McGuire to Eva 7/1/1917 IWM 96/31/1. The book was written by Robert William MacKenna and published in 1916. It was reviewed in *The Spectator* of 19/8/1916, pp. 9-10.

say I was.' Mrs M.B. says he is a delightful boy. They must feel a bit serious when they know every minute could be their last in this phase of life.<sup>715</sup>

A report in the BA about the death of Sapper John Williams of Higher Bebington brings beliefs about sacrifice and death to a focal point. The article is headed 'Remarkable Premonition of Death' and describes how John was killed on 16 June 1915 during the Hooze charge. His pocketbook contained the words:

Soldiers must go to fight this terrible fight;

I may come back, perhaps I might;

If not so, may God be your guide and shining light.

Company Sergeant-Major Langley wrote a detailed letter to John's parents which contains the now familiar words, 'God has willed that it should be and we can but say (hard though it seems), "Thy will be done." It is hard, for you, all at home to bear, but it is the sad penalty that our dear ones must pay.'<sup>716</sup>

Preparedness for death was, of course, partly enabled by the conviction that there is an afterlife. Numerous are the sermons recorded in the local press which illustrate the point. A striking example is that which was delivered by Canon E.F. Robson at Hoylake in September 1917:

And perhaps – who can tell? Whilst you and I are in this church tonight, they too, have been in our midst, unnoticed, invisible, but moving silently amongst us. This mysterious and wonderful subject of the life beyond is always presenting to us new thoughts, new ideas, new visions. Perhaps the

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<sup>715</sup> Ada to Eva 31/5/1916, IWM 96/31/1.

<sup>716</sup> BA 10/7/1915. Sapper Williams was a member of the Cheshire Field Company, RE and died from the effects of a shell explosion. Before the war, he had been a part-time soldier, staff-sergeant in the Church Lads' Brigade and member of the church choir. The newspaper said he died on 16 June, but *Soldiers Died in the Great War* says it was the 17, which seems more likely.

thought that they are in our midst – see all the things we do, know all the sorrows we endure – may come to us with a new sense of comfort when we mourn their loss.<sup>717</sup>

The published diary of Captain Billy Bloor of Oxton and Hoylake, who died on 5 January 1918 near Ypres, contains a dedication by Maurice Maeterlinck, which includes the words:

And now it is in us that their life, so suddenly cut short, must resume its course. Whatever be our faith and whatever the God whom it adores, one thing is almost certain and, in spite of all appearances is becoming more certain; it is that death and life are commingled; the dead and the living alike are but moments, hardly dissimilar, of a single and infinite existence and members of one immortal family.<sup>718</sup>

There is also evidence of widespread interest in eclectic folk or pseudo-religion – a probable offshoot from Diffuse Christianity as explained above. Hannah McGuire, for example spoke about a book called *In Tune with the Infinite* by Ralph Waldo Trine, which she liked ‘very much’. The work combines the doctrines of several world religions, amateur psychology and positive thinking strategies to provide a readable self-help manual, which in many ways was ahead of its time and certainly appears relevant to people living through war. Hannah said that it was ‘something on the lines of Christian Science but much more understandable.’<sup>719</sup>

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<sup>717</sup> DA 14/9/1917.

<sup>718</sup> IWM: *The War Diary of Captain William Henry Bloor RFA* (Privately published 1915 and 1918). See [grangehill1922.wordpress.com](http://grangehill1922.wordpress.com) for Bloor’s biography.

<sup>719</sup> Hannah to Eva, 2/5/1915. R.W. Trine, *In Touch with the Infinite* (London: Bell, 1911); first published in the USA in 1897, it has continued to be republished up until 2008 and is still a popular work, also available as an audiobook.

Hannah's daughter, Ada, mentioned *The Survival of Man* by Oliver Hodges (apparently published in 1909), which was about spiritualism – a practice, according to some historians, whose popularity grew during and immediately after the war.<sup>720</sup> If Spiritualists played a significant role in Wirral society, their activities failed to impinge upon the primary sources. Spiritualist societies existed in Birkenhead and Rock Ferry by October 1900. The former was founded by Joseph Warlow (1844-1936), a Liverpool cotton broker and his wife Mary Ann Bowker (1850-1910), who kept a wartime scrapbook, which says little about their occult activities, but records that they met at *Britten Hall*.<sup>721</sup> Brief references elsewhere to a major Spiritualist gathering in Birkenhead in 1917 and correspondence between believers and sceptics in the LE hint at Spiritualism's continuing presence, but say nothing about its popularity amongst bereaved families.<sup>722</sup>

After the war the authorities took a dim view of Spiritualism: practitioners were prosecuted under the 1824 Vagrancy Act. In March 1924 the *Nottingham Evening Post* reported on the arrest of Mrs Florence Louisa Leighton in Birkenhead for 'fortune telling'. She claimed to have been a medium since the age of fourteen, that her husband and children shared her beliefs and that she 'her only object was to do good.' Four female police spies queued for forty minutes to see Mrs Leighton, who confessed to once having seen twenty-seven customers in one

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<sup>720</sup> See J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 54-77, in which the author states (p. 54) that the Great War, 'the most modern of wars', triggered 'an avalanche of the unmodern', for example, Spiritualism; this assertion can be criticised on the grounds that Spiritualism, having been invented in America in about 1848, was innovatory and, as a result of its adoption by a number of distinguished scientists and its attempted scientific methods, can be seen as a typical product of modernity; J.M. Winter and E. Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p.56; Davies, *A Supernatural War*, pp. 54-98. Spiritualism also attracted those in search of a more democratic form of religion in which women could play a leading role; see Hazelgrove, 'Spiritualism'.

<sup>721</sup> WA ACC 1908.

<sup>722</sup> LE 16/11/1917 and 5/1/15.

day.<sup>723</sup> This might be evidence of a modest growth in interest in Spiritualism in Birkenhead amongst the post-war bereaved, but, in sum, local evidence does not support the idea of a war-induced surge in interest in communicating with the deceased.

According to Snape, 'during the years of the First World War a prevailing atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity conspired to push fortune telling to the fore'.<sup>724</sup> Even the highly rational and practical trade union leader and later peer of the realm from Wallasey, Walter Citrine, confessed to having developed an interest in palmistry before the war which he never lost.<sup>725</sup> Hannah and Ada McGuire expressed an interest in soothsaying: in January 1917, Hannah wrote to her daughter 'It is prophesied that the wicked world will end in 1917, so be ready!' (no source was cited) and Ada wrote that Mother Shipman had prophesied that the war would end in Delamere Forest.<sup>726</sup> Beginning on 23 May 1917, the EPA published a series of articles, called 'An Advertiser Special', about astrology, in which the author claimed that it was a science and completely compatible with Christianity. It was an example of the bizarre and implausible syncretism, which seems to have provided comfort or distraction to some people during stressful times.<sup>727</sup>

It is impossible to know exactly how widely and sincerely the above-mentioned Christian and home-spun doctrines were accepted or to what extent they provided comfort to those who adhered to them, but it is clear that people were expected to

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<sup>723</sup> *Nottingham Evening Post* 12/3/1924.

<sup>724</sup> Snape, *God*, p.54.

<sup>725</sup> W. Citrine, *Men and Work: An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), p.21.

<sup>726</sup> Hannah to Eva 7/1/1917; Ada to Eva 11/10/1914. See J.C. Simpson, *The Life and Prophecies of Ursula Sotneil Better Known as Mother Shipton of Knaresborough, Yorkshire* (n.p. The Waverley Press, 1920), which does not, however contain a reference to this prophecy.

<sup>727</sup> EPA 23/5/1917.



believe in concepts which provided an all-embracing cosmogony, capable of absorbing many painful experiences into a hopeful teleological framework, wherein suffering and death would lead to greater outcomes. The next section of this analysis discusses the evidence for deviation from accepted beliefs and its relevance to wartime local society.

## **6.6 Dissent**

As mentioned above, the attitudes of atheists in Wirral are almost impossible to find. Ironically, what is apparent is that some of the small amount of anti-war feeling which did exist was expressed by believers. Many local church leaders of all denominations thought that it was a just war and that it was a sin not to become involved. People who disagreed on conscientious grounds were scorned. During April 1916 the Liverpool Primitive Methodist Synod was held in Chester and addressed by the Reverend R.T. Guttery, who about half-way through his fiery sermon, said:

And I want to lift my voice in respectful protest against the mawkish cant that is being talked in some quarters as if [recent army recruits] had descended to some lower moral level and had sacrificed an ideal conscience! These are the heroes of conscience! These are the men who have taken the sacrificial cup that will cleanse the world. When they come back with the light of victory in their eyes – thank God they will! – they will have done something to make the world ready for the blessing of peace.<sup>728</sup>

The alternative viewpoint had been enunciated in equally uncompromising terms by 'C.W.F.' of Tranmere, in a letter to the LDP, in which he or she said:

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<sup>728</sup> CC 29/4/1916.

The attitude of most of the churches does not reflect the noble life of Jesus of Nazareth nor 'the sermon on the mount'. I submit that a community Christian in its true sense would never tolerate as leaders or teachers the smug easy-going modern Balaams, the fawning partisans who find it so irksome to obey their Master's 'Follow Me'.<sup>729</sup>

In other words, any true disciple of Christ would oppose the war. Some people who appeared before local appeals tribunals expressed the same belief. Reports in March 1916 about the Wirral Rural District Tribunal describe an eighteen-year-old youth who worked as a clerk for a metal dealer, saying that he would not fight because he was a Christian. 'He wished to be a humble follower of Jesus Christ, whose teaching was opposed to all war, whether between man and man or class and class.' His subsequent interrogation by the chairman, A.S. Gaskell J.P., followed a stereotypical and rather shallow course, as he asked him whether he would ever kill to protect his home or female relatives. He said that he would not, but would be prepared to lay down *his* own life instead. He further said that he would not work as a medic as it was still a type of military service. He was granted exemption from combatant duties, but there is no record of his subsequent fate.<sup>730</sup> Keith Robbins asserted that 'Legend has it that the tribunals were invariably harsh, obscurantist and insensitive' and claimed that this view results from our having been informed by the conscientious objectors themselves.<sup>731</sup> The above report, however, and many more like it, in Wirral's newspapers suggest that this view is based on evidence and is therefore fact and not legend, although Robbins's

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<sup>729</sup> LDP 29/12/1914; the letter is dated 28/12/1914.

<sup>730</sup> BN 8/3/1916.

<sup>731</sup> K. Robbins, 'The British Experience of Conscientious Objection' in H Cecil and P.H. Liddle, eds., *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), pp.691-708 (p.695).

broader point that conscientious objectors were a diverse and complex group who should not either be stereotyped or over-played is accepted.

It is possible that the next appellant was an atheist, due to his being labelled as a 'free-thinking socialist', but he said nothing about his religious views and explained that he had been a socialist for five years and believed in the 'solidarity of the human race'. Again, the interrogation appears somewhat wooden, as the appellant was asked if he had 'any foreign blood in him' and what he would do if someone was to punch him in the face. He replied, 'I would ask him to apologise (laughter). The question of a personal attack is irrelevant.' His appeal was denied. There were further appeals of this nature over the remainder of the war, although it must be emphasised that the majority of cases related to economic and domestic problems, especially those experienced by carers, businesspeople and farmers instead of conscientious matters. Indeed, the cases which appeared immediately after the above two were a farmer, a 'teamsman', a farm hand, a baker and a dental surgeon, all of whom said that their circumstances were not conducive to military service, with no mention of any religious or political objections to the war.<sup>732</sup>

Conscientious Objectors (COs) who appeared at service tribunals were not usually named by the newspapers, but six men have been identified: Walter Bone of Birkenhead (1879-1919), Louis Anderson Fenn (1889-1964) and Reginald Ernest Fenn (1894-1988), brothers of Birkenhead, Thomas Bailey Butcher (1879-1918) of Wallasey, Joseph Alfred Pearson (1894-1917) of New Brighton and Noel Shaw Stephen (1892-1962) of Great Saughall. Walter Bone was a bookbinder and finisher, who died in prison in Winchester following mistreatment. He was a

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<sup>732</sup> BN 8/3/1916.

member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and refused to co-operate in any way with the authorities. His case is particularly noteworthy due to his being a pre-war model citizen. His obituary in the BN described his many virtues and contributions to local society, including in the field of adult education:

Mr Bone was for many years a valued member of the Oxton-road Adult School, of which he was a vice-president, and to the work and influence of which he contributed gifts of both mind and character that cannot be too highly estimated.<sup>733</sup>

The writer of the eulogy could not bring him or herself to reveal that Walter had effectively been killed by the authorities, claiming that he had ‘fallen asleep’ after a bout of pneumonia and perhaps secretly agonised about why such an exemplary citizen had become, in the eyes of the government and most of the public, a villain by 1917.

The two Fenn brothers belonged to a family with strong political and religious affiliations. Their father was a ‘non-denominational’ minister of religion. When they joined up, Louis was a political organiser and Reginald a student. About such COs, Keith Robbins said that ‘religious language and political programmes [were] fused.’<sup>734</sup> Louis was Prospective Labour Candidate for Widnes in 1939 and an author and Reginald became a minister of religion. Both men, like Walter Bone, were ‘absolutist’ COs, who refused to co-operate with the military authorities in any

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<sup>733</sup> BN 12/3/1919. Also see *The Labour Leader* 27/2/1919, A. Kramer, *Conscientious Objectors of the First World War: A Determined Resistance* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014), p.143 and *The Men Who Said No* Website: [https://menwhosaidno.org/men/men\\_files/b/bone\\_walter.html](https://menwhosaidno.org/men/men_files/b/bone_walter.html) [Accessed 6/5/2021].

<sup>734</sup> K. Robbins, ‘The British Experience of Conscientious Objection’, p.698.

way and were repeatedly punished.<sup>735</sup> Butcher's religious or political affiliations are unknown. He eventually served with 12/CR and was killed in action in Greece. Pearson and Stephen were Baptists and members of the Liverpool No-Conscription Fellowship.<sup>736</sup> Pearson was harshly treated by the authorities and forced into the CR; he was killed in action near Ypres on 3 August 1917. His mother, Lucy Ann, refused to accept Joseph's post-war plaque and scroll, although his father, Alfred Owen Pearson did accept his medals. Joseph's brother, John Sydney (1891-1964) was also a conscientious objector. Noel Stephen was an architect and estate agent, who, after being arrested, was finally drafted into 21/Royal Welsh Fusiliers, part of the Non-Combatant Corps and served at home until 1920.<sup>737</sup> Conscientious Objectors, then, were certainly treated harshly by apparently insensitive and unsubtle tribunals and military personnel, but they were clearly as small a part of Wirral society as they were of British society as a whole. There are some dramatic stories relating to the 'hard core' of total non-co-

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<sup>735</sup> Keith Robbins called this group 'the hard-core rump' and estimated that there were only 1300 such men in the whole of Britain out of a total of 16,500 conscientious objectors, but that they have been accepted as representing the experiences of all conscientious objectors, K. Robbins, 'The British Experience of Conscientious Objection', p.695. Reginald was probably 'Coactus' who wrote a letter to the BN on 13/3/1916 in which he said, 'I am perfectly sincere in the views I hold and resent the name of either shirker or coward.' He was described in the BN of 4/7/1917 as 'A smart looking and intelligent young man [...] he could not admit that he was a member of the army, the purpose of which he believed to be absolutely contrary to the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. He could not, therefore obey any military order.' He was fined forty shillings and handed over to the military authorities. This personal description is similar to one which appeared in the BN of 18/3/1918 when a pacifist 'fine strapping young police constable' appeared in court. It seems that the authorities could not comprehend such fine specimens of masculinity being unwilling to fight and recalls Lois Bibbings's analysis of the use of 'gender-based punishment and character assassination' in recruitment processes in her 'Images of Manliness: The Portrayal of Soldiers and Conscientious Objectors in the Great War', *Social and Legal Studies* 12(3) (2003), pp.335-358. Also see her *Telling Tales About Men: Conceptions of Conscientious Objectors to Military Service During the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

<sup>736</sup> The No Conscription Fellowship was created at the end of 1914 by Fenner Brockway, Clifford Allen and C.H. Norman. By 1915 it had 200 branches, K. Robbins, 'The British Experience of Conscientious Objection', p. 697.

<sup>737</sup> Soldiers' service papers TNA WO 363, accessed via Ancestry.co.uk. IWM Website: [livesofthegreatwar.org](http://livesofthegreatwar.org) – the *Conscientious Objectors' Register* created by Cyril Pearce. The Pearson family emigrated to the USA in 1922. Stephen is probably the 'estate agent from Mollington' mentioned in the *Nantwich Guardian* of 23/6/1916, as being 'dressed in khaki' at the hearing.

operators, such as the Fenn family, but they were a tiny minority, who did not start a wider anti-war movement by proselytization.

Recent research, however, has shown that, in other parts of Britain, COs were both more numerous and received more support, usually in consequence of the political and religious characteristics of their home areas. Leicester, for example, partly due to its having a strong Liberal tradition and the former Labour leader and pacifist, James Ramsay MacDonald, as its MP, was more sympathetic to COs than was Wirral.<sup>738</sup> Westmorland generated more opposition to the war due to its Quaker population.<sup>739</sup> Similarly, Wales, and particularly, the industrialised south of the country, where religious nonconformity and socialism were relatively strong (especially in Briton Ferry, Port Talbot and Merthyr, where the ILP was active) developed a stronger anti-war culture than is evident in Wirral.<sup>740</sup> Wirral must, therefore, be viewed as one of the more conformist and conservative districts in the British Isles, probably in consequence of the traditional dominance of the Conservative Party in local politics and the relative weakness of religious nonconformity.

A possible related form of opposition to the war is military desertion. However, only twenty-nine members (1.45%) of the WSS were recorded as having deserted and all of them appear to have had personal reasons for doing so, namely mental and physical illness or an inability to cope with military discipline. For example, John

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<sup>738</sup> M. Elliott, 'Opposition to the First World War: The Fate of Conscientious Objectors in Leicester' *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 77 (2003), pp. 83-92.

<sup>739</sup> R. Smalley, *Educate! Organise! Political Dissent in Westmorland, 1880-1930* (Kendal: Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 2013), pp.65-88.

<sup>740</sup> A. Eirug, *Opposition to the First World War in Wales*, Unpublished PhD Thesis (Cardiff University, 2016), p.215; P. Adams, *Not in Our Name: War Dissent in a Welsh Town* (Ludlow: Briton Ferry Books, 2015) and *Daring to Defy: Port Talbot's War Resistance 1914-1918* (Ludlow: Briton Ferry Books, 2016). Also See W.H. Marwick, 'Conscientious Objectors in Scotland in the First World War', *Scottish Journal of Science*, 1(3) (1972), pp. 157-164.

