

**Citizens at War: the Experience of the Great War in Essex, 1914-1918**

Stuart Hallifax  
The Queen's College, Oxford

Submitted for examination for D.Phil in History, November 2010.

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This thesis examines the experiences and attitudes of civilians in Essex during the First World War, 1914-1918. Through these it explores the reasons for people's continued support for the war and how public discourse shaped conceptions of the war's purpose and course and what sacrifices were needed and acceptable in pursuit of victory. This combination kept the war comprehensible and enabled people to continue to support it.

Vital to getting a picture of how the war was understood is an account of the role of the local elites that sought to shape popular knowledge and attitudes about the war. The narratives of the war, the discourse of sacrifice, and elites' roles evolved with events at home and at the front.

Chapter 1 deals with the initial reactions to the war and growing acceptance of the major war narratives. The second and third chapters address two of their major features: attitudes towards the enemy and volunteering for the armed forces. The fourth chapter addresses the changes to the war's narratives and ideas of sacrifice as casualties and hardships increased from 1916, while Chapter 5 provides an in-depth case study of local military service tribunals. The final chapter deals with the crises of 1917-18, which covered both the expected course of the war and the image of equal sacrifice, and how local and national elites overcame these problems.

The successful depiction of the Great War as necessary, just, winnable, and fought against an evil enemy allowed civilians to accept sacrifices in order to win. An evolving discourse of sacrifice framed what was expected of and acceptable to civilians. Local elites played an essential role: advocating sacrifice and endurance for the national cause while also working to ensure that sacrifices were minimised and borne equally. This combination of framing the war and mitigating its effects was vital in maintaining civilian support for the war effort.

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This thesis examines the experiences and attitudes of civilians in Essex during the First World War, 1914-1918. Through these it explores the reasons for people's continued support for the war effort in spite of its length, the enormous loss of life, and increasing hardships at home. Existing literature has offered useful insights towards explaining ongoing support for the war in Britain but have not found a complete answer. Through this study of one English county, we can see how public discourse helped to shape conceptions of the war's purpose and course and what sacrifices were needed and acceptable in pursuit of victory. This combination kept the war comprehensible and enabled people to continue to support it.

Vital to getting a picture of how the war was understood is an account of the role of the local elites who, through their words and actions, sought to shape popular knowledge and attitudes about the war. Political science research on public opinion in more recent conflicts has shown that support for wars relies upon convincing narratives of the war's necessity, the likelihood of victory and an apocalyptic vision of the enemy and the consequences of defeat. Underlying them is the role of elites in presenting unified support for the war and articulating or mediating these war narratives. During the Great War, a powerful language of sacrifice accompanied these narratives, with servicemen hailed as the peak of honour, an example for civilians to emulate. Battlefield sacrifices were used to justify the endurance of increasing hardships on the home front, while the war narratives in turn justified the continuing prosecution of the war.

Elites could guide public conceptions of the war and the ideas that supported them, but could not completely control them. Public actions are therefore used here to judge how effective these narratives and ideas were. Interaction between local elites' rhetoric, events and public actions saw the narratives of the war and the discourse of sacrifice evolve through the years of the conflict. The role of elites also evolved as their calls for willing sacrifice were combined with increasingly important work ensuring fairness and equality of sacrifice in the last years of the war. By maintaining accepted narratives of the war and collectively-borne sacrifices, these local elites helped to ensure continued acceptance of and support for the war.

This thesis uses a mixed chronological and thematic approach to its task. The war is broken into two broad sections: the first focuses in particular on 1914-15, when ideas of the war's meaning and course were being formed and calls were made for voluntary sacrifice, particularly in recruiting. The second covers the years 1916-18, as the cost of major offensives and lack of victory became clear. In response, ideas of the war's course and meaning evolved; alongside this change came a shift in elite roles from appeals for willing sacrifice to efforts to maintain equality of sacrifice as manpower and food shortages began to bite.

The first chapter deals with responses to the war crisis and first months of war in 1914, looking at how elites and the public at large adapted to wartime and came to accept the narratives that carried them through the rest of the conflict. Following a

muted and anxious response to the war crisis and Britain's entry into the war in early August 1914, opinion across Essex was gradually coming to accept an 'apocalyptic' narrative of the conflict when news of the British retreat from Mons with heavy casualties, along with stories of German atrocities in Belgium, dramatically increased belief in the cause at the month's end. Local elites and the general public reacted similarly throughout the first months of war, both in their changing opinions and in their actions, which were largely aimed at alleviating distress among civilians and servicemen; alongside this came an emphasis on recruitment for the armed forces and in defence of the county and country, particularly after the retreat from Mons.

Attitudes towards the enemy, particularly those seen as internal enemies in Essex are the subject of Chapter 2, which investigates how public actions and attitudes interacted with elite rhetoric and leadership. Essex people's attitudes towards the Germans manifested themselves in three main observable forms: violence against supposed internal enemies, suspicion and public campaigns against those within the county thought to be enemies or their sympathisers, and campaigns and attitudes surrounding the enemy, particularly in the form of German prisoners of war and possible civilian victims of Allied air raids. By looking at these, we can see an overall picture of fear and anger against the Germans that was often focused upon those in the county itself who were seen as German or 'pro-German', feelings that affected people who were outcasts, unknown, or disliked locally for other reasons. In spite (and in part because) of actions taken by the authorities to remove people whose background or actions made them suspicious, there was a continued sense of threat from an enemy population within Essex. Anger against the Germans was fuelled by reports of atrocities overseas and by the terror of air raids on Essex towns. Violence was rare, and suspicion and exclusion of supposed Germans were not universal, but they show how civilians accepted the evil-enemy narrative of the war to a level even beyond that advocated by elites.

Volunteering for military service was the primary embodiment of wartime ideas of sacrifice; ideas of honour, duty and the defence of one's home were tied up in the act. Chapter 3 examines the reasons that men enlisted in the 'voluntary' period of 1914-15 and the efforts that were made (with diminishing returns) by local and national elites to find more recruits. There was no single reason for men to enlist and different factors varied in their importance through the period. The retreat from Mons created an image of a very real threat to the UK, to men's homes, and to their families, which helped to create a recruiting 'boom' in late August and early September 1914. The following months saw a 'rally phase' as local and national elites attempted to recreate the earlier 'boom' by instilling in civilians the idea that enlistment was the only honourable course of action for eligible men, including a vast campaign of meetings, leaflets and posters. As this campaign failed to provide increased recruiting figures, a form of 'moral compulsion' saw eligible men placed under more direct social pressure as they were identified through a National Register and asked to 'attest' their willingness to serve under the Derby Scheme. The sense of threat, public meetings, and social pressure lasted throughout these phases, as did economic factors, pressures from men's families, and a sense of allegiance, each of which could serve to encourage or discourage enlistment. The failure of these efforts to raise recruiting levels shows us an important divide between elite rhetoric and the actions of ordinary civilians.

The years 1916 and 1917 saw great evolutions in the narrative of the war's course and in sacrifices being made along the way as casualties increased dramatically without peace coming. Chapter 4 shows that the costs and conditions of the war were widely appreciated, but were accepted because the war was still seen as necessary and winnable. Following the failure to break through on the Somme, a new narrative developed that included that summer's losses and potential future failures to break through the enemy's lines by including a wearing-out stage that would hasten eventual victory. These years also brought changing conceptions of sacrifice in the image of the serviceman and in efforts to mitigate home front sacrifices and make sure they were equally felt. Stories of dead servicemen's selfless sacrifices, embodied in individuals such as Jack Cornwell, aimed to make losses acceptable and loved ones' deaths honourable, while war shrines and early war memorials created an image of unity and a collective effort to win the war. On the civilian side, new local bodies were established with centrally-granted powers to control the local war effort and to maintain support for the war by maintaining an impression of sacrifices equally borne; these included war pension committees, agricultural committees, military service tribunals and food control committees. The same local elite that had earlier promoted willing sacrifice staffed these bodies as they now sought to ensure equality of sacrifice. At the same time, the extent of sacrifices deemed acceptable locally was being negotiated, notably in terms of leisure and in the change from charitable campaigns to war savings as the expected route for civilians' expendable income.