Taylor of New Brighton and Thomas George Edwards of Hoylake were notorious malefactors, the former having gone 'absent without leave' on three previous occasions and the latter having committed several crimes, including falsely wearing wound stripes. William E.P. Newcombe of Heswall deserted in March 1917, but the charges were dropped in 1919, when he was found to have been suffering from 'delusional psychosis'. These stories do not expose any kind of co-ordinated rebellion and are evidence of the inevitable consequence of recruiting men from such a vast range of backgrounds with diverse personalities.<sup>741</sup>

The Union of Democratic Control (UDC) was a national pressure group founded in 1914. Its main aim was modest – to ensure that Britain's war aims and policies were scrutinised by parliament. It was, however vilified by British politicians who believed that it was undermining national solidarity. Both Liberal and Conservative councillors on Birkenhead Borough Council were vehemently opposed to it. Vociferous and vitriolic arguments reported in the BA during October 1916 show just how difficult it was for anybody in public life to demur from the official stance of total support for the war. The dispute began when Liberal Councillor R.J. Russell was nominated for the mayoralty and Conservative councillors demanded to know whether he had ever been a part of the UDC, as they believed that its 'policy was inimical to the national life.' Councillor J.H. Ziegler wrote a detailed refutation of any involvement by any Birkenhead Liberals in the UDC, but arguments continued and letters were published, including one from the secretary of the UDC's Liverpool branch, who denied that their aim was to encourage the Germans. It was even found that council offices had been used for UDC meetings, which caused

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<sup>741</sup> The *Police Gazette* of 12/6/1917 contains lists of missing conscripts. There is an average of eight Birkenhead men on each page listing 120 men from all over England and Wales.

further protests and denunciations. Councillors were still arguing about it in April 1918.<sup>742</sup>

A well-known source of opposition to war and for sponsorship of COs was the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). The sect was stronger in some regions than in others, notably in the far north-west of England, where it began in the late seventeenth century. Merseyside was not one of its strongholds, where the records show that it was in decline. By October 1914, local meetings were attracting an average of only forty-four worshippers.<sup>743</sup> Famously, at that time, one of its most prominent members, Alfred Bigland M.P., renounced his faith in order to prosecute the war effort and to form his Bantam Battalions.<sup>744</sup> Without the loyalty of several key families, the sect would probably have ceased to exist.<sup>745</sup> Indeed, by November 1916, the Quakers were trying to sell one of their buildings.<sup>746</sup> Within their records, there are no references to COs or to any other major act of opposition to the war, apart from the placing of petitions in the vestibule for passers-by to sign in opposition to conscription and the importation of alcohol and requesting a negotiated peace.<sup>747</sup> Indeed, in 1919, the Society of Friends was praised in the BNVS for its wartime welfare work.<sup>748</sup>

Further illustrating the prevalence of unusual and diverse beliefs in Wirral, in an article in the LE entitled 'The Unfinished Warning: An Israelite's Prophecy Not

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<sup>742</sup> BA 4, 7 and 21/10/1916 and 27/4/1918. See T.C. Kennedy, *British Quakerism: The Transformation of a Religious Community 1860-1920* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), G.G. Coulton, *The Main Illusions of Pacifism: A Criticism of Mr. Norman Angell and the Union of Democratic Control* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1916), M. Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics During the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) and C. Moorehead, *Troublesome People: Enemies of War 1916-1986* (USA: Hamish Hamilton, 1987).

<sup>743</sup> Quakers' Preparative Meetings Minute Book 1910-1915, 25/10/1914.

<sup>744</sup> See Chapter 2 above p.293.

<sup>745</sup> Amongst these were the Thompsons (who originated within the Quaker Homeland in Kendal), the Joneses, the Cliborns and the Malcolmsons.

<sup>746</sup> Quakers' Preparative Meetings Minute Book 1915-1922, 25/11/1916, WA YSF 1/6,7.

<sup>747</sup> Ibid. 21/3/1915, 29/12/1915 and 25/6/1916.

<sup>748</sup> BNVS, p.163.



Completed'. It described an appeal made by a 'young man with hair hanging down his back' to the Wallasey Tribunal under Alderman Oldershaw in February 1916. 'He was, he said opposed to the taking of the life of man, bird or beast, as it was contrary to the Word of God.' The young man had been a member of a sect known as the Israelites of the House of David since 1913 and explained how his beliefs prevented him from doing any sort of war work, including with the Medical Corps due to the risk of being defiled by dead bodies.<sup>749</sup> He claimed to have prophesied the occurrence of war and was about to issue another prophecy before the chairman showed him the door. Later that year, the LDP told of another sect member in Birkenhead. The man came from Ellesmere Port, had a long black beard and hair and said that he was a 'religious vegetarian', unable to eat food which had not been specially prepared and that the exposure of his body to harm was 'a great sin'. He was denied exemption.<sup>750</sup>

A possible additional act of protest, enacted in Wirral, against the Great War was the so-called 'Eisteddfod of the Black Chair', which was held in Birkenhead Park between 5 and 7 September 1917. The importance of Wirral's Welsh population was introduced in Chapter One, where it was shown that eisteddfodau had been frequently held throughout the north of the peninsula since mid-Victorian times. In 1917 Birkenhead became the venue for the annual National Eisteddfod. Its focal point was the enthronement of the winner of the poetry competition in the Bardic Chair, which had been crafted by a Belgian refugee, called Eugene Van Fleteren,

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<sup>749</sup> LE 28/2/1916.

<sup>750</sup> LDP 22/9/1916. The Israelites of the House of David was a millennial sect founded by Benjamin and Mary Purnell in Benton Harbour, Michigan, USA in 1903; it became famous for its successful baseball team and began proselytising in Britain in about 1912. See R. Ferguson, 'The Religious Sect Which Became Baseball's Answer to the Harlem Globetrotters' in *The Guardian* 21/9/2016.

who was living in Birkenhead.<sup>751</sup> The winner of the award was Hedd Wyn, under the *nom de plume* of Fleur-De-Lys – Ellis Humphrey Evans (1887-1917), a shepherd from Trawsfynydd, who had been killed at Pilkelm Ridge on 31 July whilst serving with 15/RWF. Later commentators have imposed a role and significance on the event which contemporary evidence does not suggest that it had. In short, they have turned it into a story of protest by Welsh dissenters against conscription.<sup>752</sup>

By anachronistically searching for any sign of contemporary people sharing their anti-war views, both Glyn Mon Hughes and Huw Edwards have played their part in mythologising the event.<sup>753</sup> The former said, 'But questions remain. Were Eisteddfod officials making a political point? Were they showing the Prime Minister very publicly, the futility of war?'<sup>754</sup> Hughes does not cite any evidence that anybody actually asked these questions and a search of associated literature has failed to produce any corroborating examples.<sup>755</sup> Edwards, after loosely

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<sup>751</sup> This relates to the attempts by Margaret and Gwendoline Davies of Gregynog to create an artistic community of Belgian Refugees in Wales, L. Hughes, 'Finding Belgian Refugees in Cymru1914.org: using digital resources for uncovering the hidden histories of the First World War in Wales', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 34(2) (2016), pp. 210-231 (p.214).

<sup>752</sup> D. Ben Rees, ed., *Hanes Gwyl Hedd Wyn and the Black Chair Festival: Bardd-Fugail Y Rhyfel Mawr Poet-Shepherd of the First World War* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2008), A. Llwyd, *The Story of Hedd Wyn* (Llandybie: Cyhoeddiadau Barddas, 2015), Hedd Wyn *Cerddi'r Bugail Cyfroel Goffa Hedd Wyn Dan Olygiaeth Y Parch J.J. Williams* (n.p., 1918) – the winning poem is *Yr Arwr* and appears on pp.1-6. For additional discussion of Welsh cultural traditions and the development of nationalism see R.T. Jenkins, 'The Development of Nationalism in Wales', *Sociological Review* 27(2) (1935), pp.163-182, P. Morgan, 'From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period' in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.43-100 and K.O. Morgan, 'Welsh Nationalism: The Historical Background', *Journal of Contemporary History* 6(1) (1971), pp.153-172.

<sup>753</sup> G. Mon Hughes, 'The Eisteddfod of the Black Chair: The Birkenhead National Eisteddfod – 75 Years On', *The Wirral Journal* 6 (Autumn 1992), pp. 38-41 and H. Edwards, '1917 and the "L.G." Legacy' in D. Ben Rees, *Hanes Gwyl Hedd Wyn*, pp.41-51.

<sup>754</sup> G. Mon Hughes, 'The Eisteddfod of the Black Chair', p.41.

<sup>755</sup> The BNA has been searched for Welsh newspapers which might have reported the event in tones more in keeping with Edwards's and Hughes's interpretations, but without success. No newspaper recorded the event in any more detail than did the BN and none said anything of an anti-war nature when describing the Eisteddfod.

synthesising some rather superficial points about the conscription debate and Lloyd George's career and popularity, asserted:

So what we have is what we call today a perfect storm. All things coming together in one place. The horror of war, brought right into the precincts of the national eisteddfod, with the political class on the national stage, and a single death representing loss of life and tragedy on a much bigger scale. Everything came together to produce a cauldron of sadness, resentment, anger and yes, patriotism in the eyes of some, jingoism in the eyes of others.<sup>756</sup>

As should be apparent at this point in the thesis, the above extract contains five erroneous assumptions based on anachronistic wishful thinking. The first is the supposition that civilians did not know about the 'horrors of war'; in fact, as was shown in Chapter Two and has been explained by other historians, the public was more aware of the war's realities than had been previously supposed. The second is the assumption that the 'political class's' presence on the stage was something novel and implies that they knew nothing about the war's real cost; in reality, as has been shown, society's elite had been intimately involved with every aspect of the war since its commencement. The third misconception is that the death of a single soldier would have been profoundly shocking, as it would have called to mind the deaths of so many others; in truth, the local press had been making people aware of single and collective tragedies by publishing images and biographies of local casualties for over three years. The fourth unjustified assertion is that there was widespread resentment and anger; but there is no evidence to support the claim. The fifth is that some people exhibited patriotism in a form

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<sup>756</sup> H. Edwards, '1917 and the "L.G." Factor', p.48.

which others would have described as jingoistic; in fact, there is no evidence in contemporary accounts of anybody expressing themselves in this way. Indeed, due to the lessons learned in the Boer War and other factors, local people disavowed jingoism and 'mafeiking' in favour of a more sober attitude to the war. The importance of the belief in sacrifice has been explained – Wirral people continued to support the war despite (or even because) of its bloody cost.<sup>757</sup>

Contemporary sources contain no evidence of the Eisteddfod performing any kind of dissenting function. The BN covered the entire festival in great detail. All its articles described a largely happy occasion which provided a distraction from war worries and even gave the prime minister an opportunity to relax – he was seen chatting to old friends in Welsh about previous eisteddfodau. The only description of the Black Chair event had the headline 'A Pathetic Incident' and said that:

The successful competitor had answered a greater call than that of the archdruid Dyfed; he had fallen in France in freedom's cause. The chair – [...] – was enveloped in black. Dyfed [...] informed the vast and silent audience of the sad reason for this action. The Archdruid said that the young man who sent in the best composition had paid the supreme sacrifice. The ceremony being performed was not customary; in fact he only remembered one occasion when a similar thing happened before.<sup>758</sup>

Granville Bantock, writing in the *English Review*, described the scene as follows:

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<sup>757</sup> It is also probable that, given the over representation of the middle-class in the officer corps, who experienced higher casualty rates, that any number of the platform party would have lost love ones up to that point in the war. The main texts are: M. Finn, 'The Realities of War', *History Today*, Volume 52(8) (2002) pp. 26-31 and 'Local Heroes: War News and the Construction of "Community" in Britain, 1914–18', *Historical Research*, 83 (2010), pp. 520-538, H.M. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and M. Reeve, "'The Darkest Town in England": Patriotism and Anti-German Sentiment in Hull, 1914-1919', *International Journal of Regional and Local History* 12(1) (2017), pp 42-63.

<sup>758</sup> BN 8/9/1917.

The Vacant seat was draped with simple black crepe; and, while this was being done, the vast audience stood in silence as a mark of respect to the honoured memory of the dead poet [...] Many eyes were dimmed by the unchecked tear, while all around the sobbing of women and men alike emphasised the deep sincerity of their grief. It was a touching scene – one that cannot be forgotten by an eye-witness; and to many it must have been all-sufficient, and have seemed a suitable time for the termination of the day's proceedings.<sup>759</sup>

Rather than a story of resentful civilians subtly objecting to an unpopular war and a disliked prime minister, we see a familiar narrative of a civic event similar to those which were discussed earlier in the thesis and which Paul Ward described as 'great acts of national communion'.<sup>760</sup> This ceremony appears to have been different due to the incorporation of symbols (black drapes) and language ('supreme sacrifice') associated with loss and mourning. However, a similar ceremony had been performed before, in Wrexham in 1876.<sup>761</sup> It was fitting that Hedd Wyn should be commemorated in this way. The next section of the thesis discusses the way in which formats, liturgies and edifices of remembrance began to take shape during the latter stages of the war and during the early post-war period. The Eisteddfod of the Black Chair was a stepping stone within this process and a further illustration of the continuity of fundamental beliefs and attitudes between 1914 and the early 1920s.

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<sup>759</sup> G. Bantock,, 'An Eisteddfod in War-Time', *The English Review 1908-1937*, (January 1918), pp. 56-65 (p.64).

<sup>760</sup> P. Ward, *Britishness Since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.18 and 23.

<sup>761</sup> The winning bard, Taliesin o Eifon (Thomas Jones 1820-1876,) had died before the chairing ceremony, D. Ben Rees, *Hanes Gwyl*, p.93..

Hedd Wyn is now popularly believed to have been a pacifist. Alan Llwyd, however, revealed that this was not necessarily so, as early on in the war, Hedd Wyn wrote 'jingoistic' popular verses, which Llwyd dismissed as 'nothing'.<sup>762</sup> In addition, the poet was not a conscientious objector – he avoided joining up for as long as possible before deciding to take the place of his younger brother, Bob.<sup>763</sup> A more pertinent point, however, is that his views were never publicly discussed and were probably unknown by the people attending the event. Subsequent generations have projected this retrospective 'knowledge' onto a typical contemporary act of mourning in order to construct a romantic narrative about humble Welsh Nonconformists getting their own back on Anglo-Welsh elites. In Alan Llwyd's words, 'The Black Chair of Birkenhead epitomises the waste, the futility and the horror of war. It has become a national icon and has always been a symbol' and spoke of the young men of Europe, 'slaughtered in vain on the killing fields of the Great War.'<sup>764</sup> Such views owe more to the influence of later twentieth century Welsh Nationalism and to the Great War futility myth, than to an objective study of the available evidence, which implies that it was a typical commemorative act of the day, instead of an anti-war protest.

In 1922 two anti-war demonstrations were held in Birkenhead and Mersey Parks and addressed by local dignitaries, such as J.H. Ziegler and Councillor W.H.B. Yeo. Again, there was nothing revolutionary about this, because the same figures had cautioned against war enthusiasm in 1914, but also threw themselves into war work. Indeed, the Reverend J.D. Dowie, at Mersey Park, asked, 'Had our soldiers died in vain or could we wrest from their sacrifice something that would make their

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<sup>762</sup> A. Llwyd, *Hedd Wynn*, p.47.

<sup>763</sup> *Ibid.* p.57.

<sup>764</sup> A. Llwyd, *Hedd Wyn* p.167.

deaths worthwhile?’<sup>765</sup> Three years later, at the same time as Birkenhead War Memorial was being unveiled, a mass meeting, hosted by the League of Nations Association, which boasted a local membership of 2000, was held in Birkenhead Park and a Manchester Quaker, Dr. Vipont Brown (who would have been scorned during the war years) enunciated ‘fervent pleas for universal co-operation’, asked for ‘friendliness and good will among all nations’ and said:

The men who gave their lives in the war believed that they were fighting for liberty and freedom, but people had no more liberty and freedom than they had in 1914. They believed they were fighting to make England a place fit for heroes to live in. Is Birkenhead fit for heroes to live in? (A chorus of ‘No!’) Manchester is not, I can tell you.<sup>766</sup>

A legend took root in Birkenhead that the town’s post-war decline resulted from moving the statue of John Laird from its plinth opposite the Town Hall and replacing it with the Cenotaph (see Figure Thirty-nine for a picture of Hamilton Square before his statue was removed). The venerable John had allegedly, thereafter, turned his back on the town he had helped to found. An interesting comparison can be made with Kendal during the same period, where, in consequence of the area’s Quaker heritage, dissenters and conscientious objectors were rehabilitated during the interwar years, becoming respected community leaders and advocates for peace during the runup to the Second World War.<sup>767</sup> This phenomenon cannot be traced in Birkenhead to the same extent. The

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<sup>765</sup> BN 2/8/1922.

<sup>766</sup> BN 8/7/1925.

<sup>767</sup> R. Smalley, *Educate! Organise! Political Dissent in Westmorland, 1880-1930*, pp.65-88.

relative absence of Quakerism and Wirral's conservative tradition are probable explanations for the differences between the two areas.

Research often uncovers unsuspected minority views and lifestyles, but the above discussion has shown that there was a consensus in Wirral that the Great War was a just and necessary conflict which would require sacrifice. Sacrifice was viewed as a sacred act which would lead to the creation of a better world and people were comforted by their belief in life after death. These doctrines were preached by religious leaders and, as proved by personal documents, were espoused by a great many people. It is difficult to determine how many dissenters existed at the time, but what is clear is that they were reviled by the rest of the population and persecuted by the authorities. Thus, it was difficult to deviate from the official worldview. A possible act of communal protest against both the war in principle and the policies of Lloyd George's government, in the form of the Eisteddfod of the Black Chair, has been shown to have been a typical act of remembrance and mourning onto which subsequent generations have projected anachronistic ideas. As such, it is further evidence of Wirral society's pro-war solidarity. Finally, the evidence for the emergence of post-war disillusionment in Wirral has been reviewed. There were no protests on the scale witnessed in Luton, although some people were articulating pacifist beliefs in public meetings and asking questions about the social effects of the post-war slump. Due to comparisons being made with Kendal, it is clear that every district in the United Kingdom, in consequence of its peculiar political, social economic and religious traditions, must have responded in its own way to post-war developments. Wirral's experience is, however, probably not untypical, in the sense that unhappiness about such developments was expressed, but that, overall, the need for a war was



not questioned and satisfaction with its outcome unchallenged. These points are further developed in the next section.

### **5.7 Grieving and Commemorating**

Discussion thus far has thrown essential aspects of Wirral society into sharp relief, namely its deference for hierarchy, adoration of royalty and of the local elite, admiration for good citizenship, patriotism, respect for the military, philanthropy and religiosity. The ways in which these convictions were demonstrated publicly via meetings and rallies, oratory, music and procession have also been made apparent. In this final section of the chapter, it is shown how these characteristics were manifested in the processes of mourning, commemorating and remembering the dead both during and after the war. It is another example of continuity between the pre- and post-war worlds and further evidence of the Great War having had a largely conservative impact on society.

Official mourning and commemoration began as soon as the soldiers began to die. The local press published reports about memorial services for the dead which employed the above-mentioned sacrificial language. An example appeared in the DA in September 1915, about a service at West Kirby Parish Church:

It was a touching spectacle to observe amongst the large number of people present two or three West Kirby families whose relatives – sons and brothers – have made the supreme sacrifice for Britain's great cause. Equally noticeable it was when speaking with these mourning-clad people

to realise with what quiet and courageous resignation they have accepted the inevitable.<sup>768</sup>

The service was entirely choral and featured the playing of the 'Last Post'. The same newspaper reported a similar service in Hoylake in July 1916, when the Reverend E.F. Robson spoke about five of the town's recent casualties:

[...] in the generations yet unborn their names will live when you and I are forgotten simply because they laid down their lives for their country. Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. [...] We are here this morning to thank God for the spirit of sacrifice which enabled these men to risk all at their country's bidding; and we are here to try and gather for ourselves some lessons which their self-sacrificing spirit can teach us.<sup>769</sup>

In October 1917 a memorial service was held at Neston Wesleyan Chapel for Sergeant-Major Samuel Duddridge. The Reverend J. Newton Davies spoke on the text 'He doeth all things well' and praised Duddridge's many good qualities. Fellow members of the local Shepherd's club attended and the hymns *Jerusalem the Golden* and *God Our Help in Ages Past* were sung.<sup>770</sup> Citizenship in the form of orderliness, dignity, sacrifice and patriotism was being emphasised, taught and exemplified. The people were, in the words of Winter, being given the opportunity to experience 'adoptive kinship' as they mourned communally, using an 'appropriate language of loss'.<sup>771</sup> The above extracts show Wirral people

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<sup>768</sup> DA 24/9/1915.

<sup>769</sup> Ibid. 21/7/1916.

<sup>770</sup> BN 13/10/1917.

<sup>771</sup> J. Winter, *Sites of Memory Sites of Mourning*, pp. 3-44. See M. Connelly, *The Great War* where he refers to Christianity being 'equipped with a language of hope and consolation', pp. 36 & 56 and to B. Bushaway, 'Name Upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance' in R. Porter, ed., *Myths of*

practising many of the commemorative rituals and liturgies which were to become standard in post-war Britain.

In due course, material memorials were constructed. Mark Connelly and Bob Bushaway see their origin in street shrines.<sup>772</sup> Examples of the phenomenon in Wirral have not been traced, but, in August 1917, the BN reported on the unveiling of Birkenhead's 'first war shrine' in St. Paul's churchyard. It bore the words 'Greater love hath no man than this'.<sup>773</sup> In Mark Connelly's words, such phenomena allowed 'grief to flow but at the same time to buttress a socially conservative message.'<sup>774</sup>

At the same time, individual and family memorials were appearing in churches and chapels. In April 1916 Mrs J.C. Woodfin of *West View* in Little Sutton requested permission for a brass tablet in Hooton church to commemorate her sons Joseph Bartlett and Walter Guise Woodfin, both of whom died in July 1916. In August 1918 a Mr. McLean Graham was granted permission to erect a memorial just behind the lychgate in Willaston churchyard to his son, Arthur, who was killed the year before.<sup>775</sup> These cases remind us that only those from wealthy families received such individual commemorations.<sup>776</sup> There is evidence of a limited amount of negotiation on the nature and wording of wartime memorials.

Permission from the Chester Consistory Court had to be obtained for such objects.

In October 1915, parishioners in Great Meols wished to commemorate Henry

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*the English* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 136-167 (p.148), where he talks about the 'language of sacrifice', being favoured above the language of patriotism.

<sup>772</sup> M. Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual Commemoration in the City and East London 1916-1939* (Boydell and Brewer, 2001 and The Royal Historical Society, 2015), pp. 25-35 and B. Bushaway, 'Name Upon Name', p.140.

<sup>773</sup> BN 9/8/1917.

<sup>774</sup> M. Connelly, *The Great War*, p.1.

<sup>775</sup> BN 3/8/1918.

<sup>776</sup> EPA 4/4/1917.

Williams, formerly of *Cartref*, who died on board the *Lusitania*, with a window bearing the inscription 'murdered on the Lusitania by Germans'. The Chancellor, Sir Phillip Baker-Wilbraham, forbade the word 'murdered' and suggested replacing it with 'drowned', saying that the original phrase might have been appropriate for a newspaper article, but not for a church, because it would have perpetuated hatred. He also recommended withdrawing any reference to Germans.<sup>777</sup>

War memorials are a ubiquitous feature of the modern British landscape and their apparent solidity and timelessness can blind us to the fact that, at one time, they never existed; there was a void in both the physical and mental post-war landscapes which needed to be filled with imagery and language that would enable the outflow of grief at the same time as supporting the existing world-view. There was a period from about the middle of 1918 into the mid to late 1920s when local people had a blank sheet upon which they needed to design, finance and place their war memorials. Government played little or no part in this process. It fell to philanthropists and groupings such as churches, councils, trade unions, veterans' groups and charities to do the work. It is profoundly regrettable that hardly any of the documents generated by these discussions have survived and that, once again, the researcher is reliant upon the diligence of journalists in reporting these proceedings in the local press.<sup>778</sup>

The following discussion, while focusing on commemoration, further develops themes which are so integral to the thesis, namely the way in which Wirral's diversity and complexity are both unique and typically British and how they result

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<sup>777</sup> EPA 20/10/1915.

<sup>778</sup> J. Bartlett and K.M. Ellis showed the kind of negotiations and controversies which surrounded the planning of war memorials in their 'Remembering the Dead in Northop: First World War Memorials in a Welsh Parish', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34 (1999), pp. 231-242.

from local factors such as the role of personalities (such as lord Leverhulme) and economic circumstances (such as those at Ellesmere Port) and the employment of nationally recognised architects, such as Goscombe-John and Jagger. By the mid-1920s, Wirral, just like the nation of which it was a part, contained a mixed landscape of remembrance, generated by a largely unrecorded process of negotiation, dependent upon local tastes, funds and culture but never straying beyond a well-established religious and patriotic framework.<sup>779</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the energy and personal brilliance of Wirral's de facto 'aristocrat', Lord Leverhulme, the first permanent war memorial to be planned was that of Port Sunlight during April to June 1916. Typically for Port Sunlight, 'a large general committee, representative of every department and section of the village life and an executive committee was appointed, with the Hon. W. Hulme Lever (Leverhulme's heir) as chairman.' Sir W.G. John was appointed sculptor and an image drawn up and approved on 26 June 1916 (Figure 25).<sup>780</sup> The design, with the centrality of the cross and images of soldiers, was traditional, but bore some striking innovations, such as images of women and children, reflecting the quintessential Leverhulme vision of a united community, supporting each other through challenging times. The memorial was finally unveiled, in the presence of 7000 people, on Saturday 3 December 1921, not by a traditional dignitary, but by a blinded war veteran and long-term Levers' employee, Sergeant T.G. Eames, accompanied by Private Cruikshank V.C. of the firm's London Office (Figure

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<sup>779</sup> For discussion of remembrance in other parts of the country see B. Bushaway, 'Name Upon Name', pp.144 and 147, where he talks about the role of the IWGC and the War Memorial Committee formed in Coventry; M. Connelly, *The Great War*; and B. Davis, 'Experience Identity and Memory: The Legacy of World War 1', *The Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), pp. 111-131.  
<sup>780</sup> BN 11/5/1918.

26).<sup>781</sup> In its careful mixing of civilian and military entities, the Port Sunlight ceremony is a good example of a war memorial dedication acting as what Bob Bushaway described as a 'right of passage' and 'process of social reintegration accompanied by rituals' following total war.<sup>782</sup>

Another early memorial was the one in the leafy Birkenhead suburb of Prenton. It was designed by Briggs and Thornley of Liverpool during March 1919 with special consideration of its place within the landscape: it stood on a 2000 square-yard plot, intended to act as a village green. Views of Liverpool and of the surrounding countryside, as far as Hoylake, West Kirby and Heswall were commented upon and the memorial's intention to list all the local men who served was celebrated (Figure 28).<sup>783</sup>

Another local memorial which was designed both to interact with and to dominate the landscape is that for the Hoylake and West Kirby area, situated on Grange Hill. It was designed by the Yorkshire sculptor Charles S. Jagger (1885-1934), who also designed the Royal Artillery Memorial at Hyde Park Corner. It is the most striking memorial in the whole of Merseyside (and the original motivation for this author's interest in the Great War). The extensive views around the north-western tip of the Wirral Peninsula combined with the following words, even to this day, engender a profound sense of numinous and solemnity:

In gratitude to God and to the men and women of these parts who laid down their lives in the Great War 1914-1919. They were a wall unto us both by night and day. At the call of King and country they left all that was dear

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<sup>781</sup> BN 7/12/1921.

<sup>782</sup> B. Bushaway, 'Name Upon Name', p.158.

<sup>783</sup> BN 23/8/1919.

to them, endured hardness, faced danger, and finally passed out of the sight of men by the path of duty and self-sacrifice, giving up their own lives that others might live in freedom. Let those who come after see to it that their names be not forgotten.<sup>784</sup>

In the words of the DA:

Truly these are immortal words. From the silver trumpets came the sweet, sad notes of the 'Last Post', followed by a full minute's silence, startling in contrast; a maroon was fired; then again from silver trumpets sounded forth the 'Reveille', bidding mourners be of good cheer, sending out a challenge to death itself, and voicing a message of faith – the sure and certain hope of a Glorious Resurrection.<sup>785</sup>

The memorial itself was clearly a newcomer on the landscape, but its message was profoundly traditional and an embodiment of the treasured values of the surrounding population.

Wirral's war memorials are diverse. Wallasey's memorial is situated next to the Magazines on the promenade near New Brighton. It has three military figures atop a plinth, but no lists of names. They are lodged within the Town Hall, which, during the war acted as a military hospital (Figure 29). Birkenhead's memorial was designed by Lionel Budden of Liverpool University; it resembles the Whitehall Cenotaph, bears 1332 names and was unveiled by Birkenhead's first Labour and first female Mayor, Mrs Mary Ann Mercer (née Chettar, 1883-1945) on 1 July

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<sup>784</sup> Bob Bushaway described such phraseology as the 'prevailing language of the Patria the local sense of place and identity' in 'Name Upon Name', p.142.

<sup>785</sup> DA 22/12/1922; the memorial was unveiled by the Earl of Birkenhead on 16/12/1922 in the presence of 5000 people. See: [grangehill1922.wordpress.com](http://grangehill1922.wordpress.com) for further details.

1925. The BN described the unveiling ceremony, 'Around the Cenotaph centred many hallowed memories, subdued by time and mellowed by sympathy, but many an old wound opened as tear-stained faces were raised towards that solemn pile (Figure 30).'<sup>786</sup>

Ellesmere Port was self-consciously late in erecting a war memorial. Its eventual construction in the middle of 1925 was preceded by confusion and debate, as the idea of spending money on a 'useless' stone monument was not universally supported. The council had considered options such as new boots and shoes for war orphans, a swimming pool, an extension to the Cottage Hospital, a recreation ground and communal halls. It was also discovered that the town council and parish church had been planning their own memorials without knowledge of each other.<sup>787</sup> Eventually, a rather conventional memorial was unveiled in November 1925 with ceremonies similar to what had occurred in neighbouring towns during the preceding years, including parades by ex-servicemen and youth organisations, a sermon, prayers, hymns and wreaths as well as special honours accorded to the bereaved families. A few days later, the memorial hosted the annual armistice day service, at which the Reverend A.B. Sleight spoke the following words:

[The dead] are still alive. They are still members of the family. They have no more ceased to belong to us than our friends who have left us to live in Canada and Australia. They still remember us as we remember them; they still love us as we love them. Death is really not the end but the beginning of life.<sup>788</sup>

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<sup>786</sup> BN 8/7/1925.

<sup>787</sup> EPA 28/8/1925.

<sup>788</sup> EPA 13/11/1925.



By the middle of the 1920s then, Wirral's war memorials and their associated rituals of remembrance had been established. These phenomena were replete with traditional imagery and ideas, chosen to facilitate dignified mourning. Again, evidence for deviation from the accepted framework is scant.

It is also possible that interest in large communal acts of commemoration became less popular as the years passed, increasingly becoming the preserve of veterans with memories of deceased comrades, enjoying the consolations of reminiscence. Evidence for this appears in the memories of Herbert Kemp of Wallasey about inter-war remembrance parades of which most of the participants were unemployed:

Our bass drummer had served in both the Boer War and the Great War, but his distinction for me was his playing of the drum on that march: he produced a hair-raising, spine-chilling, never-to-be forgotten sound. For the first two bars only the sound of gently shuffling feet and the swaying clink of medals could be heard, when into this awesome silence the band entered with the full sonorous chords of *Sondon* [...] And once the formalities were over, the participants retired to the pub, where the clinking of medals was augmented by the clinking of glasses and Wallasey Village had once again 'remembered them'.<sup>789</sup>

Only small cracks were appearing in the communal understanding of the Great War during the 1920s. Full scale disillusionment probably did not take hold until after 1929 when the Great Depression began and after about 1938 when the British started to foresee the possibility of another world war. For at least a

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<sup>789</sup> H. Kemp, 'We will Remember Them: Recollections of Wallasey's Armistice Day, November 1918', *The Wirral Journal*, 6 (1992 Autumn), pp. 26-29, p.29.

decade, traditional beliefs experienced through familiar but diverse imagery and rituals assuaged communal pain, supplied hope and preserved a positive view of the Great War.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the resilience of the people of Wirral during the Great War. Themes mentioned in preceding chapters, such as belief in the necessity of a major war with Germany and the vigour with which people became involved in it have been continued. An attempt has been made to contemplate the intensity and variety of the sufferings which the people endured, both as a result of death and of economic and social dislocation. Using evidence generated by the people themselves as well as by military, community and religious leaders it has been shown that two doctrines in particular – sacrifice and life after death – enabled people to hope that their sufferings would ultimately create a better world. It has been suggested, however, that if the incipient local ‘welfare state’ had not existed and had not local industry flourished, such high levels of commitment to the war might have been impossible. The myth of ‘secularisation’ has been challenged by looking at the prevalence of serious religion as well as diffuse Christianity, folk religion and offshoots such as Spiritualism. Although the war itself caused immediate changes, such as disruptions to family life and to the economy, there is no evidence that it awakened new worldviews or radical concepts. Again, it is clear that people were drawing on traditional beliefs and leaning on established structures for their support. Finally, these beliefs were enshrined in war memorials and their associated rituals, which despite being diverse in appearance, promulgated an essentially conservative vision of the universe.

## **Thesis Conclusion**

This section concludes the thesis by evaluating, in five subsections the degree to which its aims were achieved and intended methodology effectively employed. The main points of each chapter are summarised and the thesis's overall argument restated. Finally, some possible future research projects are suggested.

## **Aims**

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of the Great War upon British society, this thesis has focused on a well-defined district in the North-West of England. With a population of about a quarter to a third of a million, residing in an area of about 200 square miles, who worked in a variety of primary, secondary and tertiary industries, Wirral was developed and populous enough to be representative of the country as a whole and unique enough to deserve to be understood in its own right. The enquiry has both increased our knowledge about Wirral society in the early twentieth century and deepened our understanding of the impact of war on the British people.

Hypotheses and arguments propounded by British Great War historians have been analysed and compared with Wirral data. Examples include Arthur Marwick's argument that the Great War precipitated enormous cultural and social change and the opposing views of such historians as Gerard De Groot and Adrian Gregory. The thesis has broadly agreed with much recent work on issues such as Great War mythology (Dan Todman) reactions to war (Catriona Pennell), the social and regional history of military units (Helen McCartney and Mark Connelly), working-class patriotism (Nick Mansfield, David Swift and Marcus Morris) , relations between the home and fighting fronts (Mike Finn and Michael Reeve),

gender history (Alison Fell, Janet Watson and Nicoletta Gullace) the role of spirituality (Robert Beaken and S.C. Williams) and the importance of remembrance and commemoration (Jay Winter, Bob Bushaway and Mark Connelly). The findings herein expounded have exemplified many of the national historians' arguments. In some cases, Wirral stories have re-focused or refined arguments made about Britain as a whole, but rarely have they flatly contradicted them.

### **Methodology**

The thesis has explored Wirral in its own right. This is necessary because no serious studies of Wirral in the twentieth century exist. Most of the published works, such as Steven McGreal's account of Wirral during the Great War (produced to coincide with the war's centenary) are unacademic, popular and not based on primary sources; and the more serious works which deal with 'Merseyside' only refer to Birkenhead (for example, those by John Belchem and the Merseyside Labour historians, such as Eric Taplin and Ron Bean), but not to the rest of the peninsula. A range of primary sources has been used. Local newspapers were shown to be invaluable. A presumed enormous quantity of records relating to a myriad of organisations and individuals have, since the era of the Great War, been lost. Examples include those relating to the labour movement and to the planning of war memorials. Newspapers have partially filled this gap. In addition, where primary sources do exist (for example local council records) the newspapers have added colour and enabled clearer visualisation of events. Newspapers' role as advocates of a distinctive worldview and tendency to promote propaganda has, however, been analysed and factored into the discussion. The

military service files of 2000 Wirral men, which have been referred to as the WSS have provided statistical and personal data and enriched the discussion of the effects of war on families, exemplified the role of women as advocates for their menfolk, told intimate stories about marital relations, added detail about the experiences of conscientious objectors and demonstrated the importance of working-class patriotism and of belief in sacrifice. Local government records have given insights into the sufferings of employees and the role of councils in providing welfare and relief. Private papers, such as those belonging to Andrew Carlyle Tait, Gladys New and the McGuire family have given more details about local patriotism, resilience, public service, Germanophobia and attitudes to empire. Sound recordings from the IWM have revealed the various reasons why men joined up in 1914 and shown how pre-war associations and leisure pursuits helped them to settle into military life. Inspired by the work of such historians as Alan McFarlane and E.P. Thompson a 'bottom-up' approach has been followed, enabling a detailed view of the life of the people and an argument based on an authentic range of data.

The work has filled a historiographical gap and will, it is hoped, provoke further discussion about the impact of war on local and national society. On the one hand, as a result of its possession of a range of landscapes (coastal and inland), settlement types (rural, suburban and urban), economic activities (agricultural, industrial and commercial) and social classes (working, middle and upper), Wirral is a microcosm of the United Kingdom. On the other, in light of its peculiar characteristics (such as the absence of aristocracy and the dominance of the upper-middle-class, its dynamism, liminality and diversity, and its sense of identity), it is unique. The interplay between its representativeness and its

singularity during the era of the Great War has been analysed, leading to the argument that pre-war structures, beliefs and attitudes enabled a vigorous prosecution of the war, thus embedding conservative outlooks and obviating any kind of departure from cherished traditions.

### **Chapter Summaries**

The Introduction contained explanations of certain concepts which are integral to the thesis, namely impact, social change, class and the classes, citizenship and gender. With the help of a range of scholarly works from the fields of social and labour history, sociology, geography and cultural studies, working definitions were formulated. The venerable works of G.D.H. Cole and E.P. Thompson argue that class is a fluid entity. With this in mind, it was suggested that the working- and middle-classes should not be defined, but described. Gender history was shown not simply to be a synonym for women's history, but a discipline which studies the role of gender in social change. Citizenship was shown to have two meanings – participation in the life of the body politic (especially via voting rights) and the collection of virtues whose possession by the public ensures the smooth running of society. Discussion of these concepts is threaded through the thesis.