Chapter 5 investigates in depth the role and actions of the local military service tribunals that heard appeals against men's conscription in 1916-18. These bodies sought to balance the nation's need for more soldiers and the needs of local businesses, families, and communities to retain certain men. Most appeals gained men some form of exemption from military service, either temporary or dependent on specific conditions, and the tribunals were generally fair, their decisions and hard work respected locally. More prominent in contemporary and subsequent attention but less numerically significant is their role in judging appeals based on conscientious objection to military service, which showed shortcomings in the system. Viewed at the time as soft on objectors, tribunals are now seen as unfairly harsh; in these cases their lack of comprehension of the issues involved only added to the inconsistency and lack of clear guidance that were perhaps their greatest faults in general. Just as volunteering for military service was symbolic of the sacrifices called for in 1914-15, the work of tribunals in weighing up military and civilian needs was the most prominent and important example of the new role of local elites in mitigating the negative impacts of the war in their communities.

After the changes in narratives and elites roles in 1916-17, the narrative of the war's course and ideas of equal sacrifice were undermined as crises on the war fronts coincided with a food crisis at home over the winter of 1917-18. Chapter 6 addresses the extent of these crises and how the actions of elites helped to overcome them, but also how the limits of local elites' powers were highlighted in the last crises of the war. At the end of 1917, Allied efforts and losses seemed to have brought few gains; meanwhile the Central Powers' position of strength and the likely German attack on the Western Front caused alarm and increased despondency among Essex civilians. This crisis of confidence was dealt with through a local and

national reshaping of the narrative of the war's future course, in which the coming battle would be the last gasp of the enemy before their inevitable collapse and Allied victory. At the same time, queues grew outside provision shops in towns across Essex; these served to highlight apparent inequalities in food supplies between different places and classes and brought into question the idea that wartime sacrifices were being borne equally and fairly. Local elites struggled to deal with the queues, and the food supply and distribution problems that caused them; they created local fixed price lists, redistributed supplies, and instituted ticketing systems in some places. These actions could not eliminate the queues, though, and it was only through regional (and later national) rationing schemes that the image of equality was restored. Through the remaining months of the war, the committees set up in 1916-17 continued their work of ensuring fairness, with existing food control committees running rationing schemes. Alongside this, the course of the war broadly followed the model set in early 1918, with a massive German offensive that failed to break the Allied line and was eventually reversed as British, French, and American troops advanced to victory through that summer and autumn.

The successful depiction of the Great War as necessary and winnable, Britain's cause as just, and the enemy as evil allowed civilians to accept sacrifices in order to win. The evolving discourse of sacrifice framed what was expected by local and national elites and what was acceptable to the civilian population. Local elites provided an essential link between the two, advocating sacrifice and endurance for the national cause locally while also working on the behalf of the community to ensure that sacrifices were minimised and borne equally. This combination of framing the war and mitigating its effects was vital in maintaining civilian support for the war effort.

## Preface & Acknowledgements

The Great War affected families and communities across Britain, taking men away to fight, bringing shortages and hardships at home, and disrupting normal social relationships. This thesis seeks to understand why people in the county of Essex continued to support the war and the roles local elites played in buttressing that support. Believable narratives about the war's purpose, the diabolical enemy and Britain's inevitable victory constructed an image of a just and winnable war that people could support, and which justified sacrifices by servicemen and at home. These narratives and the ideas of acceptable sacrifice changed during the war to accommodate the realities of war but basically remained intact. Local elites played a major role in promoting the narratives; they also promoted willing sacrifice in the early years of the war, on top of which a new role of managing equality of sacrifice grew from 1916 as battlefield losses and home-front hardships increased. Through believable and supportable narratives of the war and through the negotiation of justifiable levels (and equality) of sacrifice, the war was kept within the bounds of acceptability for the people of Essex.

\* \* \*

As with any major piece of research and writing, there are many people who helped directly or indirectly in the completion of this thesis. My supervisor, Adrian Gregory, was a great help in my research and writing. Thanks also to Benjamin Ziemann for helping to convince me that I could write a doctoral thesis.

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The staffs of particular reading rooms and archives have been very helpful in a variety of ways. In Oxford, the Bodleian's Upper Reading Room and Duke Humfrey's Library, the Codrington Library, and my former colleagues at Rhodes House Library; elsewhere the staff at the Essex Record Office, the Imperial War Museum, and Waltham Forest Archives, particularly Jo Parker. Thanks also to James Munson for helpful discussions about Andrew Clark's diary, and to Prue James for allowing me to read her father's. Financial assistance from the Institute for Historical Research's Friend's Bursary helped me to make use of archives in London; similarly the book fund at the Queen's College, Oxford, helped repeatedly with important book purchases.

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## Source abbreviations and acronyms

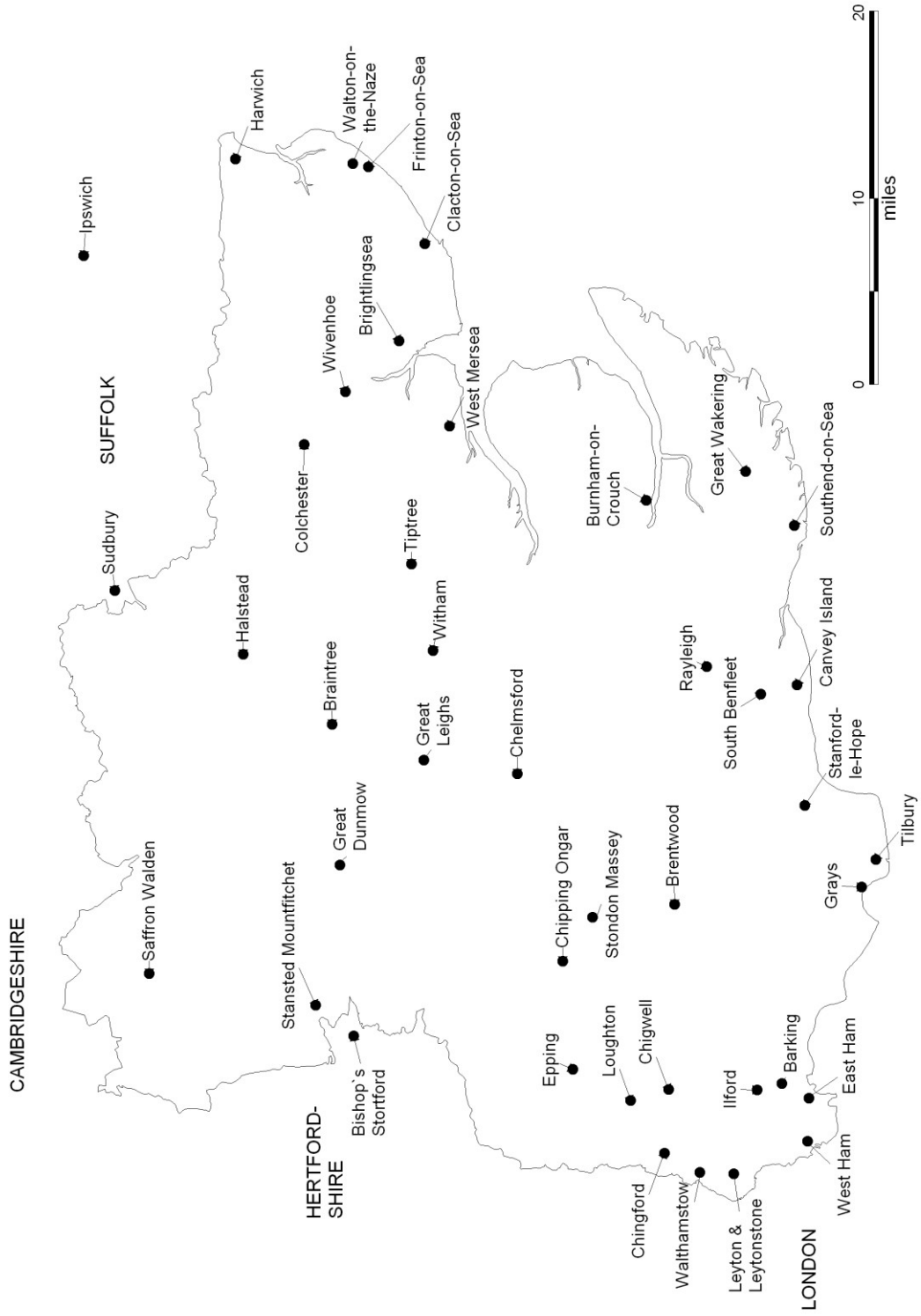
### Newspapers

BA	<i>Barking Advertiser</i>
BDA	<i>Burnham and Dengie Advertiser</i>
EADT	<i>East Anglian Daily Times</i>
EEA	<i>East Essex Advertiser</i>
EHE	<i>East Ham Echo</i>
ECC	<i>Essex County Chronicle</i>
ECS	<i>Essex County Standard</i>
EH	<i>Essex Herald</i>
EWN	<i>Essex Weekly News</i>
IR	<i>Ilford Recorder</i>
LEI	<i>Leytonstone Express and Independent</i>
SE	<i>Stratford Express</i>
SO	<i>Southend Observer</i>
ST	<i>Southend Telegraph</i>
SWG	<i>Southend and Westcliff Graphic (from 1917 Southend, Leigh and Westcliff Graphic)</i>
WHSEM	<i>West Ham and South Essex Mail</i>