Chapter One discussed Wirral's characteristics before 1914, showing that it was a well-defined area whose population was growing in consequence of in-migration from other parts of Britain and immigration from overseas, which created a diverse and multi-cultural society, in which such groups as the Welsh, Irish, Scots, Manx, Germans, Scandinavians and East Europeans lived peacefully side by side. Wirral contained a representative cross-section of British society. There were employees in a range of primary (coalmining, quarrying and fishing), secondary (shipbuilding,

soap manufacture and iron and steel) and tertiary (transport, banking, insurance and commodity broking) industries.

Due to its possession of an efficient transport network, giving access to the 'Second City of Empire', lower-middle-class clerks made up a higher proportion of the population than was the case nationally. Another peculiarity, which also resulted from the proximity of Liverpool, was the dominance of the upper-middle-class elite (with such names as Laird, Ziegler, Willmer, Duckworth, Boulton and Torr), whose wealth stimulated local economies and whose personnel were society's leaders, figureheads and military recruiters.<sup>790</sup> Unlike in rural areas such as Sussex and Westmorland, traditional aristocratic families were no longer present in the peninsula, although the Stanleys of South Lancashire and the Grosvenors of Chester had some association with Wirral during the war years. Lancashire grocer, Liberal politician and industrialist, Sir W.H. Lever/Lord Leverhulme, was Wirral's equivalent of a feudal lord. From his base in Port Sunlight he influenced industrial relations, recruitment, welfare and commemoration.

Wirral's dynamism and reputation for innovation were exemplified by it being home to several 'firsts' such as a public park, a railway tunnel, tramcars and an electrified railway. Its liminality resulted from its river boundaries, closeness to the 'Celtic Fringe' and accessibility to both the formal and informal empires. Other themes, such as industrial relations and women's status and rights, which featured in subsequent chapters were introduced.

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<sup>790</sup> See Appendix Four.

Building upon Catriona Pennell's work about reactions to war in 1914, Chapter Two explored local people's relationship with the war between August 1914 and late 1915. War was not foreseen by many: most eyes were focused on the Women's' Suffrage Campaign and the Irish crisis, although there is evidence from Wallasey of a small number of liberal thinkers who were already campaigning against militarism and the possibility of conflict. While there is no evidence of anybody celebrating the advent of war, there is plenty of evidence of an intense desire to become involved in it – to do everything possible to ensure victory over an enemy who embodied the opposite values to those which the people held dear. This situation was compared with those in Bolton and Hull, which have been researched by G.J. Bryant and Michael Reeve respectively. In both cases, local people demonstrated similar behaviours and attitudes, particularly with regard to Germanophobia and spy-fever. These phenomena are evidence of people's desire to be fully involved in the war.

For a while, as the queues at the recruiting offices and the over-subscription to reserve military forces imply, the eagerness to get involved outweighed society's ability to manage the public's energies. The emergence of new military units such as the 'Pals', the 'Bantams' and the Volunteer Reserve (the first unit of which was raised in Mollington) was further evidence of Wirral's dynamism and innovation, while the recruitment of locals by Welsh and Lancastrian regiments as well as the CR is evidence for its liminality. Recruitment was also shown to have functioned along class lines, whereby regiments such as 1/5 and 1/6 KLR took in middle-class men (mainly clerks), while 1/4 and 13 CR accepted working-class men. These facts emerged from analysis of the WSS. Few people imagined it would be a short war – the phrase 'over by Christmas' was never used – and, as exemplified



by numerous speeches delivered by society's leaders, most people accepted that resilience and sacrifice would be imperative.

Chapter Three explored the nature and distribution of Wirral's working-class. It continued the point made in Chapter One that there were examples of workers in each of the three employment sectors and that most of them lived and/or worked along the Mersey Estuary as far east as Ellesmere Port and in Liverpool. Building upon work by Nick Mansfield, Marcus Morris, David Swift and others about working-class patriotism, the chapter discussed local examples of the phenomenon and found it to be particularly strong amongst the canal workers of Ellesmere Port, who had developed a sense of solidarity due to their shared roots in Wolverhampton. There were few if any examples of working-class disillusionment with the war. Strikes aimed to rectify perceived injustices in the workplace, rather than to undermine the war effort. Due to industrial expansion, trades union membership grew, which led to the growth of local TLCs, especially in Ellesmere Port. The experiences of ex-servicemen and their representative bodies, the NFDDSS and CGW, were discussed. The former organisation was shown to have been particularly active – partly due to the work of its president (Birkenhead Liberal and clerk, Joseph Frederick Lister). This section of the thesis was a response to Nick Mansfield's observations about the 'obscurity' of the NFDDSS and his request for additional community history research.

The story of Labour's rise by 1919 presaged that of the Second World War, when Labour ministers in the wartime coalition government demonstrated their commitment to public welfare, leading to a Labour landslide in the 1945 election. During the Great War, Wirral's Labour Councillors, such as W.H. Egan, showed

that they were competent and energetic and that their policies were beneficial. Consequently, in 1918 and 1919, they increased their representation on Wallasey, Birkenhead and Ellesmere Port Town Councils, but gained no parliamentary seats. Unlike in uniformly industrial towns, such as Bolton and Wednesbury, there was no significant 'swing to the left' in local politics. Again, the message is one of gradual change and conservatism, rather than one of revolution.

Chapter Four analysed women's experiences. Alison Fell's 'War Story' or depiction of the hackneyed view of the roles of men and women in the Great War acted as a provocative starting point. Three contemporary advertisements for Sunlight Soap epitomised contemporary beliefs about the role and image of women as housewives and mothers, whose greatest contribution to the war was their support of their menfolk. These paradigms were found not to be universally applicable, as there is evidence of women performing other roles both before and during the war. A good example of this is the upper-middle-class women who were prominent in charities, pressure groups and committees. In addition, in order to gain fresh insight into women's experiences, the correspondence of the McGuire family of Wallasey was studied. Motherhood, wifeliness and daughterhood were explored; and it was shown how demonstrators of these qualities were praised and deviants punished and/or vilified. The role of 'heroines' was discussed and, again, it was argued that this was a traditional idea wherein women, such as nurses, were admired for demonstrating the time-honoured feminine qualities of care, hard-work, elegance and beauty. Innovations such as female industrial employment were shown to have been envisioned as temporary adjustments and not auguries of long-term change. However, the small increase in female representation on local councils and the appointment of Birkenhead's first female mayor, Mary

Mercer, in 1924 are evidence of a small rise in women's status in the political sphere.

Chapter Five dealt with beliefs and attitudes which were implicitly woven through all the preceding chapters. Historians such as Jay Winter and Gerard De Groot have argued that prosperity, resulting from full employment and government regulation underpinned popular resilience. It was shown that there is insufficient statistical data from Wirral to enable a meaningful contribution to this debate, but that anecdotal evidence might shed some light on the question. In this regard, building on discussions in Chapter Three, it was argued that, as demonstrated by the strikes, even though not all of the people of Wirral were well-paid, well-fed and well-housed all of the time, in general, for most people, extremes of poverty, destitution and disease were unknown. Material wellbeing must have undergirded resilience, but cannot fully explain it, necessitating study of beliefs and ideas. Using recent work by Robert Beaken and S.C. Williams, the role of both 'diffuse' and formal Christianity was discussed and both forms of belief found to have been important. The impact of less conventional beliefs such as spiritualism and astrology were also analysed. It was shown that exponents of both activities were active in Wirral, but that they were few in number and had a minor impact on local society.

Examples of possible dissent and resistance to the war were then explored. There was a small minority of COs in Wirral. Five cases in particular were analysed. They were shown not to have initiated any kind of mass movement or rebellion, but to have been people with pacifist convictions who in some cases had been active in pre-war civic life, the best example being Walter Bone, who died in

custody in 1919 and had been a trade union official and adult education tutor, formerly revered for his good citizenship qualities, but later reviled for his opposition to the war. Comparison was made with Leicester and Kendal, where local traditions encouraged more conscientious objection than in Wirral.

A local myth which says that the crowning of the bard at the National Eisteddfod in Birkenhead Park in September 1917 was an act of anti-war and anti-government protest was then shown to have been a typical civic event of the period and a stage in the evolution of concepts of mourning and commemoration which eventually lead to the official formats which became common in the late 1920s and are still in use today. This is further evidence of Wirral people's pro-war solidarity, which owed less to jingoism and 'mafeking' and more to rational understandings of the threat posed by Germany to Europe, Britain, the Empire and the home region, undergirded by Christianity and its doctrines of justice, sacrifice and eternal life.

The final section of the chapter traced the emergence of accepted rituals of remembrance and commemoration and of the establishment of war memorials. Again, despite the superficial diversity of Wirral's war memorials, their shared message is a traditional one, involving the familiar concepts of patriotism, faith and sacrifice. This review of the role of faith and belief rounded off the entire thesis by re-affirming the profoundly conservative nature of the Great War's impact on local and national society.

### **The Argument**

It has been shown that the war did cause change: people served in new roles, travelled to new places and witnessed death, disease, destruction and displacement on an unprecedented scale, but what helped them to cope was a set

of traditional values, beliefs, hierarchies and structures. The enquiry began by suggesting that there are two ways of looking at the Great War – either as a transformative or as a conservative force on British society. Marwick was cited as the spokesman for the first and De Groot, mainly due to his explicit attacks on Marwick, posited as advocate of the second interpretation. At this point, Marwick resembles a voice crying in the wilderness: few if any Great War scholars seem now to agree with his arguments and many more historians, in addition to de Groot, have discussed the Great War's reactionary effects on British life.

In truth, at the beginning of this project, it was suspected that this enquiry would confirm, by means of primary data, that Marwick's thesis is not valid. It was also assumed that the sources would contradict the British Great War disillusionment myth with its attendant assumptions that the public were coerced or duped into supporting the war effort, that they did not know what they were fighting for, that they knew nothing about the nature of warfare on the fighting fronts, that they felt betrayed and that they quickly became angry at the establishment and adopted new ideologies such as socialism and pacifism. Not only has this expectation been fulfilled, but the sheer intensity of the public's conservatism and commitment to the war effort have come as something of a shock. It had not been realised just how deeply erroneous the disillusionment myth actually is and how profoundly, intelligently and energetically the common people not only supported the war but prosecuted it in their own ways.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

This thesis raises further questions. Perhaps the most obvious one being how does Wirral's story compare with those of other British regions? Existing local and

regional studies appear in the bibliography, were reviewed in the introduction and were mentioned in the text. Worthy examples include those about Bolton, Hull, Luton, Wednesbury, Leicester, Pembrokeshire and other parts of Wales, but some of the others, especially the commemorative works published just after the war's end, are dated and not many are as comprehensive or pay as much regard to recent historiography in the areas of resilience, belief, working-class patriotism, gender and class as does the above study. More regional enquiries are required.

Additional questions are raised about Wirral itself. Much has been said above about the upper-middle-class elite, who would never have existed had it not been for the port of Liverpool and its cotton trade. The origins and effects of this wealth in the fifty or so years before 1914 require further investigation, as do the effects of its diminution during the 1920s. Such work would shed light on the impact of economic decline on later beliefs about the Great War and on the emergence of the 'futility' or 'disillusionment' myth. Similarly, the above analysis of war memorials provokes curiosity about their relationship with Wirral's rapidly changing landscape and growing population. An enquiry into this relationship could improve our understanding of the evolution of remembrance and commemoration in later twentieth century Britain as a whole.

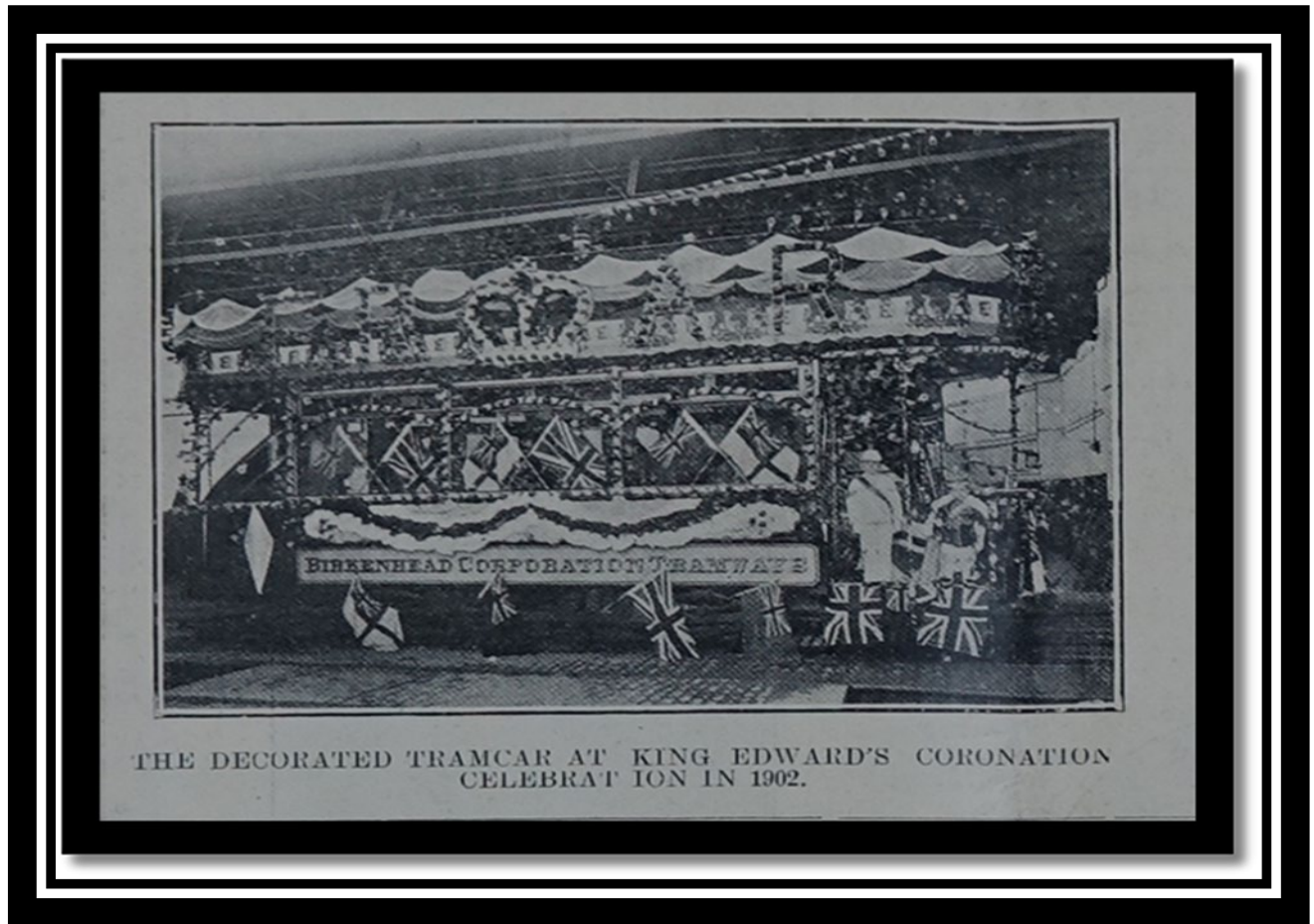
The story of Wirral's ex-servicemen's associations, especially that of the NFDDSS and its figurehead J.F. Lister, requires further analysis. In view of the disappearance of its records, the newspapers and genealogical research will have to be brought to bear in order to discover exactly how it functioned and to what extent it was successful. Such work could add considerably to our current patchy knowledge about pre-British Legion ex-servicemen's groups and their effects on

British society. Similarly, further study of the Eisteddfod of the Black Chair, including analysis of its organisers and the platform party at the time of the crowning of the bard should reveal fascinating details about the effects of war on the Anglo-Welsh community of the north-west of England.

The above enquiry has, to a large extent, relied upon a multitude of micro-histories, including those of individual soldiers, families and neighbourhoods. Attention has been paid to the service papers of two thousand Wirral soldiers. More work of a similar vein is both possible and desirable, firstly by tracing the service records of all the remaining soldiers from Wirral and secondly by analysing surviving soldiers' experiences during the 1920s and 30s and into the Second World War and beyond. Such a project would shed light on the contribution of the Great War generation to later British society and on perceptions of the relationship between the two world wars, using a 'bottom up' perspective.

Finally, research into the impact of the Second World War upon society in Wirral, Liverpool and/or upon the entire Merseyside region is highly desirable. One reason for this is that, unlike the nation as a whole, the region appears to have suffered as many if not more casualties in the Second World War as it did in the First. This is due to the 1940 Blitz and to the Battle of the Atlantic. It would be most instructive to compare the effects of the two conflicts upon this fascinating region and helpful to gain a wider perspective of the relationship between war and society in the twentieth century.