### Archives

ERO	Essex Record Office, Chelmsford
IWM	Imperial War Museum, London
NAM	National Army Museum, London
TNA	The National Archives, London
WFA	Waltham Forest Archives, London

# Map of Essex in 1914



## Introduction

In November 1917, almost exactly a year before the Armistice that ended the war on the Western Front, the *Times Literary Supplement* speculated on what posterity would make of the ‘great German War’ compared with pre-1914 memory of the wars with France a century earlier.<sup>1</sup> The Colchester-based *Essex County Standard* picked up on this theme, commenting that people remembered the victory at Waterloo, but:

[They] forget all about the long years that led up to it – years of famine prices, anxiety, threatened invasion, interruption of trade, and long casualty lists. So probably it may be hereafter, when the present years of bitterness are past, and when our children’s children remember only the results, and forget – because they never knew – the period of suspense and privation and endurance. [...] Posterity has long ago forgotten all these things [of the wars with France], and posterity will have forgotten very nearly all our troubles in much less than a hundred years hence.<sup>2</sup>

Neither writer could have predicted the way in which the Great War is popularly remembered today: Britain’s victory ‘forgotten’, and death and futility prominent features.<sup>3</sup> They were, however, correct that home front hardships, anxiety and fear of invasion would be forgotten; with them the ideas that kept the nation supporting the war have also been lost. This thesis investigates why people continued (on the whole) to support the war and how narratives of the war’s purpose and course and ideas of sacrifice buttressed that support, aided by evolving leadership from local elites.

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<sup>1</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, 8/11/1917.

<sup>2</sup> *ECS*, 10/11/1917.

<sup>3</sup> Gary Sheffield, *The Forgotten Victory: The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London, 2001); Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London, 2005).

## Histories of Great War home fronts

Different nations' war experiences and subsequent histories lead to different emphases in the study of the events and mentalities of wartime.<sup>4</sup> In Germany, one legacy of Nazi aggression and genocide is that the Great War is viewed as a breeding ground for later horrors;<sup>5</sup> for those looking at France, the legacy of defeat and collaboration in the Second World War gives studies of 1914-18 a different complexion and affects the way the earlier conflict is viewed.<sup>6</sup> In nations where the war formed part of a longer period of revolution (such as Russia,<sup>7</sup> Portugal or Turkey) or state-creation (as in the former Austria-Hungary), the war is difficult to separate from these other processes and events.<sup>8</sup> For Britain, victorious and not invaded through the two World Wars, the Great War is still 'the great blood sacrifice of the twentieth century'.<sup>9</sup> Here the question of how and why both civilians and servicemen held out and continued to believe in the war in spite of unprecedented loss of life is, perhaps, central. As predicted in 1917, home front experiences have been forgotten. The ideas underlying the war and what it achieved were already being questioned before they were undermined by the Second World

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<sup>4</sup> See John Horne, 'Introduction' in his (ed.) *A Companion to the First World War* (Oxford, 2010), pp. xxii-iv.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany, 1914-1923*, trans. Alex Skinner (Oxford, 2007), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Hew Strachan notes this as a criticism of Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker's *14-18: Understanding the Great War*, trans. Catherine Temerson (New York, 2002) in his review article 'The War to End All Wars? Lessons of World War I Revisited' review article, *Foreign Affairs*, 85/1 (2003), pp. 148-55, p. 150. See also J.M. Winter and Antoine Prost (eds), *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 153.

<sup>7</sup> Some books break this trend, such as Peter Gatrell's *Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History* (Harlow, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> This theme was discussed at the 'From the trenches to Versailles: War and Memory (1914-1919)' conference in Lisbon, June 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Horne, 'Introduction', p. xxii.

War, with its more apparently objectively evil and successful enemy<sup>10</sup> and legacy of long-lasting international co-operation without major inter-power conflict. Similar evils and ambitions featured in the ideology of 1914-18, but they have been eclipsed by events since 1939. This makes uncovering the reasons for Britons holding out and supporting the war in the First World War harder to explain by comparison to the Second, but by no means impossible.

### *Great Britain*

Since the publication of Arthur Marwick's *The Deluge* in 1965,<sup>11</sup> there have been a variety of books written about Great War Britain. These range from accounts combining developments at home with fortunes on the battlefields, such as John Bourne's *Britain and the Great War* and Trevor Wilson's *The Myriad Faces of War*,<sup>12</sup> to those dealing with specific aspects including recruitment, gender roles and female enfranchisement, experiences and memory, and attitudes towards Britain's German population.<sup>13</sup> Among these works have been those seeking to uncover what it was that made Britons continue to support the war for more than four years and at a cost of hundreds of thousands of men killed and millions wounded: some, like Cate Haste, have emphasised the power of propaganda, while Jay Winter's studies

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<sup>10</sup> See Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London, 1965).

<sup>12</sup> John M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War 1914-1918* (London, 1989); Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 3 for recruiting literature; Nicoletta F. Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (New York, 2002); Janet S.K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge, 2004); Panikos Panayi, *The Enemy in our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (Oxford, 1991).

of civilian health in wartime suggest acceptance buttressed by the maintenance (and even increase) in living standards, and Gerard DeGroot's analysis highlights the importance of the deference in British society in that era.<sup>14</sup> Each of these factors played an important part, but none provide a full explanation in themselves of how people understood the conflict and why they continued to accept it. Studies of propaganda alone ignore responses to home-front hardships. Meanwhile, it is hard to see hardships or mass casualties being withstood, even in a deferential society with improving standards of health, without a strong belief in the necessity of fighting the war underlying the other factors.

Alan Wilkinson and Adrian Gregory have posed the clearest questions about support for the war in Britain, Wilkinson asking directly why people continued to support the war in the face of great losses and finding answers in the defence of Belgium and horror at German atrocities, alongside the war's 'irresistible momentum' and the importance of the role of sacrifice in Christian and public-school world-views.<sup>15</sup> Building on the idea of sacrifice in his *The Last Great War*, Gregory stresses the importance of public knowledge of and belief in the Christian language of sacrifice to buttress wartime support for the war and the idea of equality

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<sup>14</sup> Cate Haste, *Keep The Home Fires Burning: Propaganda in the First World War* (London, 1977); J.M. Winter, 'Some Paradoxes of the First World War', in Jay Winter and Richard Wall (eds), *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918*, (Cambridge, 1988), and J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, (Basingstoke, 2nd edn. 2003 [1985]); Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (Harlow, 1998), especially pp. 46, 170-71.

<sup>15</sup> Alan Wilkinson, 'Changing English Attitudes to Death in the two World Wars' in Peter C. Jupp and Glennys Howarth (eds), *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (Basingstoke, 1997), especially pp. 150-53. Bourne also makes this link between Christian and public school ideas of sacrifice, *Britain and the Great War*, p. 230.

of sacrifice in both losses and hardship.<sup>16</sup> This thesis builds on these insights and looks at how an underlying feeling of the war's necessity and an essential belief in victory emerged and were maintained throughout the war, and the centrality of ideas of sacrifice in maintaining consent for war.

The value of a local home-front study is that one can gain a sense of how the different factors affecting support for the war within a fixed area. This thesis focuses on how the people of Essex understood the war and how local elites there sought to encourage participation and propagate the ideals for which the war was being fought and, later, to mitigate the negative effects of the war on their community. The county is used as a location through which to observe wider trends, while acknowledging the variations within it and between Essex and other parts of the United Kingdom. A discrete local area helps one to avoid the temptation to follow peaks of activity across the country, allowing investigation of trends of action and opinion in the same place; meanwhile the size and diversity of Essex provides scope for comparative assessments. Essex is used as a collection of localities and communities in and through which the war was experienced, rather than a coherent identifiable 'locality' in itself; as we shall see, there were great limits to any sense of Essex as a county community.<sup>17</sup>

This kind of localised study can also show the limits of support for the war and negotiations of the narratives and ideas of sacrifice that underpinned it. Pierre Purseigle notes that civil society and its leaders were not autonomous, but neither were they simply vessels for national propaganda; rather they played an important

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<sup>16</sup> Gregory, *Last Great War*, especially Chs. 5-7.

<sup>17</sup> See pp. 41-44.

intermediary role between the state and the population.<sup>18</sup> Local communities were important sites for both maintaining consent and stifling dissent.<sup>19</sup> Attention paid to pessimism and dissent, notably by Brock Millman, is a useful corrective to accounts that seek only signs of resilience in a nation that did not suffer invasion, defeat or revolution, and ignore indications of anti-war sentiment; however, Millman's corresponding explanation of the lack of collapse in terms of the state's suppression of dissent overstates this factor and ignores successful local mobilisation of support for a cause that most people continued to support, at least in Essex.<sup>20</sup> His conception of rival 'patriotic' and 'dissenting' coalitions is more useful, though, reflecting the popular opposition that dissenters faced from the 'hegemonic belligerence' identified by Purseigle.<sup>21</sup>

Opposition to the war was muted in Essex, but this does not mean that there was blind obedience by the 'patriotic' populace to state or elite demands. Indeed, as we shall see, the actions called for and undertaken by local elites changed during the war as narratives evolved and acceptable sacrifice was negotiated locally; even the crises of 1917-18 were rooted in specific events and concerns at that point, and were resolved by a mixture of local and national actions.<sup>22</sup> David Monger's thesis on the National War Aims Committee (NWAC) has shown the weakness of Millman's

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<sup>18</sup> Pierre Purseigle, 'Beyond and Below the Nations: towards a comparative history of local communities at war' in Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle (eds), *Uncovered Fields: Perspectives in First World War Studies*, History of Warfare, 20 (Leiden, 2004), pp. 98, 101, and Purseigle 'Introduction' in his (ed.) *Warfare and Belligerence: Perspectives in First World War Studies*, History of Warfare, 30 (Leiden, 2005), p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> Purseigle, 'Introduction', pp. 24-25.

<sup>20</sup> See Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in Britain, 1914-18* (London, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Purseigle, 'Introduction', pp. 18-27.

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 6.

state-suppression narrative when scrutinised: rather than being ‘Lloyd George’s stormtroopers’ ready to spring into action to suppress dissent by force, the NWAC was a voluntarily-led effort to remobilise support for the war through patriotic appeals, nationally-organised as a scheme but tailored for local communities by local committees.<sup>23</sup> This type of mobilisation led by local elites was a major feature of the local war effort in Britain (and elsewhere), from recruiting and charity, to war savings schemes. John Horne’s description of self-mobilisation in Britain, France and Germany in the first years of the war followed by a period of remobilisation with greater state leadership in the last two or three years of the conflict is valuable, particularly in highlighting the importance of the civilian character of this effort in Britain and France (in contrast to its failure under military control in Germany) and the need to maintain a balance between civilian and military needs.<sup>24</sup>

This thesis builds upon ideas of mobilisation within communities, led by local elites that encouraged, justified, negotiated, and attempted to manage wartime sacrifices and maintain consent among of the local population.<sup>25</sup> It focuses on one populous and diverse county to uncover the importance of how the war was understood, the discourse of wartime sacrifice and the role, power and limitations of local elite efforts at maintaining support for the war. For this purpose, ‘elites’ are broadly defined as those who took part in organising local activities and sought to influence the actions and opinions of the general population, taking in people such as prewar

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<sup>23</sup> See David Monger, ‘The National War Aims Committee and British patriotism during the First World War’ (King’s College, London, PhD Thesis, 2009), especially pp. 78-80, quoting Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent*, p. 248. See pp. 189-90 and 300-303 below.

<sup>24</sup> John Horne, ‘Introduction: mobilizing for ‘total war’, 1914-1918’ in his (ed.), *State, society and mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 5-16.

<sup>25</sup> See Purseigle, ‘Introduction’, pp. 26-39.

magistrates, ministers, local councillors, local journalists and editors, and charity organisers, and the people who joined charitable, patriotic and other local committees during the war.<sup>26</sup>

### *Other home fronts*

The experiences of the civilian populations of France and Germany have received as much attention as the British, if not more. Among the works published in English, Jean-Jacques Becker's *The Great War and the French People*,<sup>27</sup> with its insights into mentalities and attitudes, has been particularly influential for recent studies of the British war experience.<sup>28</sup> Roger Chickering's *Imperial Germany and the Great War* deals with both military and civilian aspects of the conflict and provides a useful analysis of civilian life, particularly the breakdown of associational bonds under the pressures of wartime, a theme continued in his detailed study of Freiburg.<sup>29</sup> The *Capital Cities at War* volumes directed by Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert provide excellent insights into the urban experience of war in Paris, London and Berlin and the parallels and contrasts between them, as well as broader analysis of war experiences and mentalities.<sup>30</sup> Belinda Davis and Maureen Healy have given us useful accounts of the political impacts of food shortages and

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<sup>26</sup> Purseigle uses the term in a similar way in 'Beyond and Below'.

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (Oxford, Leamington Spa, 1985).

<sup>28</sup> For example, Kit Good utilises Becker's idea of the 'banality' of war in his 'England Goes to War, 1914-15' (University of Liverpool, Ph.D. thesis, 2002) for example pp. 52-54; Adrian Gregory also cites this book as an influence on his work.

<sup>29</sup> Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 2004) and *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Jay Winter, Jean-Louis Robert *et al*, *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914-1919*, two volumes: un-subtitled vol. i (Cambridge, 1997) and *Volume 2: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, 2007).

inequalities in the German and Austrian capitals,<sup>31</sup> while other authors have dealt with other aspects of attempts to maintain support for the war, such as the ‘spirit of 1914’ and propaganda.<sup>32</sup> Another influential sub-national study is Benjamin Ziemann’s *War Experiences in Rural Germany*, looking at soldiers and civilians from rural Bavaria and the interactions between them. Ziemann’s focus is primarily the soldiers, their sense of victimhood and resignation and the extent to which their attitudes were adopted by civilians; he also notes the failure of efforts to reinvigorate the war effort with the war’s defensive purpose and ideological basis.<sup>33</sup> These works and others have influenced this thesis, providing comparable experiences and contrasting impacts against which experiences and understandings of the war in Essex may be judged.

### **Consent, war cultures and narratives**

To uncover the ‘unstoppable momentum’ of the Great War, we need to look at how the war was understood and how information and ideas about it were disseminated. Looking at the roles and actions of local elites and the popular responses to them is a useful way into this area,<sup>34</sup> building upon recent research on both the First World War and subsequent conflicts.

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<sup>31</sup> Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (London, 2000); Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge, 2000); David Welch, *Germany, Propaganda and Total War, 1914-1918: the Sins of Omission* (London, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Ziemann, *War Experiences*, especially, pp 270-272.

<sup>34</sup> Purseigle, ‘Beyond and Below’.

French academic discourse on the Great War has become divided in recent years between writers who see civilians and soldiers as having carried on in the war because they understood and consented to it and those who highlight the power of coercion, particularly in the military. The debate has been arduous and apparently intractable,<sup>35</sup> but the ‘consent’ camp has had a much greater impact outside France, in part because its books are more often written in (or translated into) English. One of the most influential aspects of this ‘consent’ thesis is the idea of a ‘war culture’ or varied ‘war cultures’, advanced particularly by the directors of the Historial de la Grande Guerre in Péronne, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker.<sup>36</sup> They and Leonard V. Smith state that war culture in France was ‘a broad-based system of representations through which the French made sense of the war, and persuaded themselves to continue fighting it’, created and disseminated by a ‘surprisingly broad cross-section of the French population’, from teachers and preachers to industrialists and photographers, and ‘interiorized by their compatriots’.<sup>37</sup> These people and others attempted to control information and influence public opinion and fundamentally to portray the war as they understood it themselves, in order to mobilise and buttress consent.<sup>38</sup> Ideas of the war’s purpose were thus shaped by a range of state and non-state actors from the corridors of national power and media, through the Town Hall and local newspaper offices, to the village street, factory floor, and shop window. ‘War culture’ or ‘war cultures’, then, reinforced the need to be victorious, which was not seriously undermined by the war’s hardships and loss.

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<sup>35</sup> Writers involved in the debate and who can read and write French have described the divisions more clearly than I can, for example Winter and Prost, *Great War in history*, p. 105 and Ch. 7, and Purseigle, ‘Introduction’.

<sup>36</sup> Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*.

<sup>37</sup> Leonard V. Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War 1914–1918* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. xv, 54.