**Appendix 1: Figures**



*Figure 1: A Photograph from the Birkenhead Advertiser of 10/6/1911 showing the decorated tramcar of 1902 - a way of promoting loyalty to the monarchy and of associating it with civic pride. It references the world's first tram service, which began in Birkenhead in 1860.*



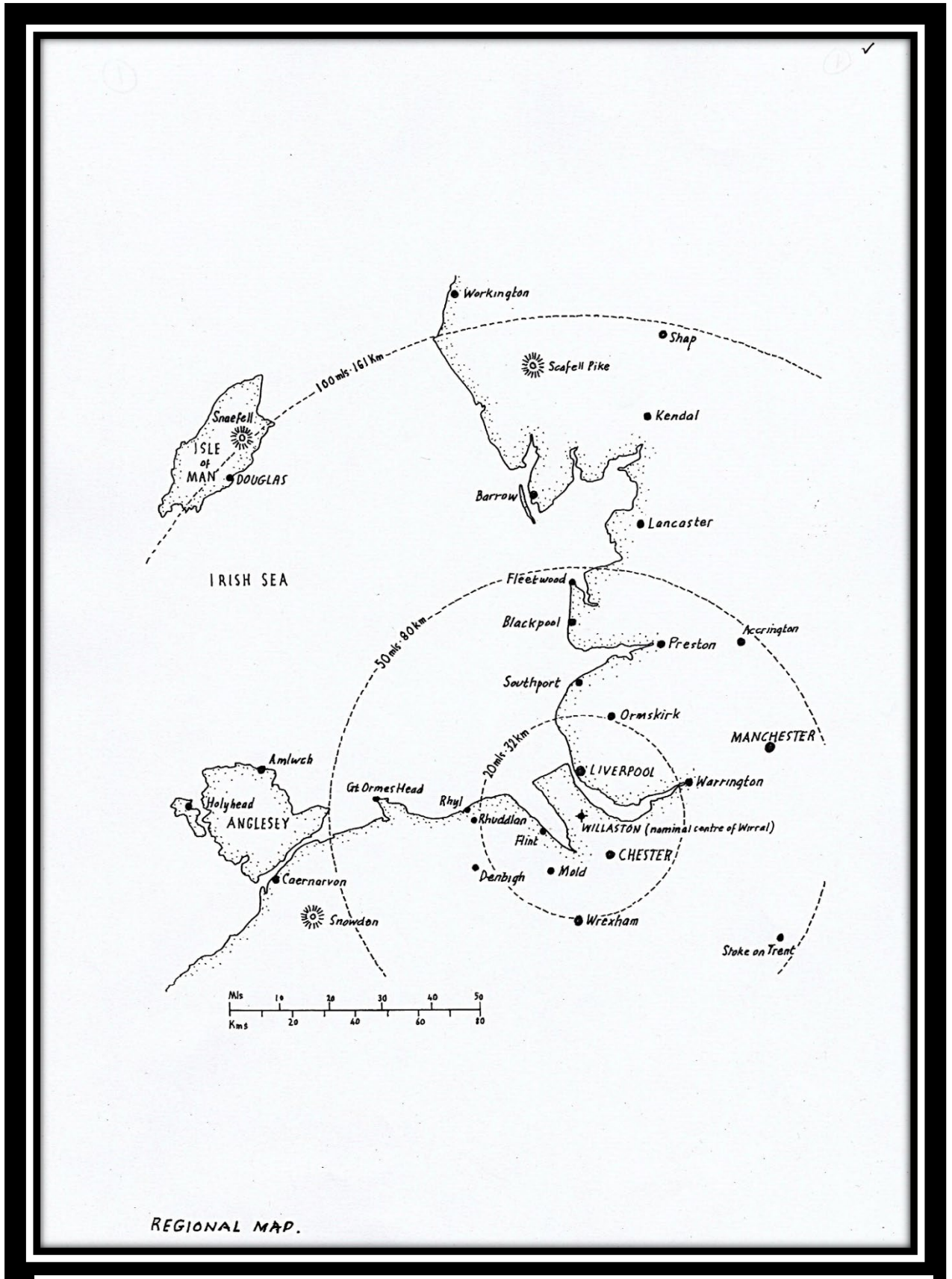


Figure 2: The Wirral Region



Figure 3: An Aerial View of Wirral's Mersey Shore from 'The Illustrated London News' of 1898. Levers' works and Port Sunlight can be seen in the foreground followed by Birkenhead Docks and New Brighton Tower. The view shows the importance of industry and leisure facilities along Wirral's Mersey coast.

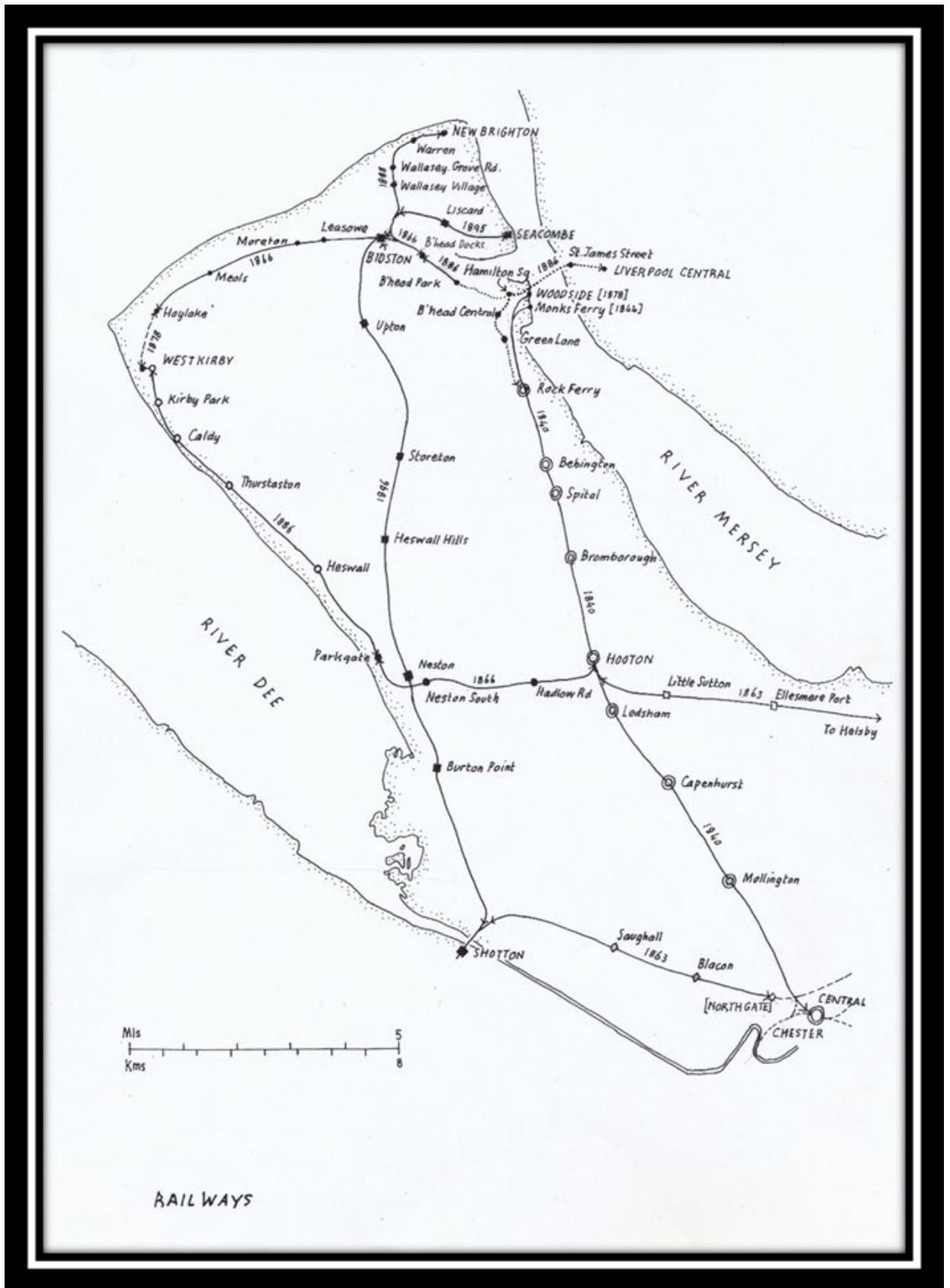


Figure 4: Wirral Railways. The network was well developed by 1914, enabling people from all over Wirral to commute to Liverpool in under an hour.

# “ KITCHENER’S NAVY.”

HOYLAKE FAMILY’S PROUD RECORD.

THREE SONS JOINED SAME DAY.



Sappers Edwin, John and James Harrison are all attached to the Inland Water Transport Section of the Royal Engineers (Kitchener's Navy), and are at present "somewhere in France." Mr. and Mrs. James Harrison, of 27, Alderley-road, Hoylake, are naturally proud of their sons, if only for the fact they all joined the same day, while prior to this they were engaged on Transport service since the outbreak of hostilities.

Figure 5: Image from the DA 7/1/1916, mentioning service by the Harrison brothers of Hoylake in the Inland Waterways Transport Section of the Royal Engineers.

NOT TO BE USED IN CASE OF FIRST TRANSFER TO ROYAL ENGINEERS.

**ROYAL ENGINEERS, RAILWAY TROOPS,**  
OR  
**WESSEX DIVISIONAL SIGNAL COY., ROYAL ENGINEERS, (T.F.)**

**CERTIFICATE OF RECOMMENDATION FOR ADVANCEMENT TO A HIGHER RATE  
OF ENGINEER PAY. (OR REMUSTERING)**

I CERTIFY that I have tested No. 167587. Rank Sapper Kerman T.  
Royal Engineers, Railway Troops  
~~Wessex Divisional Signal Coy., R.E. (T.F.)~~

And find him to be Superior. as a  
Driver (Loco)

Date of Completion of Test 26-9-1917.

Present Rate Third Date from which held 1-5-1916.

Present Trade \_\_\_\_\_  
[Only in cases of Remustering in a new Trade]

\*Here insert—  
**Proficient**—(4th Rate Engineer Pay One Shilling)  
**Skilled**—(3rd Rate Engineer Pay One Shilling & Four Pence)  
**Superior**—(2nd Rate Engineer Pay One Shilling & Eight Pence)  
**Very Superior**—(1st Rate Engineer Pay Two Shillings)

*John Kernan Capt R.E.*  
Lieut-Col. R.E.  
for DIRECTOR of RAILWAYS,  
**MESOPOTAMIA.**

According to the Man's Degree of Skill.

S.G.P.B....1837...2944...1,000...25-2-18.

Figure 6:: Proficiency Certificate for Sapper John Kernan (wrongly called T. Kerman) of Lower Tranmere, of the RE Railway Troops. John was an engine-driver in civilian life. This was the only job he did in the army. By 1939, he was working as a Lead Engine Man for the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, showing, at the very least, that his time in the army did not harm and might even have boosted his career on the railways. Page copied from his service file.

ROYAL ENGINEERS.

UNIT I.W.S.R.E. E.C.F.

WP 308755

Ordinary Trades Only

Certificate called for by War Office letter No.50/Engineers/3123 (AG7) dated 15th March 1915.

Certified that No. WP 308755 <sup>Superior Pritchard, I.W.</sup> has successfully performed work which in my opinion is equivalent to the test defined in Corps Memo for the Superior rate of Engineer Pay, as a (Trade) Joiner Rate to take effect from 12 Feb. 1918.  
Present Trade Joiner Present rate 1/4  
Date of completion of test 1-2-1918  
Date of present rate 20th January 1918

Date 10-6-18

*P. H. Williams*  
Captain  
for Colonel, R.E.  
D.I.W.T.  
Officer Commanding.

NOTE: Trades should conform to para.201 R.E.Corps Memo No.633 Part 11. No others can be recognised except in Railway Companies.

P.H.O.

Figure 7: Thomas Wilfred Pritchard Certificate of Proficiency as a Superior Joiner in the RE. He was a joiner in civilian life both before and after the war. Page copied from his service file.

### THE STREET PARADE.

The Street Parade promises to be a truly unique spectacle, the like of which has never before been seen in Birkenhead, and will probably be unsurpassed in any but the very largest towns in the United Kingdom. Some four thousand people are taking part in it, and the procession alone will be not less than two miles long. One of the most striking features will be about twenty picturesque tableaux representing various arts and industries being carried on in the borough; and there will be seven military bands. There will be a great assembly of friendly societies and trade unions with their banners and regalia. The Fire Brigade will lead off with their two motor fire-engines—delivery of the second new one, now on order, has been promised in time for the occasion—and they will be followed by contingents of the Birkenhead District Medallists' Association (Old Volunteers), the Cheshire County Association of Veterans and Boy Scouts, Boys' Brigades, etc. The Trade Unions will include:—

- 1.—Amalgamated Society of Engineers.
- 2.—United Kingdom Amalgamated Society of Smiths and Strikers.
- 3.—Birkenhead Operative House Painters.
- 4.—Steam Engine Makers' Society.
- 5.—Riggers' Society.
- 6.—Co-operative Workers' Association.
- 7.—Postmen's Federation.
- 8.—Birkenhead and District National Association of Operative Plasterers.
- 9.—Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners.
- 10.—United Machine Workers' Association.
- 11.—Shipwrights' Association (Drillers and Hole-cutters).
- 12.—Drillers' Society.
- 13.—National Union of Labourers.
- 14.—Birkenhead Operative Bakers.
- 15.—Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants.
- 16.—National Amalgamated Society of Municipal Employees.
- 17.—Coach Builders' Society.

The following will be included in the Friendly Societies:—

- 1.—Good Templars.
- 2.—Independent Order of Oddfellows.
- 3.—Independent Order of Buffaloes.
- 4.—Independent Order of Foresters.
- 5.—Loyal Orange Institution of England.

Figure 8: 'Birkenhead Advertiser' 10th June 1911 - Participants in Birkenhead's Coronation Parade

Heap.

**LABOURIST AND PATRIOT.**

**Naval Appointment for  
Mr. R. Craig Smith.**

The many who know Mr. R. Craig Smith, of 23, Wentworth-avenue, New Brighton, will learn with interest of his appointment as engineer-lieutenant in the Navy. This was made but a day or two ago. Mr. Craig Smith secured the appointment almost immediately upon application, and yesterday joined his ship—the Montcalm—which has been placed in commission as an auxiliary cruiser.

For the past five years, Mr. Craig Smith has been in charge of the engineering plant at New Brighton Tower. Prior



to that he was chief engineer in the service of Messrs. Elders and Fyffes trading between Liverpool and the West Indies.

An ardent trade unionist, he has been a member of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers for 16 years, and has been one of the most prominent workers in connection with the Labour party in Wallasey, being chairman of the local Federated Trades and Labour Council. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the Mayor's Relief Fund, and has done useful work on the Distress Committee and the Central Board of the Civic Guild of Help. Conspicuous in the sphere of social endeavour, he is also a well-known Freemason, being steward of the Amphill, Wallasey Mark, and Egerton Chapter Royal Arch Lodges.

Figure 9: The WN 27/10/1915: Robert Craig Smith (1880-1947) of New Brighton – a 'Labourist and Patriot'



THE  
MOTHER  
IN  
WAR TIME

"We are fighting for our liberty . . . and for the Virtue and Honour of our Womanhood and our innate love of home."  
—Mr. W. CROOKS, M.P.

**M**OTHERS will take courage from the words of Mr. Will Crooks. That inborn love of Home of which he speaks is begotten of perfect Motherhood. Although we lay stress upon the purity and efficiency of

**SUNLIGHT SOAP**

we always make our claims secondary to the needs of those we serve. No soap can be too good for the Wives, Mothers, and the homes of our gallant Sailors and Soldiers.

**£1,000 Guarantee of Purity on every Bar.**

*The name Lever on Soap is a Guarantee of Purity and Excellence.*  
LEVER BROTHERS LIMITED, PORT SUNLIGHT

Figure 10: BN 18/8/1915 – A Sunlight Soap Advert Describes the Role of Mothers

# FORESIGHT



**E**VERY true aim in life is taken with Foresight. The housewife, aiming at a successful wash-day, buys her soap with Foresight. She buys

## SUNLIGHT SOAP

because foresight tells her that a soap with a guarantee must be made from the very best materials, must preserve the clothes as well as purify them, must save most labour, must save most time, must be more economical in use than a soap without a standard. Cleanliness means purification. Without pure soap you can't have perfect cleanliness. That stands to reason.

*The 1d. and ½d. size will be found convenient for including in your parcels to the front.*

**£1,000 GUARANTEE OF PURITY  
ON EVERY BAR OF SUNLIGHT SOAP.**

*The name Lever on Soap is a Guarantee of Purity and Excellence.*

LEVER BROTHERS LIMITED, PORT SUNLIGHT.

Figure 11: Sunlight Soap Advertisement from the EPA 19/1/1916, shows stereotypical wartime roles and imagery.

Let your World  
be full of  
**Sunlight**

*£1,000  
Guarantee  
of Purity  
on every bar*

**MADAM**, Sunlight is the  
brightest, cheeriest cleanser  
that ever made home clean and  
happy. Don't let the household  
washing and cleaning be a worry;  
let Sunlight in.

Sunlight in the home means work well  
and easily done, snow white linen with  
that clean, fresh odour that can only  
be likened to that of a garden after  
a shower. Sunlight Soap represents  
the highest standard of soap quality  
and efficiency.

**SUNLIGHT SOAP**

LEVER BROTHERS LIMITED, PORT SUNLIGHT.

Figure 12: Sunlight Soap Advertisement from the EPA 18/6/1919 Contains Allusions to Victory and Empire

NORTH-END TRIPLETS.



MRS. MILLER AND HER BABIES.  
Nellie (left), Jacob (centre), Margaret (right).

*Figure 13: Mrs Miller and Her Triplets in the BN 6/3/1915.*



Figure 14: The BN 15/5/1915 – Mrs Nolan Depicted at the Centre of her Military Family – the quintessential ‘good’ wartime mother: head of her family and a pillar of the local ‘extended family’.



KATHERINE, DUCHESS OF WESTMINSTER (accompanied by Dr. MacDonald) INSPECTING THE NURSES.  
Photo by Weatherby, Tower-street, Liscard.

*Figure 15: The Duchess of Westminster Inspecting Red Cross Nurses – perhaps the only example of aristocratic patronage of women’s war work in Wirral, from the WN 29/5/1915.*



*Figure 16: Mary Mercer, Birkenhead's First Woman Mayor in 'The Vote' of December 1924.*

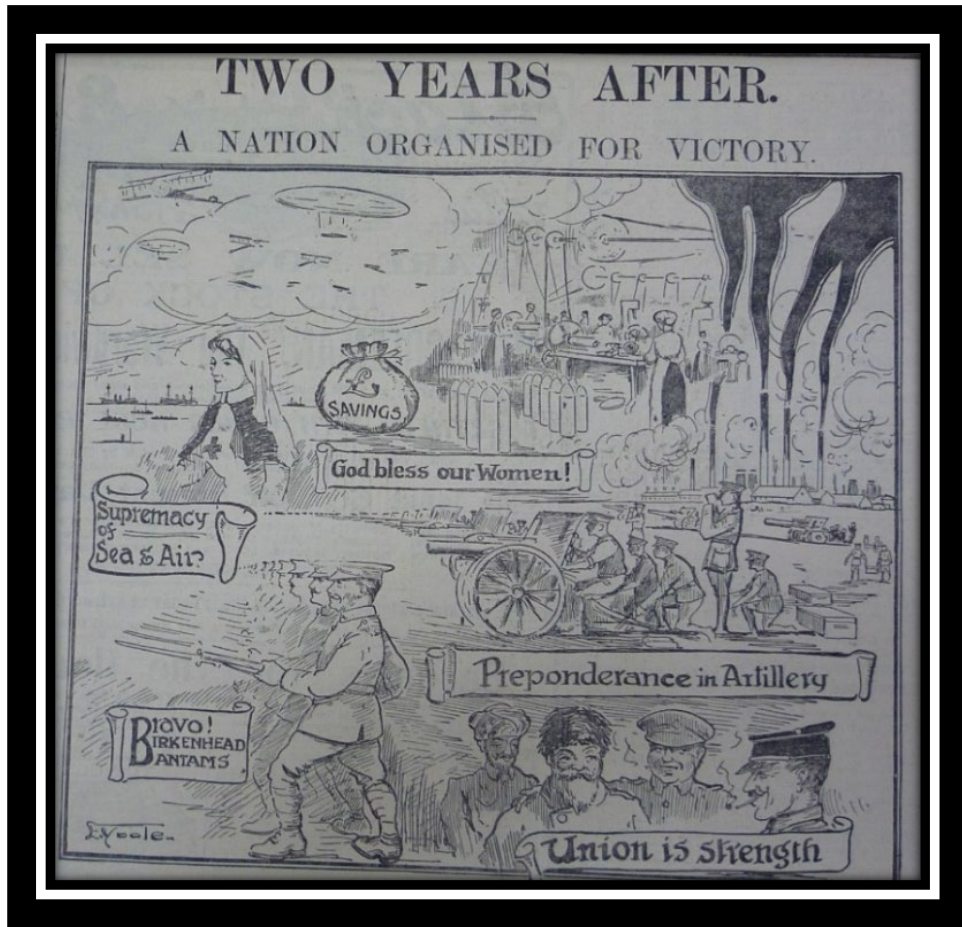


Figure 17: The BN 5/8/1916 Celebrates the Region's and Nation's Achievements Two Years Into the War

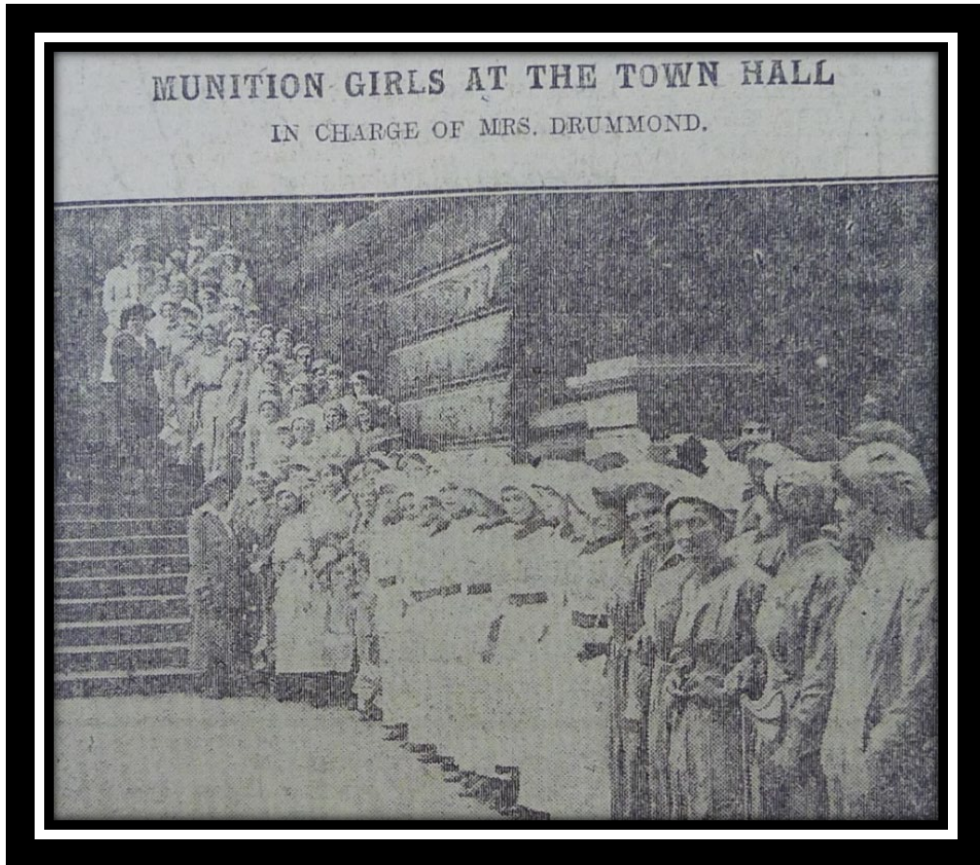




Figure 18: VAD Nurses from Bromborough Auxiliary Hospital who were Awarded Medals, BN 12/4/1919.



*Figure 19: One of the six Women Appointed as Tram Conductors in Birkenhead BN, 15/9/1915.*



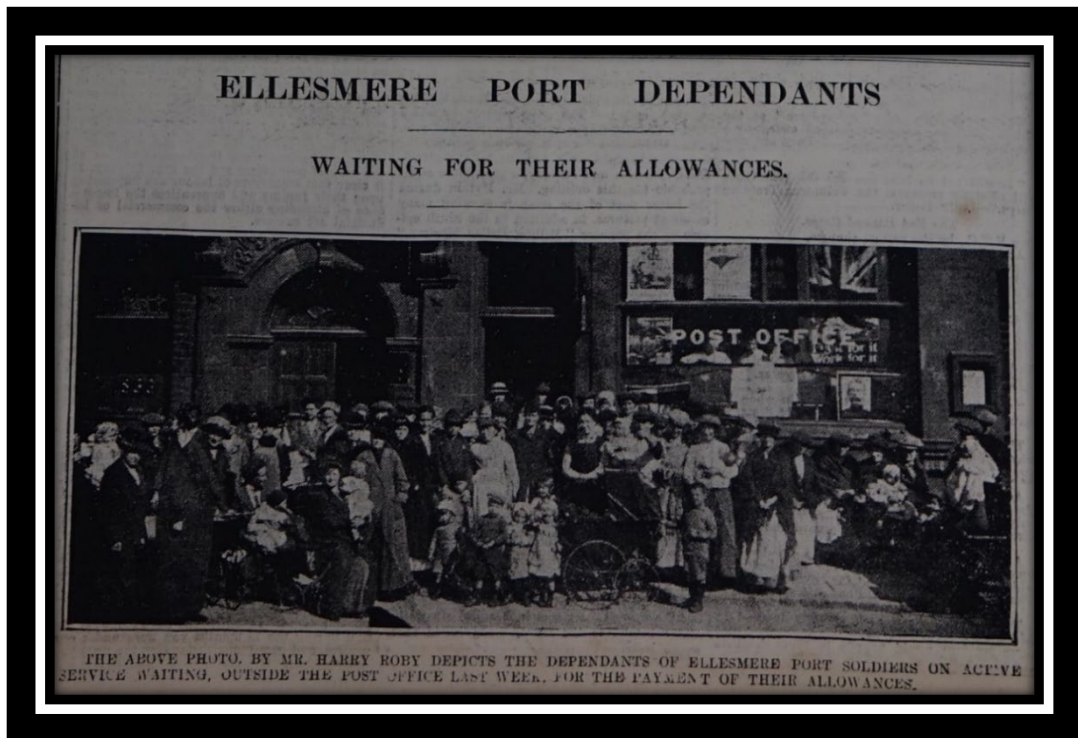
*Figure 20: Munitions Girls in Birkenhead, BN 12/9/1917*

MUNITION GIRLS CHARITY MATCH.



FOOTBALL TEAM AT PORT SUNLIGHT.

*Figure 21: Women Munitions Workers' Football Team at Port Sunlight, from the BN 17/11/1917.*



*Figure 22: Families Queuing for their Separation Allowances in Ellesmere Port, EPA 29/9/1915*



Figure 23: Memorial Card from Ada McGuire's Papers



Figure 24: EPA 4/9/1918, the Second Anniversary of the Death of Bugler Harold Wilkinson

PORT SUNLIGHT'S WAR MEMORIAL.  
LAUNCHING OF AN ADMIRABLE SCHEME.

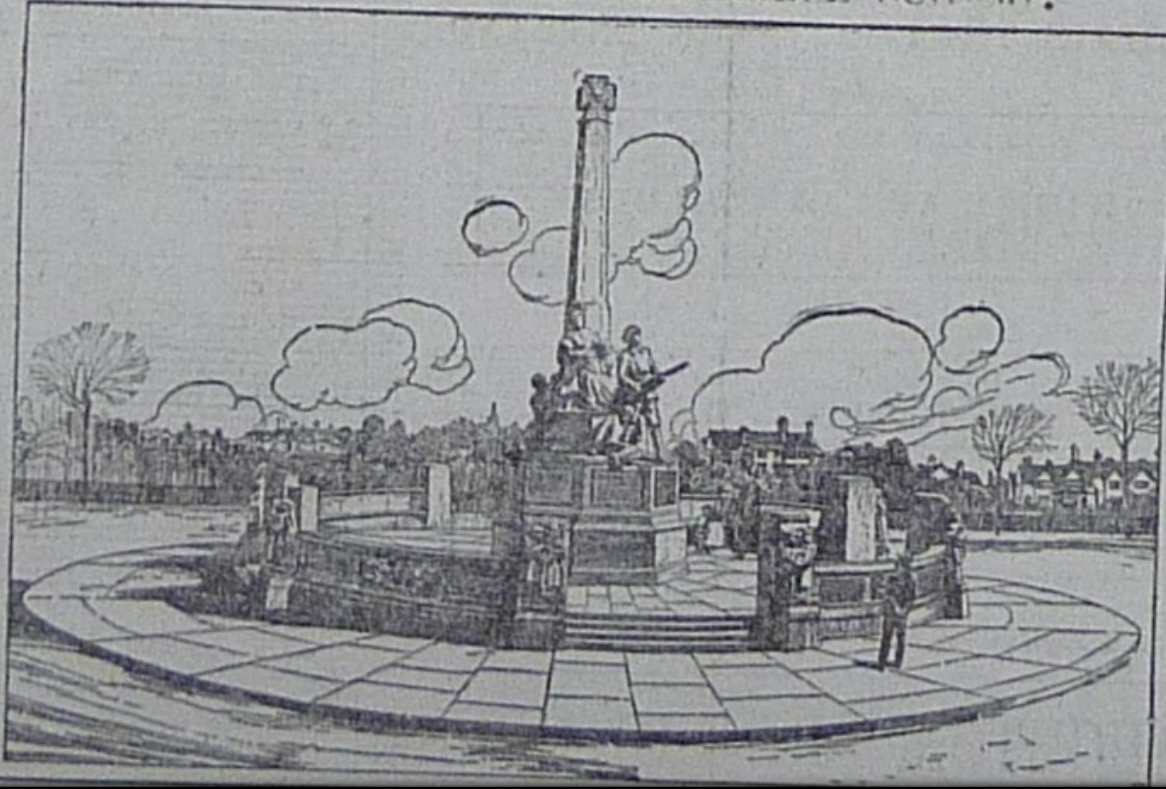


Figure 25: Plan by W.G. John for Port Sunlight's War Memorial, BN 11/5/1918





*Figure 26:: The BN 7/12/1921 showing Lord Leverhulme, Sir Hulme Lever, Sergeant Eames and Private Cruikshank V.C. at the unveiling of the Port Sunlight War Memorial, 3/12/1921.*

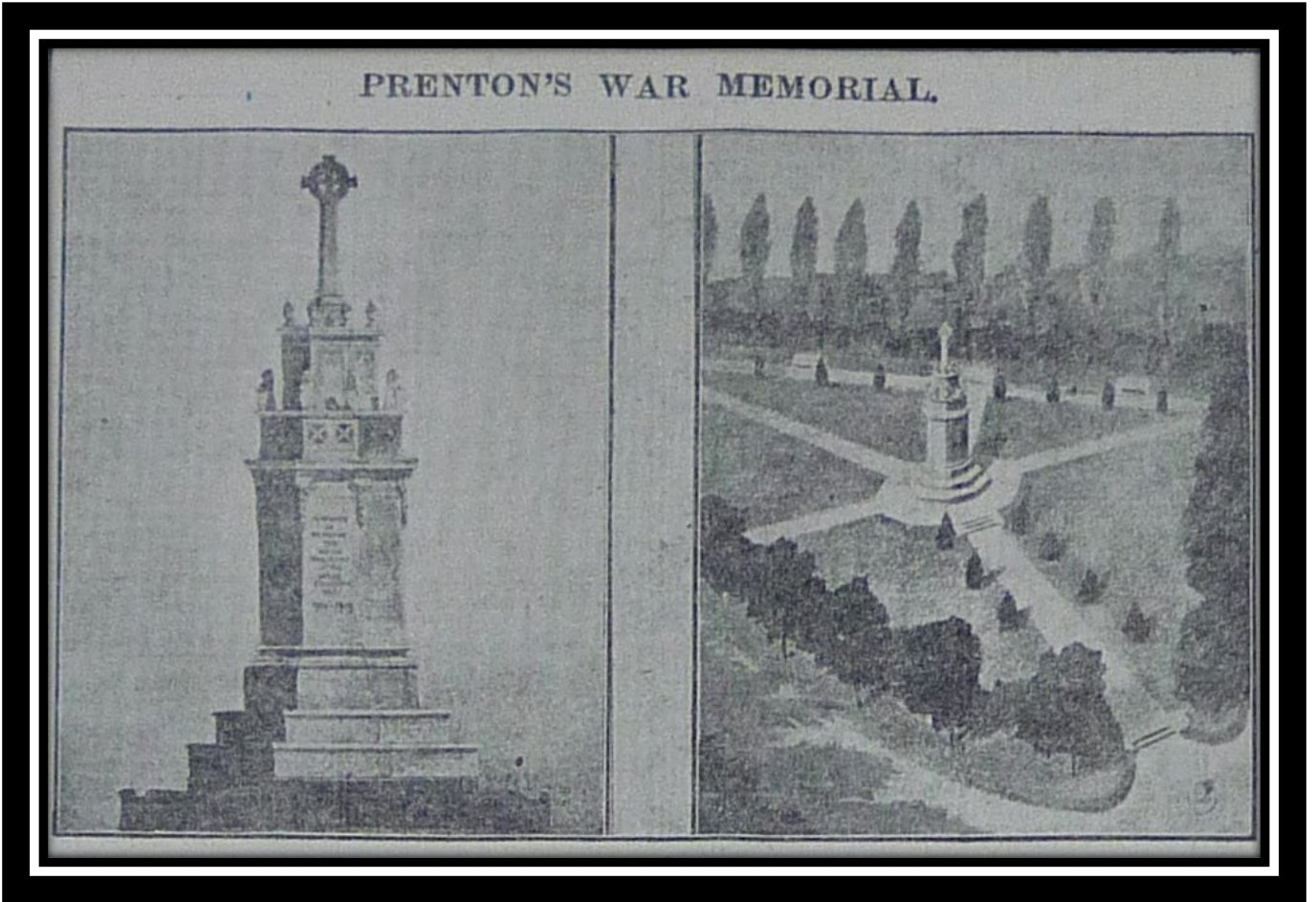


Figure 27: Plans for Prenton War Memorial, BN 23/8/1919



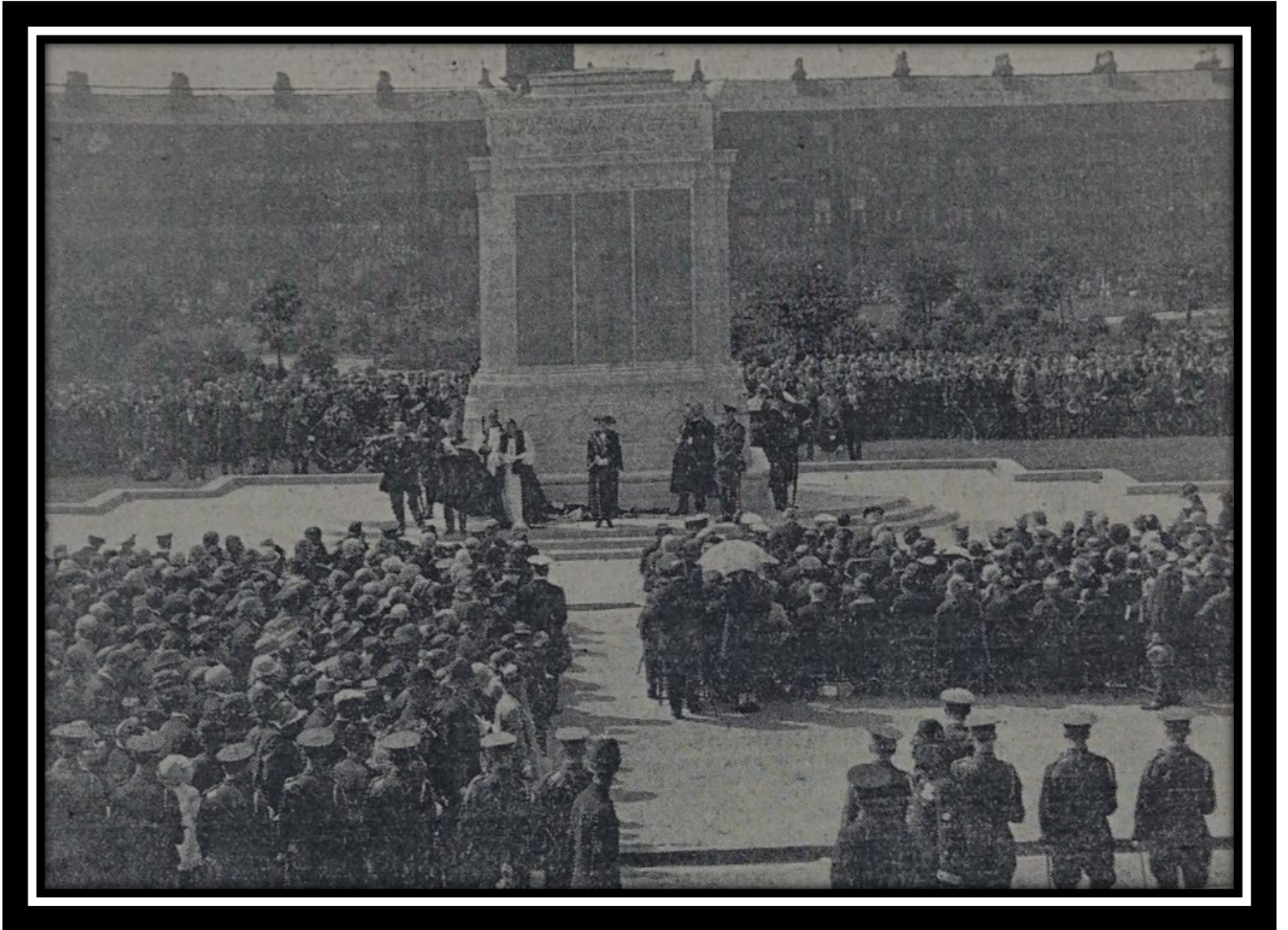
*Figure 28: Image from the DA of 22/12/1922 of the Dedication of Grange Hill War Memorial, West Kirby.*

WALLASEY WAR MEMORIAL MONUMENT.



Above is the design for the Monument to be erected at the Magazines to the glorious memory of the fallen in the Great War by the Wallasey War Memorial Trust, on behalf of which the Mayor has issued a special appeal. The sum required is about £2,500, towards which upwards of £1,300 has already been subscribed. Subscriptions should be sent to the Mayor (Alderman E. G. Parkinson) at the Town Hall.

Figure 29: Design of Wallasey's War Memorial, BN 29/11/1919



*Figure 30: Dedication of Birkenhead's War Memorial 1/7/1925, BN 8/7/1925. Birkenhead's first female Mayor, Mary Ann Mercer, is visible centre.*

THE BIRKENHEAD NEWS, SATURDAY, JULY 5, 1919

WHEN THE GLAD NEWS CAME.



The scene in front of the Town Hall on Saturday last when the Mayor announced that the Peace Treaty had been signed.

Figure 31: Birkenhead Peace Day Celebrations - John Laird's Statue is in the position later occupied by the Cenotaph

## **Appendix 2: Principal Landowners in Wirral by 1914**

The following table is based on information obtained from *Kelly's Directory of Cheshire 1914*, genealogical details derived from census returns held at TNA and from *Burkes Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage*, (three vols., 2003). It demonstrates that the land of Wirral was divided between numerous owners, few of whom had deep ancestral roots in the area and many of whose wealth derived from Liverpool trade.