<sup>38</sup> See Purseigle, ‘Beyond and Below’, p. 97, and ‘Introduction’ p. 20.

Although many of the details of the theory are rather Franco-centric, the framework of dissemination and ‘interiorisation’ is a useful one in seeking to understand how Britons understood the conflict and its course.

Compatible conclusions about the roots of consent and support in wars have been reached by those who have endeavoured since 1945, and particularly since the 1970s, to understand and form theories about contemporary or recent conflicts and public opinion.<sup>39</sup> Many academics have looked at American opinion about overseas military deployments, with a smaller body of work dealing with Britain and other European countries.<sup>40</sup> A consensus that ‘casualty-aversion’ governed American opinion has been challenged and replaced by a variety of conclusions about what factors are most important in maintaining support. These are broadly complementary and tend to stress the importance of particular factors amongst a shortlist summed up in one study of how support can continue in the face of war deaths:

By listening to elite cues about the primary objectives of the military operations, the breadth of elite support for the mission, and the likelihood that the mission will succeed, members of the public make plausible judgements about tolerable losses.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> John E Mueller’s *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York, 1973) is a touchstone of this ongoing debate.

<sup>40</sup> Colin Rallings, Michael Thrasher and Nick Moon, ‘British Public Opinion During the Gulf War’, *Contemporary British History*, 6/2 pp. 376-388; John J Wybrow, ‘The Gulf Crisis: A British Perspective’, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 3/3 (1991), pp. 260-276. Philip Smith looks at the USA, Britain, Spain and France in his *Why War? The Cultural Logic of Iraq, the Gulf War, and Suez* (London, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Christopher Gelpi, Peter D. Feaver and Jason Reifler, *Paying the Human Costs of War: American Public Opinion and Casualties in Military Conflicts* (Oxford, 2009), p. 241, see also pp. 12-14 in which multilateralism is also noted as an importance facet.

Put another way, unified elite leadership, justified causes and aims, and the prospect of victory were key to support for these wars.

It is unwise to attempt to transfer insights directly across chronological and geographical boundaries,<sup>42</sup> particularly given the gulf of difference in terms of scale, threat of invasion and loss of life between Great War Britain and the USA even in the Second World War,<sup>43</sup> let alone Vietnam or Iraq. In addition, the type of mobilisation required was of a vastly different type in the World Wars compared to post-1945 conflicts. The investment of time, energy and treasure in supporting the war in 1914-18 (aside from loss of life) was enormous; indeed it added to the sense that the war had to be won, and that such sacrifices had to bring some kind of benefit.

Nonetheless there is a great deal of correspondence between these explanations for continued support for these more recent conflicts, ideas about 'war cultures', and Britain's Great War, in terms of leadership and the narratives that made the war comprehensible and apparently necessary. The role of elites and narratives of the war as right, necessary, against an evil foe, and on course towards victory were key to maintaining support in the Great War, as in subsequent conflicts. An additional factor of great importance in 1914-18 but not highlighted by these political

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<sup>42</sup> Pierangelo Isernia, 'Conclusions: What have we learned and where do we go from here?' in Philip P. Everts and Pierangelo Isernia (eds), *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force*, (London, 2001), p. 270.

<sup>43</sup> The US mainland was not under serious threat of attack in any conflict in the twentieth century, whereas such a threat was sensed in Britain in both World Wars. British war deaths in the First World War were nearly twice the number of American deaths in 1941-45; they were over five times higher as proportions of the respective populations.

scientists was the discourse of sacrifice, both in terms of what was demanded of and what was acceptable to the population in wartime.

### *Elite cues and leadership*

In his book *In Time Of War*, Adam J. Berinsky stresses the importance of political elites' attitudes, showing that public opinion on a conflict is broadly linked to ideological support for the elites promoting conflict or intervention. Those with the strongest opinions each way were each party's best informed and strongest supporters, so that people's backing for wars broadly corresponded with their support for a party's broader agenda and the party's attitude towards the conflict.<sup>44</sup> Thus, US support for intervention in the Second World War was galvanised when Franklin D. Roosevelt's political opponents rallied behind it after Pearl Harbor, the president's supporters already having been convinced that isolationism was not the right policy.<sup>45</sup> Opinion polls after 11 September 2001 appear to show that supporters of the governing party in the UK were more likely to support the use of military force than those of the opposition; the same applied to acceptance of casualties during the 1991 Gulf War.<sup>46</sup> When the major political parties are united behind them, then, wars generally gain broad acceptance.<sup>47</sup> In the Great War, we can see the importance of this in both the rallying of opinion behind the war in 1914 and the conspicuously cross-party nature of public activities by both local and

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<sup>44</sup> Adam J. Berinsky, *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq* (London, 2009)

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, Ch. 3

<sup>46</sup> Robert M. Worcester, "'The World Will Never Be The Same": British Hopes and Fears Following the Events of September 11, 2001', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 14/1 (2002), pp. 99-106, p. 102; Rallings, Thrasher and Moon, 'British Public Opinion During the Gulf War', p. 382.

<sup>47</sup> The 2003 War in Iraq is an anomaly in this model, with supporters of the parties one might have expected to have opposed the war often remaining opposed despite party support: Democrats in the USA, Labour in the UK.

national elites (most notably recruiting and the NWAC). The great degree of support for the war given by Britain's political, social and cultural leaders makes it broadly analogous with Berinsky's understanding of the USA from 1941-45.

This picture correlates with the idea of consent as a driving force in the Great War, suggesting that people in democratic countries had sufficient faith in their leaders, or at least their political system, to continue to support the war.<sup>48</sup> This type of consent is arguably key to the success of civil society in peacetime as well as war; Purseigle cites Gramsci's ideas of the importance of the consent of the masses for the direction in which a society proceeds, where individuals are social actors but within a 'system of domination'.<sup>49</sup> Public opinion is thus influenced by the way the discourse is framed by elites, but the ability of those elites to lead also relied on consent from the general public, or else civil society could no longer function effectively.

As well as broad-ranging elite support, it is worth considering the 'elite cues' themselves: the roles elites played in promoting participation, shaping the image of the war and mitigating its impacts. Elite roles existed at both the national level and the local, in towns and villages across the country; they included organising recruiting and charitable campaigns, military service tribunals, propaganda organisation and other local bodies during the war. As the 'war culture' theory suggests, actions by political and non-party elites, from schools to pulpits, town halls to artists' studios buttressed public faith in the war. These actions were not simply propagandistic, though: they also took in the important role of mitigating the

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<sup>48</sup> It is, of course, arguable whether Britain was democratic before 1918 or 1928.

<sup>49</sup> Purseigle, 'Introduction', p. 26.

war's negative effects and mediating the power of national authorities. Looking more critically, we can identify limits to the public's willingness to accept the leads of elites or public discourse and the negotiations that ensued between them, especially in recruiting and leisure; meanwhile, attitudes towards the enemy could run away from the actions and attitudes promoted by elites.<sup>50</sup>

### *Narratives of the war and the enemy*

An integral part of maintaining support for war, among elites and the general public, is the perceived character of the war being waged, and the closely associated characterization of the enemy. Philip Smith explicitly deals with the narratives used to justify modern use of military force by the USA, Britain and other countries. In his analysis, wars that are successfully depicted as 'apocalyptic' carry more popular legitimacy and so support is dependent on the conflict being seen in such extreme terms, which often involve demonisation of the enemy or at least their leaders.

'Apocalyptic narratives are the most effective at generating and legitimating massive society-wide sacrifice' since '[w]hen radical evil is afoot in the world there can be no compromise, no negotiated solution [...].'<sup>51</sup> In the 'apocalyptic' mode, a war is motivated by ideals and the struggle is global.<sup>51</sup> Again, this resonates with the rhetoric and narratives of the Great War, a war cast as one of good versus evil, or of liberal democracy versus militarist domination, which could be described in both religious and political terms. 'British public opinion camped throughout the war on the moral high ground' based on apparent German barbarity and breaches of

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<sup>50</sup> See Chapter 2 and Jörg Nagler 'Pandora's Box: Propaganda and War Hysteria in the United States During World War I' in Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, *Great War, Total War: combat and mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>51</sup> Smith, *Why War?*, pp. 23-27 and Ch. 6.

the codes of civilised warfare.<sup>52</sup> A more positive slant could see one's own side fighting for a peaceful, 'radiant, better world' from which both war in general and the current aggressor are removed. With war itself seen as evil and the results of defeat being unthinkable, defeating the enemy became analogous to defeating war,<sup>53</sup> in this way German actions were cast as atrocious, while similar British responses were seen as necessary to overcome such evil. The idea that the war was renewing civic and spiritual life also lent it support from both public and religious spheres.<sup>54</sup> To this end, religion played an important role as an extension of local and national community life: ministers were among those within communities whose actions and words could reassure people that their cause was just; religious imagery also reinforced elite leadership and buttressed it with divine support and readily understandable concepts of good and evil.

Looking more specifically at hatred and action, Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker have sought to integrate violence and aggression into understanding of Great War mentalities: 'Deep down, the 1914-18 war culture harboured a true drive to "exterminate" the enemy'.<sup>55</sup> While violence was fundamental to this (or any) war, the truth of their claim can easily be challenged regarding even soldiers' attitudes, citing the relative lack of face-to-face killing compared to other wars,<sup>56</sup> 'live and let live' systems sporadically employed in the front line,<sup>57</sup> and the overwhelming desire

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<sup>52</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Great War*, pp. 228-9.

<sup>53</sup> Annette Becker, 'Faith, ideologies, and the "cultures of war"', trans. John Horne, in Horne (ed.), *Companion*, p. 235.

<sup>54</sup> The promotion of unity and ideas of renewal are investigated in Good, 'England Goes to War'.

<sup>55</sup> Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, p. 103.

<sup>56</sup> Ziemann, *War Experiences*, pp. 270-71

<sup>57</sup> Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare, 1914-1918: the Live and Let Live System*, (Basingstoke, 1980). This fraternisation may well have become much more

among Great War soldiers for a return to peace and their homes. Responses to the perceived threat of defeat and invasion, though, show a great fear of the enemy, aptly described by Heather Jones as ‘a culture of fear-cum-hatred of the enemy figure’.<sup>58</sup>

For British civilians, there were examples of outright aggression, from harassment of suspected spies and anti-German riots to campaigns for retaliatory bombing of German cities. Most of the rhetoric and even action involved, though, was borne of ‘fear-cum-hatred’, rather than desire for extermination. Although in 1915 the Bishop of London described the nation’s mission in terms of a crusade ‘to kill the Good [Germans] as well as the bad, to kill the young men as well as the old’,<sup>59</sup> he and other Anglican priests opposed the bombing of enemy cities for non-military purposes in 1917 and even those supporting air raids did not speak in terms of extermination.<sup>60</sup> One historian’s assessment of violent American Civil War rhetoric is a useful corrective to the idea of an exterminatory war culture in either war:

These words might be seen as sincere barometers of the intensity of national feeling, but they cannot be interpreted as marching orders and policy papers. They were at most threats. More commonly, they were emotional, patriotic outbursts – truly sound and fury, signifying nothing. We have to look at behavior [sic] rather than language to understand the nature of the Civil War.<sup>61</sup>

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widespread on the Western Front (as on the Eastern) if not for High Command intervention, which undermines a conception of exterminatory mentalities at the front.

<sup>58</sup> Heather Jones, ‘Encountering the “enemy”’: prisoner of war transport and the development of war cultures in 1914’ in Purseigle (ed.), *Warfare and belligerence*, p. 134.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted *ad nauseum*, as in Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14–18*, p. 103. The bishop’s statement had no impact in Essex and was not reproduced in contemporary newspapers; its impact has been much greater in historical works than at the time.

<sup>60</sup> See pp. 118-21.

<sup>61</sup> Mark E Neely, jr, *The Civil War and the Limits of Destruction*, (London, 2007), p. 199. The book is a critique of historical analyses of a ‘cult of violence’ in the war

The writer perhaps underestimates the utility of language in historical investigation, but his point that such statements were emotional outbursts is useful, and is borne out in the British Great War case. We must look at and compare actions and language on the home front throughout the war to assess British wartime mentalities, rather than privileging outraged outbursts responding to specific events.

*Prospects of success*

Perceptions of the course of a war and its progress towards victory are also key to maintaining support. Steven Kull and Clay Ramsey stress the importance of likelihood of success over other factors, including casualties, concluding that ‘support for continuing an operation is likely to be sustained provided that the public has support for the operation in the first place and believes it is likely to succeed.’<sup>62</sup> This and the perception of the war’s purpose are both functions of successful narrative-construction, covering both the mission’s original necessity and its ongoing success. Although not directly addressed in the ‘war culture’ literature, this factor is related to the fear of defeat, particularly by an evil foe. Alexander Watson has similarly found that fear of defeat and the prospect of victory were integral to the maintenance of morale among British and German soldiers, alongside

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(perhaps analogous to exterminatory ‘war culture’), and the idea that it was a forerunner of the twentieth century’s ‘total’ wars.

<sup>62</sup> Steven Kull and Clay Ramsay, ‘The myth of the reactive public: American public attitudes on military fatalities in the post-Cold War period’ in Everts and Isernia (eds), *Public Opinion*, quotation from p. 224.

personal ‘mental coping strategies’, effective leadership and supply provision, rather than a deep-seated desire to kill the enemy.<sup>63</sup>

The British public narrative of the Great War’s duration and the course to victory evolved with events, particularly following the failure to achieve the long-hoped-for break through the German lines in 1916 and in response to the German position of strength over the winter of 1917-18. These changes accommodated difficulties and new developments but maintained in a believable way the message that Britain and its allies would ultimately triumph and were on course to do so.<sup>64</sup> Measuring people’s perceptions of the prospects for victory, whether imminent or long-term, is very difficult when studying a conflict before the advent of public opinion surveys. From diaries, letters, and occasional public statements, we can, however, get a sense of perceptions of how long the war would last, and whether victory was certain or defeat had become more realistic or desirable.

### *Narratives and sacrifice*

Missing from the political science literature but stressed by Wilkinson and Gregory is the idea of sacrifice as an explanatory factor in continuing support for the war effort. This is a key feature that has not transferred across time and national borders into the (mainly US-focused) literature on public opinion and wars. This difference is linked to both the existential nature of the Great War in the eyes of participants and the enormous effort involved compared to post-1945 conflicts; in the former, greater sacrifices were needed in lives, freedoms and economics, while more

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<sup>63</sup> Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 2008), especially pp. 141, 233.

<sup>64</sup> See pp. 183-89 and 323-339.

common religious observance and knowledge gave the language of sacrifice a resonance it no longer carries in Britain.<sup>65</sup>

The idea of sacrifice alone could not have buttressed support for the war, but the existing religious and public rhetoric of sacrifice gave hardships suffered in a just cause a commonly-understood framework. Thus the idea of sacrifice as a force in the war rested on acceptance of the narratives outlined above and awareness of the Christian language of sacrifice; this language was prominently used, mixed with classical allusions, in the public schools that educated much of Britain's officer class. With such public prominence, discourses of acceptable and expected sacrifice were powerful in promoting participation and in mitigating the negative impacts of war. Robert Mackay has shown that those concerned with civilian morale in the Second World War considered morale to be important primarily in terms of spurring action.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, during the 'self-mobilisation' period of the Great War, ideas of sacrifice were primarily useful in spurring actions in support of the war effort, such as charitable and nursing work or enlistment in the armed forces. As casualties and hardships increased, though, sacrifice took on a different meaning: although participation did not lose its importance, the maintenance of equality of sacrifice became vital to maintaining consent, particularly where sacrifices concerned military service and food.

Conceptions of sacrifice were vital in both promoting active participation and maintaining consent in the face of hardship. The two intersected where battlefield

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<sup>65</sup> Thanks to Pierre Purseigle for his suggestions on different types of wartime sacrifice.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain During the Second World War* (Manchester, 2003), pp. 2-3.

sacrifices were used to justify increasing hardships at home by diminishing the extent and importance of the latter. The sacrifices made by servicemen always trumped the difficulties faced by those at home. A ‘moral economy’ of sacrifice in wartime has been described by Bernard Waites and Pierre Purseigle, echoing E.P. Thompson’s work on crowds in eighteenth-century England. This saw the development of a code of behaviour, in which acceptable and unacceptable behaviour differed from peacetime.<sup>67</sup> This and the changing use of rhetoric about sacrifice in the middle of the war show that it was not a static concept, but rather part of an ongoing discourse of what was acceptable and expected. This saw an evolution of the image of the serviceman, as the paradigmatic emblem of sacrifice, and occasional clashes between the rhetoric of elites and the actions of the population. By negotiating the limits of acceptable sacrifice, communities maintained a relationship with the war that could be critical, evolved over time, but remained largely supportive.