<b>Person</b>	<b>Source of Wealth</b>	<b>Places</b>
Sir William Hesketh Lever (1851-1925) and Lever Bros. of Thornton Manor, Wirral	Soap Manufacturer at Port Sunlight, Wirral	Barnston, Bromborough, New Ferry, Raby, Storeton, Thornton Hough
Trustees of the Late Richard Christopher Naylor Esq. (1814-1899) of Kelmarsh Hall, Northants. and Miss Naylor	Cotton Broker and Banker in Liverpool	Eastham, Hooton, Netherpool, Overpool, Great and Little Sutton
Robert Charles De Grey Vyner (1842-1915) of Newby Hall, Yorks.	Landed Proprietor in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire	Bidston Cum Ford, Liscard, Thingwall, Wallasey
Birkenhead Glegg (1848-1915) of Backford Hall, Wirral	Landed Proprietor in Wirral	Backford, Irby, Thurstaston
Charles Francis Kynaston Mainwaring (1872-1949) of Otely Park, Shrops.	Landed Proprietor from Shropshire	Bromborough, New Brighton, Seacombe
The Dean and Chapter of Chester Cathedral	Established Church	Great and Little Stanney, Stoke
Trustees of the Late John Cavendish Orred (1842-1905) of Lavant	Landed Proprietor: Grandfather was a	Higher Bebington, Tranmere

House, Chichester, W. Sussex	Liverpool Merchant	
Mrs Magdalene Gray (née Robin) (1831-1917) of Farley Hill Place, Reading, Berks.	Inherited property from her father, John Robin (b.1774), a Liverpool merchant residing in West Kirby.	Grange, Greasby
Miss Rathbone of Backwood Hall, Gayton, Wirral	Inherited her wealth from father, Theodore Woolman Rathbone (1798-1863), Liverpool Cotton Broker and Railway Director.	Leighton, Neston
John Cecil Gerard Leigh Esq. (1889-1963) of Lees Court, Faversham, Kent	Inherited wealth from John Shaw Leigh (1792-1871), Property Investor, Liverpool.	Grange, West Kirby
Major Herbert Lancelyn Green (1857-1939) of Poulton Hall, Wirral	Landed Proprietor in Wirral	Lower Bebington, Poulton Cum Spital
Henry Neville Gladstone (1852-1935), Burton Manor, Wirral	Landed Proprietor: First and Last Baron Gladstone of Hawarden, 7th child and 3rd son of W.E. Gladstone (1809-1898)	Burton, Puddington
Mary Ann Davies of Meadowbank	No Details available	Chorlton, Little Mollington
Arthur Lyulph Stanley (1875-1931) 5th Baron Stanley, Lord Sheffield	Landed Proprietor and Aristocrat, descendant of the Stanleys of Storeton Manor, Later Earls of Derby	Little Meols
Mrs Winifred McCalmont (1863-1943)	Widow of Col. Harry Leslie Blundell	Arrowe



of Cleveley Park, Newmarket, Cambs.	McCalmont (1863-1913), Landed Proprietor with ancestral roots in Liverpool via the Blundell Family.	
Trustees of the Late Joseph Hegan Esq., Formerly of Dawpool, Wirral	Businessman: Director of the Manchester and Leeds Railway in Liverpool	Barnston
Alexander Percy Eccles (1862-1932) of Caldby Manor, Wirral	Cotton Broker from Liverpool	Caldy Manor
Richard Taswell Richardson (1852-1930) BA JP of Capenhurst Hall, Wirral	Landed Proprietor: Inherited property from Father Richard Richardson of Capenhurst (1812-1885)	Capenhurst
Benjamin Chaffers Roberts (1849-1923) of Oakfield (Now Chester Zoo), Upton-by-Chester	Tea Merchant from Liverpool	Caughall
Thomas Hughes Brassey and Thomas Alnutt Brassey 2nd Earl Brassey (1863-1919)	Inherited wealth: Grandsons of Thomas Brassey (1805-1870), Civil Engineer from Cheshire	Claughton
Sir Thomas Bland Royden JP (1831-1917) of Frankby Hall, Wirral	Shipbuilder from Liverpool	Frankby
William Walter Brocklehurst (1829-1918) of Henbury Hall, Cheshire	Landed Proprietor in Cheshire	Heswall

Trustees of TA Hope Esq. of Hooton Grange	Unclear who TA Hope was, but probably related to Robert Hope Jones (1859-1943?), Landed Proprietor	Hooton
Miss Emily Hayward (1858-1936) of Meadowbank, Childer Thornton, Wirral	Coffee Merchant from Liverpool	Hooton
Henry Alexander Latham Esq. (1859-1929) of Lyndhurst, Childer Thornton, Wirral	Timber Merchant from Chester	Hooton
James Edward Hughes (1859-1959) of Lea Hall, Wirral	Cotton Broker in Liverpool, originally from Flintshire	Lea By Backford
Cheshire County Council acquired it for Smallholdings	County Council	Ledsham
Trustees of the Late Richard Smith	No Details available	Liscard
Bertram Keightley Esq. (1860-1944)	Son of Birkenhead Solicitor William Tristram Keightley (1801-1873)	Great Meols
Thomas Gibbons Frost (1860-1938) of Mollington Hall, Wirral	Corn Merchant from Chester	Great Mollington
Frederick Smith of Medlicott, Ness, Wirral	Businessman from Liverpool	Ness
Richard Johnson Houghton Esq. (1876-1940) of Croughton	Father, John Johnson Houghton (b.1849) was a landowner from	Neston

Cottage and of the Lodge Malpas, Cheshire	Waterloo and his father, Richard Houghton (b.1810) was a Timber Merchant from Liverpool.	
Trustees of the Late Mrs Maddocks	Probably a relation of Joseph Maddocks (1845-1947), a Liverpool Provision Dealer originally from Shropshire	New Brighton
Trustees of the Late Arthur and William Hope	No Details available	New Ferry
Thomas Green of the Cottage Spital, Wirral	No Details available	New Ferry
Charles Hill Esq.	No Details available	New Ferry
Col. R.F. Fielden	No Details available	New Ferry
Major Charles Henry John Chetwynd-Talbot (1860-1921), 20th Earl of Shrewsbury, 20th Earl of Waterford, 5th Earl Talbot KCVO of Alton Towers, Staffs.	Landed Proprietor and Aristocrat	Oxton
Unnamed Syndicate	No Details available	Prenton
Trustees of the Late Captain Smith, formerly of Springfield, Liscard, Wirral.	Sea Captain and Barrister at Law	Seacombe
The Manchester Ship Canal Company	Purchased in 1888	Stanlow

Stanley Owen Esq.	No Details available	Great Sutton
Trustees of the Late James Whitehead Haigh Esq. (1821-1898)	Cotton Mill Owner from Rochdale, Lancs.	Little Sutton
Sir J.H. Roberts	No Details available	Thurstaston
Rev. Edward Mercer Webster (1832-1926)	Inherited Overchurch Hill Estate from Father Thomas Webster (1787-1872), Liverpool Gentleman	Upton
Upton Land Company Ltd.	Purchased the Upton Manor Estate from William Inman in 1883	Upton
Frederick James Harrison Esq. (b.1853) of Maer, Staffs. and Heath Harrison Esq. (1858-1934) of Lecourt Hants.	Sons of James Harrison Esq. (1822-1891), Co-founder of the Harrison Line Shipping Company and Developer of New Brighton	Wallasey
Trustees of the Late John Robin Esq. (b.1774 in Jersey)	Liverpool Merchant residing at Grange Hill in West Kirby	West Kirby
Miss Emma Mary Ashton (1845-1935)	Father, Ralph Ashton (b.1819), was a Liverpool Merchant	West Kirby
The Shropshire Union Railway and Canal Company	Company Formed in 1846, acquired land adjoining the canal at Ellesmere Port	Whitby
Miss Susanna Egerton Grace (1852-1930) of Whitby Hall	Heiress of John Grace Esq. (1815-1902), Landed Proprietor and	Whitby

	Magistrate	
Arthur Wilson Esq.	Farmer; no more details available.	Whitby
The Hon. Mrs. Sibell Mary Lumley (1855-1929) Countess Grosvenor of Saighton Grange, Chester	Landed Proprietor and Aristocrat, widow of Lord Victor Alexander Grosvenor (1853-1884)	Woodchurch

### **Appendix 3: Principal Seats in Wirral by 1914.**

The following table is based on the same sources as Appendix 1. It lists the most important houses in Wirral with the names of their owners and/or inhabitants in 1914. Most of the manors had been established in the middle ages, but few were occupied by ancient Wirral families. Again, Liverpool was the main source of most of the proprietors' wealth.

<b>Seat</b>	<b>Owner</b>
Backford Hall	Birkenhead Glegg Esq. (1848-1915): Landed Proprietor and Magistrate, descendant of one of the oldest landowning families in Wirral
Bidston Court	John Lever Tillotson Esq. JP (1871-1915): Nephew of Sir W.H. Lever; Managing Director in Lever Bros. Ltd.; Committed suicide in London following possible marital and financial problems
Bromborough Hall	Sir William Bower Forwood DL JP (1840-1928): son of a wealthy Liverpool businessman; associated with the funding for Liverpool Library, the Liverpool Overhead Railway and Liverpool Cathedral; Lord Mayor of Liverpool 1883 and 1903; Director of the Cunard Shipping Line 1888-1923 and of the Bank of Liverpool 1898-1901; buried in Windermere Cemetery, Westmorland
Burton Manor	Henry Neville Gladstone Esq. JP (1852-1925): seventh child and third son of W.E. Gladstone (1809-1898); First and Last Baron of Hawarden
Capenhurst Hall	Richard Taswell Richardson BA JP (1852-1930): Landed Proprietor and successful Tennis Player, inherited property from Father Richard Richardson of Capenhurst (1812-1885)
Carlett Park	Rev. Canon William Edward Torr MA (1851-1924): son of John Torr (1813-1880): Mercantile Produce Broker in Liverpool, originally from Lincolnshire
Chorlton Hall	William Henderson Walker Esq. (1857-1923): Chartered Accountant with offices in Liverpool and on the Isle of Man; Purchased the Hall in 1898

Caldy Manor	Alexander Percy Eccles Esq. (1862-1932): Liverpool Cotton Broker
Eastham House	John Herbert Vernon Esq. (1859-1933): Son of Sir William Vernon of Shotwick Park, Flour Miller
Frankby Hall	Sir Thomas Bland Royden JP (1831-1917): Liverpool Shipbuilder
Hill Bark, Frankby	Mrs Harriett Smith (née Ledward, b. 1849), Widow of Jerome Smith (1845-1906), Cotton Broker from Liverpool and Daughter of Septimus Ledward (1819-1890), Iron Merchant from Liverpool
Mollington Hall	Thomas Gibbons Frost Esq. JP (1860-1938): Corn Merchant from Chester
Poulton Hall	Major Herbert Lancelyn Green (1857-1939): Gentleman with Own Means and Army Officer; Descendant of the family which had owned the hall and land in Wirral since the 12 <sup>th</sup> Century
Puddington Hall	Samuel Sanday Esq. JP (1847-1930): Grain Merchant from Nottinghamshire; sold Puddington Hall in 1915
Shotwick Park	Sir William Vernon (1836-1919): family originated in Staffordshire, where his father bought Fole Mill in Uttoxeter in 1847; milling business established in Birkenhead and Liverpool, employing 1000 people by 1914
Thornton Manor	W.H. Lever, Lord Leverhulme (1851-1925) soap magnate
Whitby Hall	Miss Susanna Egerton Grace (1852-1930): Heiress of John Grace Esq. JP (1815-1902), Landed Proprietor and Magistrate

#### **Appendix 4: Some Important Individuals and Families of the Upper Middle-Class Elite**

An essential characteristic of Wirral society is evident here: the local ruling class were not landed aristocrats, but upper middle-class businesspeople, whose wealth had been acquired during the previous two or three generations, often via involvement in Liverpool's maritime economy. The following is not an exhaustive list, but an illustrative sample. Details were obtained from general genealogical sources, newspapers and W.T. Pike, *Liverpool and Birkenhead in the Twentieth Century* (Brighton: W.T. Pike, 1911).

**Arthur Kilpin Bulley (1861-1942)** was a cotton broker from New Brighton. In 1911, he lived in a thirteen-roomed house in Ness with his wife, **(Harriett Agnes Whishaw 'Mrs Bulley' (1861-1955))**, two children, a governess and a children's nurse both from Germany, a cook from Shropshire and two retired children's nurses (aged eighty-five and sixty-eight) from Wales and Oxfordshire. Bulley is a particularly interesting case because he provided work for a number of local people and cared for retired servants who would otherwise possibly have been homeless. He also made a profound and lasting impression on the landscape of Wirral by employing fifty-one people in his gardens which were opened to the public in 1907. By 1913, he was employing eleven people with a wages bill of £17 17s. 8d. Two years after his death, the estate became Ness Gardens and was subsequently run by Liverpool University.<sup>791</sup>

**John Chesshyre Blythe (1856-1918)** husband to **Annie Clementine Boulton**, **'Mrs Chesshyre Blythe' (1867-1954)**; the **Boultons** came from Oxton and were part of Ellesmere Port's *de facto* aristocracy.

**Reginald Gordon Chambres (1855-1935)**, wealthy stockbroker of Wallasey, married to **May Cecilia Rose Maria Georgina Barnard (1862-1940)** **'Mrs Chambres'**, another prominent public servant and charitable worker associated with Mrs Duckworth and Mrs Torr.

**Joseph Battersby Duckworth (1848-1912)** was a wealthy cotton merchant, who, by 1911, was living in a twenty-three roomed house in Eastham with eight servants.<sup>792</sup> He was married to **Ada Christiana Sanderson 'Mrs Duckworth' (1862-1930)**, whose father was **Richard Sanderson (b.1832 in Hull)**.

**John Laird (1805-1874)** founded Birkenhead and the eponymous ship-building company. He was Birkenhead's first MP between 1861 and 1874 and was succeeded by **David Maclver**. His Granddaughter **Annie Laird (1865-1927)** was Birkenhead's first female borough councillor.

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<sup>791</sup> Place Neston, pp. 85-88.



**David Maclver (1840-1907)** of Bromborough was Managing Director of the Cunard Steamship Company. MP for Birkenhead 1874-1885 and Liverpool Kirkdale 1898-1907. Two of his sons were killed in the Great War – **Andrew Tucker Squarey Maclver (1878-1915)** and **Reginald Squarey Maclver (1892-1916)**. His daughter, **Edith Eleanor Maclver (1882-1954)** was a well-known public servant in Birkenhead.

**Thomas Royden (1831-1917)** of *Frankby Hall* earned his fortune from shipbuilding in Liverpool. His daughter, **Maude (1876-1956)** was involved in several local charitable and civic organisations and was a renowned author, preacher and feminist campaigner.<sup>793</sup>

**Canon William Edward Torr 1851-1924** of *Carlett Park* in Eastham was heir to the fortune created by his father, **John Torr (1813-1880)**, a merchant banker, originally from Lincolnshire. He was married to **Julia Elizabeth Holmes ‘Mrs Torr’ (1851-1924)**, who, along with **Mrs Duckworth and Mrs Chambres** was active in many local charities, including the Anti-Sweating League.

**Arthur Washington Willmer (1857-1940)**, who, in 1911, lived in a sixteen-roomed house on Park Road West in Birkenhead, where he housed his wife, five children and three female servants aged between eighteen and twenty-seven. He was a cotton broker, owner of the *Birkenhead News*, Liberal Birkenhead councillor and Mayor of the town 1910-1911. His son, **Arthur Francklin Willmer (1890-1916)** was killed in action in France as was his nephew **Walter Willmer (1888-1916)**, both of whom are listed on Birkenhead Cenotaph.

**John Hastings Ziegler (1851-1927)**, a cotton merchant and Liberal member of Birkenhead Borough Council. He met his wife, **Charlotte Caryl Eustaphieve (1852-1929)**, granddaughter of the first Russian Consul in Boston, in New York, where his father was working. Two of his brothers also married Americans before returning to Britain. By 1911, the family was living at *Gorsefield* in Noctorum with five servants. After his death, his estate was worth £114,309 2s. 7d. (equivalent to nearly £3.5 million in 2005).<sup>794</sup>

**Wealthy farmers who were revered as local dignitaries: Samuel Strong Croxton (1873-1963)** of Woodchurch and **Alfred Samuel Gaskell (1864-1940)** of Prenton were both local councillors.<sup>795</sup> Wealthy residents such as **Thomas Thornycroft Vernon (1862-1919)** of *Shotwick Park* and **Samuel Sanday (1847-1930)** of *Puddington Hall* were noted agricultural enthusiasts who appear frequently in the local press as winners of prizes for their livestock and crops. Both, at different times, were chairmen of the Cheshire Agricultural Society.

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<sup>793</sup> Cowman, *Mrs Brown*, pp. 110 and 152; S. Fletcher, *Maude Royden* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

<sup>794</sup> Calculated by using TNA Currency Converter.

<sup>795</sup> BN 7/9/1912, BA 22/4/1911 and the 1911 census.

## Appendix 5: Demography and Employment

**Table 1: Population Growth in Wirral's Local Authority Areas 1901-1921.**<sup>796</sup>

Local Authority	1901	1911	Decennial Increase (Rounded Up)	1921	Decennial Increase (Rounded Up)
Birkenhead Borough	110,915	130,832	18%	145,577	11.3%
Bromborough	1891	1974	4.4%		
Higher Bebington	1540	1689	9.7%		
Lower Bebington	8398	11,412	35.9%		
Total (combined authority by 1921)	11,289	15,075	33.5%	19,104	26.7%
Chester City	1980	2182	10.2%	2744	25.8%
Ellesmere Port and Whitby	4275	10,366	142.5%	13,063	26%
Hoylake and West Kirby	10,911	14,029	28.6%	17,068	21.7%
Neston and Parkgate	4154	4596	10.6%	5195	13%
Wallasey Borough	53,579	78,514	46.5%	90,809	15.7%
Wirral Rural District	13,905	19,024	36.8%	24,753	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>211,548</b>	<b>274,618</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>318,313</b>	<b>16%</b>

<sup>796</sup> Based on census figures from Rideout *The Growth of Wirral* p.99 and the History Data Service, University of Essex, <http://www.histpop.org/>.