We can attempt to judge how successful narratives of the war’s purpose and eventual successful outcome and the explanatory discourse of sacrifice were by how people reacted to the war’s ongoing hardships and increasing casualties.

Investigating these narratives is thus important for understanding why people continued to support the war and the level of their acceptance gives us a measure of the extent and limits of people’s support for the war.

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<sup>67</sup> Bernard Waites, *Class Society At War: England 1914-18* (Leamington Spa, 1987); Purseigle, ‘Beyond and Below’, p. 111; E.P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in Eighteenth Century’ in *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), pp. 77-136. Adrian Gregory (in *Last Great War*) uses a similar idea but avoids the specific allusion to the eighteenth century, seeing the roots of similar acts in the Great War in popular acceptance of a more modern political economy.

## Chapters

To tackle the evolving narratives and roles of local elites, this thesis is roughly divided into two parts, reflecting the initial period of elite encouragement of willing sacrifice and the later phase in which they took on the additional role of managing equality and fairness in sacrifice. The three chapters dealing with the growth of the narratives in 1914, their evolution in 1916-17 and crisis in 1917-18 most clearly reflect this chronology. The other chapters deal with aspects of narrative and discourse that are central to understanding wartime mentalities: the enemy and recruitment for the armed forces. Each chapter looks at a variety of aspects of war experience and mentalities within its thematic or chronological remit.

Recent works on 1914 have stressed the complexity and nuances of public responses to the war crisis and declarations of war in different countries. How the people of Essex responded in those first days, weeks and months is the focus of Chapter 1, taking in the variety and evolution of responses across the geographic and demographic range of Essex. A progression from apprehension to acceptance to something approaching fervour is identified, connected with a growing acceptance of the narratives of the war and the apparent threat to Britain, linked to events on the battlefields of France and Belgium. The next two chapters pick up on central aspects of these narratives: attitudes towards the enemy and volunteering for military service. What can we learn about Essex people's feelings and fears regarding the Germans from their wartime words and actions? Violence was an extreme, powerful but sporadic indication of hatred and exclusion aimed at internal 'enemies', while suspicion followed both 'Germans' and other outsiders across the

county. Do these and broader attitudes towards German civilians and soldiers show acceptance of the ‘barbaric enemy’ narrative, or something more or less?

Recruitment was the key context for wartime sacrifice on the home front, and so occupies a large portion of this thesis. As a central act of wartime citizenship (for military-aged men at least, although others could be active wartime citizens by encouraging them) and key to the discourse of sacrifice, recruitment spanned the entire war but underwent the first major shift in elite roles and discourse as compulsory military service was introduced in 1916. The chapters looking at recruitment and the role of local elites in it address, then, two distinctly different processes of enlistment, but find continuities as well as changes. Factors affecting the decision of whether or not to enlist in the voluntary period of 1914-15 are considered in Chapter 3, along with the ways that Essex people and local elites sought to encourage and all but compel enlistment. Following the 1916 Military Service Act, as the costs and manpower needs of the war were being fully brought to light, work on military service tribunals brought local elites into a position where they decided who (of those appealing for exemption or appealed for by others) should join up and who should remain at home. This was a fundamental shift from encouraging voluntary enlistment, but still involved decision-making as to whether a man’s enlistment was the best course for him, the community and the nation – a decision now for local worthies rather than each individual. The work of Essex tribunals is addressed in Chapter 5, which finds maintenance of equality of sacrifice having surpassed but not completely replaced ideas of willing sacrifice.

Evolution of the wartime discourse of sacrifice reached beyond tribunals; moreover, it was only one of the changes that occurred as the costs and conditions of the war were first being fully appreciated and the Allies failed to break through to victory in 1916. These undermined existing narratives of willing sacrifice and the future course of the war, while the purpose of the war effort, the image of the serviceman and other aspects of wartime life and mentalities also underwent some revision. Chapter 4 shows how, through 1916 and 1917, new narratives and discourses evolved through elite leadership and negotiation with the population so that expectations and demands would remain realistic and acceptable. By the end of 1917, though, major faults were emerging even in the newer narratives and the idea of equal sacrifice. Food queues provided a reason and a venue for disgruntlement and agitation, while obvious German strength and success made Allied victory seem further off than ever. This can be seen as a crisis of confidence and conditions, undermining both the narrative of future victory and the essential idea of equal sacrifice. Chapter 6 charts the severity of this crisis and how elites and the public responded to the circumstances of that winter.

### **Sources**

For the student of life in England in the Great War, four broad types of source material are available: memoirs, diaries and letters, newspapers, and official records. British archives do not offer the volume of the latter utilised by Jeffrey Verhey and Jean-Jacques Becker in their studies of 1914,<sup>68</sup> but the extant selection

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<sup>68</sup> Verhey used German police reports, Becker reports written by teachers across France. Verhey, *Spirit of 1914*; Jean-Jacques Becker, “That’s the Death Knell of Our Boys...” in P. Fridenson (ed.), *The French Home Front 1914-18* (Providence, 1992).

of personal, journalistic and official material can be used to build up a picture of events and attitudes in wartime.

Memoirs come in two forms: personal and civic. The former vary from accounts written in a few pages of typescript specifically relating to the war,<sup>69</sup> to full-length memoirs about the war or those that touch only briefly on war experiences. The limitations of such retrospective accounts are well-documented, particularly the impact of the passage of time and subsequent events on both the memory of events and overall narrative.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, such memoirs can also offer insights into otherwise unrecorded events and opinions and enlighten us as to the impact of the war at the local level. Similarly, one advantage of the civic war memoirs is that they offer information on people, events and organisations about which archival material may no longer exist. Of this type of source, the most useful is the near-contemporary record, such as those made in Hornchurch in 1920 and Colchester in 1923;<sup>71</sup> while more recent local war or general histories of parishes and towns can also give insights, reproducing local recollections or snippets from newspapers. Their main shortcoming parallels that of personal recollections, in that they often reflect the period in which they were produced. In its immediate aftermath, towns were keen to portray a positive experience of war, one of patriotism and unity

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<sup>69</sup> For example, the series of 'Age Concern' essays on experiences of the war written in the 1960s (ERO, T/Z 25/596-691)

<sup>70</sup> See Todman, *Great War*, and Leonard V. Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers' Testimony of the Great War* (London, 2007).

<sup>71</sup> Charles T. Perfect, *Hornchurch during the Great War* (Colchester, 1920), E.A. Hunt (ed.), *Colchester War Memorial Souvenir* (Colchester, 1923); the war also occupies a section of Alfred Stokes' *East Ham: from Village to Corporate Town* (Stratford, 1920 enlarged edn.).

towards a common goal of victory, as Stephen Gower has noted.<sup>72</sup> Many recent books repeat a formula common to later short reminiscences by individuals: recruitment, Zeppelins and casualties, or focus on the latter and offer biographical details of the locality's 'lost generation'.<sup>73</sup> From these personal and civic memoirs, we can glean much useful information, but we must be wary of subsequent factors that influenced their narrative. Since this thesis was begun, Paul Rusiecki's history of Essex during the First World War has been published;<sup>74</sup> this is a well-researched and well-written work of local history, covering a wide range of impacts of the war and offering insights into life in the county, giving useful corroboration to evidence I have found elsewhere, but it does not seek to uncover the underlying roots of continuing support for the war as this thesis does.<sup>75</sup>

The second source type shares one feature of the personal memoir that can be both a benefit and a shortcoming: like memoirs, other contemporary personal records in the form of letters and diaries represent the viewpoint of only one person. The most comprehensive of the Essex diaries of the war, the 92-volume record kept by Revd

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<sup>72</sup> S.J.L. Gower, 'The Civilian Experience of World War I: aspects of Wolverhampton, 1914-18' (University of Birmingham, PhD thesis, 2000), pp. 285-9.

<sup>73</sup> For example, Robert Pike, *The Victor Heroes* (Saffron Walden, 2000), Chris Adam and Ken Adam, *1914-18, A Village Remembers: Military and Social History, Letters, Diaries and Photographs from Faulkbourne in Essex* (Faulkbourne, 1999), J.P. Foynes, *Brightlingsea and the Great War, 1914-1918* (privately published, 1993) and Jeffrey Jarvis (ed.) *The Southend and District Roll of Honour, 1914-1921* (privately published, 1998). See also 'Roll of Honour – Essex' [website] <<http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Essex/>> and *Chelmsford War Memorial* [website] <<http://www.chelmsfordwarmemorial.co.uk/>>.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Rusiecki, *The Impact of Catastrophe: The People of Essex and the First World War* (Chelmsford, 2008). Also published since this thesis began was Ken Crowe's interesting but more limited, *Zeppelins over Southend: the Story of South East Essex in the First World War* (Southend, 2008).