**Table 2: Employment in Birkenhead and Wallasey in 1911 – a selection of trades.**

	<b>Birkenhead</b>	<b>Wallasey</b>
<b>Total Workforce (Male and Female)</b>	55,519	32,879
<b>Type of Employment</b>	<b>Number and Percentage</b>	<b>Number and Percentage</b>
Domestic Service	5,718 10.3%	3,907 11.9%
Clerical	2,611 4.7%	3,466 10.5%
Railways	2,130 3.8%	385 1.2%
Merchants	819 1.5%	1,243 3.8%
Docks	2,130 3.8%	367 1.1%
Shipbuilding	5,062 9.1%	0 0%
Agriculture and Horticulture	459 0.8%	459 1.4%

**Appendix 6: General Election Results for Wirral Seats 1900 – 1935 (From F.W.S. Craig *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885 – 1918 and 1918 – 1949*)**

**a. Wirral**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Winner</b>	<b>Second</b>	<b>Third</b>
1900	J. Hoult Con. 6084, 54%	W.H Lever Lib. 5079, 45.5%	
1906	W.H. Lever Lib. 8833, 55.3%	J. Hoult Con. 7132, 44.7%	
1910 Jan.	G. Stewart Con. 10,309, 53.8%	E.P. Jones Lib. 8862, 7.6%	
1910 Dec.	G. Stewart Con. 10,043, 56.5%	A.J. Ashton Lib. 7727, 43.5%	
1918	G. Stewart Con.	Unopposed	
1922	G. Stewart Con. 12,888, 51%	S.R. Dodds Lib. 8014, 31.7%	J.E.C. Grant Lab. 4363, 7.3%
1923	S.R. Dodds Lib. 13,631	G. Stewart Con. 11,791, 46.4%	
1924	J. Grace Con. 17,705, 60.2%	S.R. Dodds Lib. 11,697, 39.8%	
1929	J. Grace Con. 25,522, 47.5%	S.R. Dodds Lib. 15,158, 30.6%	G. Beardsworth Lab. 10,876, 21.9%
1931	G.C. Clayton Con.	S. Wormald Lab.	

	44,935, 81.5%	10,177, 18.5%	
1935	A.C. Graham Con. 41,617, 72.5%	S. Wormald Lab. 15,801, 27.5%	

**b. Birkenhead**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Winner</b>	<b>Second</b>	<b>Third</b>
1900	Sir E. Lees Con.	Unopposed	
1906	H.H. Vivian Lib./Lab. 7074, 49%	Sir E. Lees Con. 5271, 36.4%	J.A. Kensit Ind. 2,118, 14.6%
1910 Jan.	H.H. Vivian Lib./Lab. 8120, 50.4%	A. Bigland Con. 7976, 49.6%	
1910 Dec.	A. Bigland Con. 8304, 53.4%	H.H. Vivian Lib./Lab. 7249, 46.6%	

**c. Birkenhead East**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Winner</b>	<b>Second</b>	<b>Third</b>
1918	A. Bigland Con. 13,012, 64.5%	J. Finigan Lab. 5399, 26.7%	H.G. White Lib. 1787, 8.8%
1922	H.G. White Lib. 14,690, 57.8%	A. Bigland Con. 10,745, 42.2%	
1923	H.G. White Lib. 15,845, 63.5%	L. Lees Con. 9091, 36.5%	
1924	W.H. Stott Con. 11,328, 40.3%	H.G. White Lib. 9275, 33%	J. Coulthard Lab. 7496, 26.7%
1929	H.G. White Lib. 13,157, 35.9%	C.E.R. Brocklebank Con. 11,860, 32.3%	J. Coulthard Lab. 11,654, 31.8%
1931	H.G. White Lib. 26,938, 73.2%	C. McVey Lab. 9868, 26.8%	
1935	H.G. White Lib. 16,548, 48.1%	S.J. Hill Con. 9854, 28.6%	Mrs. M.A. Mercer Lab. 8028, 23.3%

**d. Birkenhead West**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Winner</b>	<b>Second</b>	<b>Third</b>
1918	H.M. Grayson Con. 10,881, 59.4%	W.H. Egan Lab. 5673, 31%	H. Bickersteth Lib. 1755, 9.6%
1922	W.H. Stott Con. 12,176, 54%	W.H. Egan Lab. 10,371, 46%	
1923	W.H. Egan Lab. 12,473, 55.8%	W.H. Stott Con 9862, 44.2%	
1924	E. Nuttall Con. 13,059, 50.7%	W.H. Egan Lab. 12,723, 49.3%	
1929	W.H. Egan Lab. 15,634, 45.9%	E. Nuttall Con. 13,410, 39.5%	R.P. Fletcher Lib. 4946, 14.6%
1931	J.S. Allen Con. 22,336, 63.8%	W.H. Egan Lab. 12,682, 36.2%	
1935	J.S. Allen Con. 17,684, 55.9%	C. McVey Lab. 13,931, 44.1%	

e. Wallasey

<b>Date</b>	<b>Winner</b>	<b>Second</b>	<b>Third</b>
1918	Dr. B.E.F. McDonald Con. 14,633, 55.2%	W.M. Citrine Lab. 4384, 16.6%	J.M. Hay Lib. 4055, 15.3%  Fourth: T.D. Owen Ind. 3407, 12.9%
1922	Sir R.B. Chadwick Con. 17,508, 63.7%	T.A. Morris Lib. 9984, 36.3%	
1923	Sir R.B. Chadwick Con. 13,995, 51.6%	Lib. 13,146, 48.4%	
1924	Sir R.B. Chadwick Con 22,599, 72.4%	J.H. Warren Lab. 8634, 27.6%	
1929	Sir R.B. Chadwick Con 21,457, 46%	H. Phillips Lib. 13,628, 29.2%	J.D. Mack Lab. 11,545, 24.8%
1931	J.T.C. Moore- Brabazon Con.  40,161, 83.9%	J.D. Mack Lab.  7712, 16.1%	
1935	J.T.C. Moore- Brabazon Con.  27,949, 67.4%	J. Airey Lab.  13,491, 32.6%	



**Appendix 7: Wirral Great War Names. A sample of people either born and/or died in Wirral bearing names of people and/or places associated with the Great War. The names were found in civil registration indexes and in the 1939 Register, hosted by Ancestry.co.uk.**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Born When and Where</b>	<b>Died When and Where</b>
Joseph <b>Allenby</b> Carney	12 Sep 1919, Liverpool	Sep 1978, Bromborough, Wirral
<b>Arras</b> Andrew Anderson	17 Jun 1915	Dec 1984, Birkenhead
Perceval <b>French</b> Copple	28 Dec 1914, Birkenhead	Mar 2006, Birkenhead
Phyllis <b>French</b> Edge	30 Apr 1915	Jan 1986, Birkenhead
Gordon <b>French</b> Linnell	14 Mar 1915, Liverpool	Mar 1997, Birkenhead
Reginald <b>French</b> Oasgood	18 Mar 1915, Liverpool	Jan 2007, Birkenhead
Albert <b>French</b> Stredder	12 Mar 1915, Birkenhead	Mar 1986, Birkenhead
Eric <b>French</b> Wakelam	21 Apr 1915, Birkenhead	Jun 1975, Pensby, Wirral
<b>Douglas Haig</b> Boote	12 April, 1917, Birkenhead	29 Jan 1979, Birkenhead
<b>Douglas Haig</b> Bovill	6 Apr 1916, Birkenhead	Aug 1988, Birkenhead
<b>Douglas Haig</b> Capener	15 May 1918, Wirral	Jan 2002, Chester and Ellesmere Port
<b>Douglas Haig</b> Harvard	14 Nov 1917, Brecknockshire	Oct 1989, Birkenhead
<b>Douglas Haig</b> McKellar	1918, Birkenhead	Mar 1918, Birkenhead
<b>Douglas Haig</b> Mulholland	25 Oct 1918, Liverpool	Jul 1995, Chester and Ellesmere Port
<b>Douglas Haig</b> Williams	1918, Birkenhead	Jun 1920, Birkenhead
<b>Douglas Haig</b> Yoxall	18 Sep 1917, West Kirby	25 Nov 1918, West Kirby
<b>Kemmel Douglas</b> L. Miller	2 Sep 1918	Mar 2004, Birkenhead
Charles <b>Kitchener</b> Andrews	8 Jan 1915, Wirral	Jun 2001, Birkenhead

<b>Kitchener French</b> Forshaw	30 Aug 1914, Wirral	Jul 1990, Chester and Ellesmere Port
George <b>Kitchener</b> Norman	29 Apr 1915, Birkenhead	Jun 2006, Birkenhead
Albert <b>Kitchener</b> Osmond	29 Jan 1915, Holyhead	Dec 1991, Birkenhead
<b>Kitchener</b> Parnell	1916, Birkenhead	Jun 1916, Birkenhead
Henry <b>Kitchener</b> Pearson	26 May 1916, Birkenhead	Aug 1995, Birkenhead
John <b>Kitchener</b> Sutter	18 October 1915	Mar 1993, Birkenhead
<b>Herbert Kitchener</b> Warren	6 June 1916, Birkenhead	Dec 1999, Birkenhead
<b>Lens</b> Crofts	20 Jul 1919, Hawarden	Mar 1975, Chester and Ellesmere Port
<b>Lille Louvain</b> Williams	5 Oct 1914	Feb 2000, Birkenhead
Harriett <b>Loos</b> Gilmore	15 Dec 1918, St. Asaph	Dec 1993, Birkenhead
Nancy <b>Louvain</b> Hunter	24 Sep 1916	Aug 1984, Birkenhead
Elsie <b>Louvain</b> Lomax	28 Nov 1917	Aug 1995 Birkenhead
<b>Louvain</b> Eva Williams	20 May 1916	28 Nov 1977, Chester and Ellesmere Port
<b>Marne</b> Fenton	7 Oct 1914	Dec 1972, Birkenhead
Robert <b>Mons</b> Alexander	27 Aug 1914, Wirral	Jun 1978, Birkenhead
Eric <b>Mons</b> Lewis	21 June 1915,	10 Mar 1980, Heswall, Wirral
Eunice <b>Mons</b> Leyland	22 Sep 1914	Jun 2004 Birkenhead
Robert <b>Somme</b> Saunders	15 Feb 1917, Birkenhead	Jan 1999, Birkenhead
Francis <b>Verdun</b> Hertzberg	14 Mar 1916, Liverpool	Jul 2006, Birkenhead
<b>Verdun</b> McLean	19 Feb 1916, Birkenhead	Sep 1968, Wolverhampton
<b>Verdun</b> Wadsworth Payne	15 May 1916, Birkenhead	Jan 1996, Manchester
<b>Verdun</b> Alexander M. Rosie	21 Jul 1917	Feb 1988, Birkenhead
Ernest <b>Verdun</b> Ross	20 Apr 1916	May 2001, Birkenhead

George <b>Verdun</b> Yoxall	29 May 1916, West Kirby	1968, West Kirby, Wirral
<b>Douglas Victory</b> Roberts	11 Nov 1918, Wirral	Mar 1998, Birkenhead
<b>Ypres</b> Marryposa Catterall	21 Feb 1915	Mar 2006, Birkenhead
Thomas <b>Ypres</b> Darlington	14 Oct 1916, Wirral	Mar 1968, West Cheshire
Renee <b>Ypres</b> Hall	9 Nov 1918	Feb 2000, Birkenhead
James <b>Ypres</b> Ledsham	27 March 1917, Birkenhead	Oct 1986, Birkenhead
Irene <b>Ypres</b> Randles	4 Nov 1914	Aug 2005, Birkenhead

**Appendix 8: Statistical Summaries Derived from the Soldiers' Sample**

- a. **Places of Employment.** Every soldier in the sample had a stated occupation, but only 423 (21.2%) had a stated or implied place of work.

<b>Birkenhead</b>	<b>Wallasey</b>	<b>Ellesmere Port</b>	<b>Port Sunlight (all at Lever Bros.)</b>	<b>Elsewhere in Wirral</b>	<b>Total Employed in Wirral</b>	<b>Liverpool</b>	<b>Elsewhere in the UK</b>	<b>Total</b>
98 = 23.17 %	70 = 16.55%	21 = 4.96%	26 = 6.15%	35 = 8.27%	259 = 61.23%	153 = 36.17%	11 = 2.6%	<b>423 = 100%</b>

- b. **Places of Birth of the 1937 members of the WSS with known places of birth: If not Wirral or Liverpool, listed by county or country.**

<b>Soldiers' Places of Birth</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage of the 1937 with Known Origins</b>
Wirral	996	51.42
English Counties excluding Wirral and Liverpool and including Lancashire	399	20.60
Liverpool	379	19.57
Wales	68	3.51
Ireland	43	2.22

Scotland	28	1.45
Isle of Man	9	0.46
Channel Isles	1	0.05
Overseas	14	0.72
Total	1937	100

**c. Employment: The occupations of 1956 members of the WSS are known.**

The majority of them (about eighty to ninety-five per cent) worked in the tertiary or service sector. About six to ten per cent worked in the secondary or manufacturing sector and a mere three to four per cent worked in primary industries such as farming, fishing and mining. In this respect, the picture was very modern, resembling British employment patterns in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It also reminds us that Wirral's economy was closely linked to that of neighbouring Liverpool. The following is a list of the fourteen most common job titles with their respective frequencies in brackets:

1. Labourer (280)
2. Clerk (276)
3. Carter (145)
4. Driver (86)
5. Gardener – Domestic and Market (53)
6. Farmer or Farm Hand (46)
7. Carpenter and Joiner (44)
8. Painter (and Decorator) (36)
9. Butcher (27)
10. Engineer/Fitter and Postman (26 each)
11. Bricklayer (21)
12. Baker (20)

**Employment in the Transport Sector**

Type of Transport	Number
<u>Land</u>	
Horse (carters and equipment makers eg. saddlers)	184
Motor (car, van, lorry and crane drivers)	113

Railways (cleaners, firemen, drivers, porters, plate layers and repair men)	43
Trams (drivers and conductors)	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>344</b>
<b><u>Water</u></b>	
Inland Waterways and Docks (ferryman, bargemen, tugmen, etc.)	20
Sea (mariners, sailors, ship's stewards etc.)	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>434</b>

**d. Regiments First Joined by Soldiers from the Sample (of the 1987 known).**

<b>Regiment</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Cheshire Regiment	539	27.12
Royal Regiment of Artillery (Field, Horse and Garrison)	318	16
King's (Liverpool Regiment)	246	12.33
Army Service Corps	235	11.83
Royal Engineers	220	11.07
Royal Army Medical Corps	74	3.72
Royal Welsh Fusiliers	47	2.37
South Lancashire Regiment	44	2.21
Labour Corps	34	1.71
Training Reserve	24	1.21

Machine Gun Corps	19	0.96
Denbighshire Hussars	18	0.91
Others	183	9.21
<b>Total</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>100.65 (rounding up)</b>

## **Appendix 9: Summary of the McGuire Family of Mossley Hill in Liverpool and Wallasey in Wirral**

### **Parents**

#### **James Charlton McGuire**

Born: c.1846 in Ballintemple, County Cavan, Ireland

Married: **Hannah Jackson Evans** on 24 October 1873 at St. David's Church, Liverpool

Died: 1914 in Wallasey, Wirral

Occupation: Book-keeper and Registrar of Births and Deaths

#### **Hannah Jackson Evans**

Born: c.1845 in Liverpool

Died: 3 February 1943 in Oxton, Wirral

### **Children**

#### **Herbert Vincent McGuire**

Born: 1874 in Liverpool

Died: 1906 in Prescot, Lancashire

Notes: Trained to be a dentist at Liverpool University

#### **Evelyn 'Eva' Marie McGuire**

Born: 17 April 1876 in Liverpool

Married: **Ralph Victor Grandison** on 27 July 1914 in New York City, USA

Died: 30 November 1962 at 62 Cliff Road, Milton, Massachusetts, USA

#### **Ralph Victor Grandison**

Born: 30 May 1888 in Mossley Hill, Liverpool

Died: 12 December 1954 in Milton, Massachusetts, USA

**Notes:** His father, **Daniel Cook Grandison** (1855-1911) was an oil agent from Scotland. Ralph was a cotton agent, who emigrated to the USA in 1911. His sister, **Lillias Agnes Sillar Grandison** (1889-1964) emigrated to the USA in the same year and was naturalized in 1921. She was awarded a scholarship by Yale University to study in France and worked for over forty years as a teacher in Boston. She died at 62 Cliff Road, Milton – her brother's former home. Ralph's sister, **Jessie Sillar Grandison** (1896-1945) also emigrated to the USA not long after her brother and married **Hubert Leighton King** (1895-1958) in 1924 in Boston. Her son, **Wallace Thomson King** (1929-1988), lived in California, possibly in the house in which the McGuire family's letters were discovered.

#### **Florence Matilda McGuire**

Born: 19 January 1878 in Liverpool

Died: October 1914 in Islington, London?



Notes: She does not appear in any records after the 1881 census. The possible reference to her death has not been confirmed.

### **Rhoda 'Rho' Jane McGuire**

Born: 1880 in Oxton, Wirral

Died: 14 June 1964 at St. Catherine's Hospital in Birkenhead

**Notes:** In 1925 she was living with her mother, Hannah, and sister, Ada, at *Deepdene* 7 Rose Lane, Mossley Hill, Liverpool. Her address at time of death was *The Willows*, Wallasey, Wirral and her estate was valued at £3475. There is no record of Rhoda having had an occupation.

### **Ada Evans McGuire**

Born: January 1882 in Liverpool

Died: March 1957 in Birkenhead, Wirral

**Notes:** Ada was the most prolific correspondent of the family; she trained to be a teacher at the North Wales Training College in Bangor; she worked at Manor Road Council School 1905-1907 and 1916-1931, at St. Mary's CE School 1907-1916 and at Poulton Council School as head of the Infants Department from 1931; she was a lively and observant member of the community, who enjoyed walking and golf.

### **William 'Willie' Charlton McGuire**

Born: c.1883 in Liverpool

Died: 10 October 1962 in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

**Notes:** In 1920 he was living at Precinct 5, Red River, Texas, USA. He arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1924, when he was a travelling salesman. He stated that he intended to stay in Canada for about a year, but obviously stayed there for the rest of his life. Interestingly, despite being born in Liverpool, he declared his nationality to be Irish.

### **Edgar Harcourt McGuire**

Born: 7 October 1884 in Liverpool

Died: 21 May 1966 in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

**Notes:** Edgar's occupations were commercial clerk (1901) and hotel keeper at 'The Balmoral Hotel' in Vancouver (1919). He seems to have been domiciled in Canada since the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as he served with the Canadian Expeditionary Force (16<sup>th</sup> and 72<sup>nd</sup> Battalions) between 11 September 1915 and 19 March 1919. He fought in France, was wounded in the head in June 1916 and finished his career with a dose of gonorrhoea, necessitating thirty-three days at the Canadian Military Hospital at Whitley in Surrey, before being sent to Kinmel Camp near Rhyl and travelling back to Canada. He arrived in Seattle, USA in 1919, having sailed from Vancouver, but must, clearly, have returned to Canada later on and remained there for the rest of his life.

### **Henry James McGuire**

Born: 7 October 1884 in Liverpool

**Notes:** In 1917-18 he was residing at Sheffield Apartments, 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Los Angeles, California, USA and was an unemployed labourer. There is possible evidence of his having travelled to Canada in 1906, 1910 and 1919.

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**Personal Papers:** Blackburn Family Letters

**Wirral Archives**

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