<sup>75</sup> By contrast, Michael Foley's *Essex in the First World War* (Stroud, 2009) offers little the way of information or insight.

Andrew Clark of Great Leighs, occasionally betrays aspects of its author's personal opinions, for example relating to conscription and tribunals, as does the record kept by his contemporary at Stondon Massey, Revd E.H.L. Reeve.<sup>76</sup> Diaries such as these and the more personal ones kept by others do, however, give us a great insight into both events and people's thoughts and attitudes, as do letters written between civilians or sent between the home and war fronts. Crucially, of course, they were recorded *at the time* or soon after, and are thus free of post hoc framing of memories.<sup>77</sup> That is not to say, of course, that they were immune from narrative construction: all wartime writing was affected by wartime narratives and contemporaneous events, discussions and rumours as well as by their intended audiences. Clark's and Reeve's diaries were explicitly written for the eyes of future generations,<sup>78</sup> while letter-writers tailored their content to be suitable for the recipient: for mothers as opposed to fathers or for siblings as opposed to the local priest.<sup>79</sup> Although relatively few survive that were written by Essex civilians, there are enough to give an impression of attitudes and opinions in the county; correspondence between civilians and servicemen also show us the kind of information and opinions conveyed from the war front to the home front as well as the influence of each on the other's morale.

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<sup>76</sup> Bodleian Library, Eng hist e 88-177, diaries of Andrew Clark (hereafter Clark diaries): see pp. 237 (fn. 45) and 258 (fn. 114) for Clark's comments on conscription and tribunals. ERO, T/P 188/3, Stondon Massey, Materials for a History of the Parish, Volume III (hereafter Stondon diary): Reeve was clearly disappointed with a parishioner who felt no allegiance to the King (25/3/1916).

<sup>77</sup> One must of course be wary of apparently contemporary records that *were* altered later, such as the diary of Mrs E.A. Courtauld (NAM, 1986-04-135. Quoted by kind permission of Rev A.C.C. Courtauld).

<sup>78</sup> So too, we must assume, was the typescript version of Mrs Courtauld's diary.

<sup>79</sup> See Jessica Meyer *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2009) and Michael Roper *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester, 2009) for excellent examples of how collections of letters may be effectively utilised.

According to *Sell's Directory* there were seventy-one Essex newspapers in 1914, in addition to which there were a small number of regional papers that covered some or the entirety of the county such as East London's newspapers or the *East Anglian Daily Times*.<sup>80</sup> Like contemporary personal records, these have the major advantage of having been made at the time, but they have the shortcoming of partiality in two senses: first, that they predominantly each covered only part of the county, and even within their areas there is a risk, noted by Benjamin Ziemann, that rural events and opinions will have been sidelined as editors opted to cover more dramatic stories from towns. Jean-Jacques Becker warns similarly that depictions of public opinion are liable to exaggeration as a noisy minority could steal the limelight and put its case disproportionately strongly.<sup>81</sup> The second element of partiality is the political slant to some papers' opinions, which, although less marked than in the national press, is quite clear in, for example, the Conservative *Essex County Standard* and the liberal *Essex County Chronicle*.<sup>82</sup> Kit Good's use of local newspapers as evidence of both events and elites' attempts to shape actions provides both another avenue through which 'elite cues' were directed and a warning against believing all one reads at face value (or relying on only one newspaper).<sup>83</sup> On the other hand Panikos Panayi notes that opinions of the press had largely to reflect those of their readership in order to keep selling papers.<sup>84</sup> The risk that newspapers were emasculated by censorship and thus unwilling to publish details or opinions that might support criticism of the government was not realised in Great War

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<sup>80</sup> *Sell's Directory of the World's Press*, 1914.

<sup>81</sup> Ziemann, *War Experiences*, p. 17; Becker, "Death Knell", p. 30.

<sup>82</sup> See p. 322 for an example of differing responses of two Essex papers to the same event.

<sup>83</sup> Good, 'England Goes to War', pp. 10-12.

<sup>84</sup> Panayi, *Enemy in our Midst*, pp. 232-5

newspapers; although there was undoubtedly self-censorship and some limitation on content (for example, details of the locations of air raids), government control over the local press was limited in Britain. A government report opined that the London (i.e. national) press did not reflect opinion outside the capital, whereas the provincial papers were ‘more consistent, less materialistic and more representative of solid English opinion’ thanks to the position of the editors as part of the local community, in touch with readers’ concerns and opinions.<sup>85</sup>

While newspaper reports are valuable sources from the start of the war, official government records, the fourth major source, increase in importance and availability through the war period. This reflects both the transition characterised (if exaggerated) by A.J.P. Taylor as seeing English lives go from an age in which one would ‘hardly notice the existence of the state, beyond the post office and the policeman’ to one where lives were ‘shaped by orders from above’,<sup>86</sup> and the increasing interest taken by the state in the actions, condition and opinions of the people. National records cover areas including recruitment, the war aims campaign, anti-German violence, and industrial unrest. With civilians’ wartime interactions very often being with local authorities there are also records kept at county and borough level, such as those of charities and some military service tribunals; records of existing institutions such as local police forces, or health and education committees also offer useful evidence. Also open to researchers in the twenty-first century are the internet, online catalogues and computerised databases.<sup>87</sup> Much of

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<sup>85</sup> TNA, T 102/16, ‘The Government and the Press’ (n.d. [1917-18]). See also Gower, ‘Civilian Experience’, p. 6.

<sup>86</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (London, 1975 [1965]), pp. 25-26.

<sup>87</sup> Such online archive catalogues for ERO and the National Archives, and the searchable *Soldiers Died in the Great War*, v.2.0 [CD-Rom].

this official material may be dry, but in combination with other sources and with an awareness of their purpose and limitations, it helps to build up a full picture of wartime life.

Historians must be wary of over-reliance on one source and look for corroboration and comparison elsewhere.<sup>88</sup> David Silbey, in his investigation of working-class enlistment in Britain, uses a synthesis of different types of evidence, testing individuals' opinions against broader trends. Similarly, Keith Grieves comments on the utility of personal accounts to add flesh to the bones provided by official records.<sup>89</sup> In this way, official, press and private records of the war can be used to build up a picture not only of the war's events, but of how they and the war as a whole affected the lives and thoughts of Essex people.

### **Essex: a county of contrasts**

For a sub-national study of wartime experiences and mentalities there are no perfect microcosms; however, Essex is a useful subject for investigation given the range of settlements and industry in the county and the quality of local sources outlined above.<sup>90</sup> With swathes of countryside, towns based on markets, engineering and tourism, and the populous south-western districts of suburbs and industry, Essex provides examples of many of the styles of life and settlement in Great War Britain.

Essex is a county of contrasts. There is little that can be said of Chelmsford that is true of Chingford, or of Barking that is true of Braintree. Thaxted and Saffron Walden are in a different world from Ilford and West Ham; Southend

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<sup>88</sup> Ziemann, *War Experiences*, p. 12.

<sup>89</sup> David Silbey, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914–1916* (London, 2005), pp. 7; Keith Grieves, *Sussex in the First World War*, Sussex Records Society, 84 (Lewes, 2004), p. x.

<sup>90</sup> Clark's diary is unparalleled in its scale for 1914-18, while the existence of multiple near-contemporary civic memoirs is unusual within one county.

and Colchester can hardly know each other. It is not distance that divides them but time. They belong to different centuries [...].<sup>91</sup>

This description was written three decades after the Great War, but its core message is apt for the county in the early years of the twentieth century. Located on the coast directly north-east of London, the county contained communities ranging from those virtually indistinguishable from the capital to villages whose size and agricultural character remained largely unchanged through the nineteenth century. The county was one of marked diversity in its social and economic character; these factors and its rapid growth undermined any sense of Essex identity, but more localised identities did remain.

Between 1881 and 1911, the county's population doubled to 1,350,881 (660,662 male and 690,219 female), a considerably faster growth-rate than the national increase of forty percent in the same period.<sup>92</sup> This increase was 'due almost entirely to the growth of "London-over-the-border." Outside this area, the population, on the whole, was either stationary or decreasing.' Indeed, some twenty parishes in the rural north had, in 1901, fewer inhabitants than a century earlier.<sup>93</sup>

### *Metropolitan Essex*

'London-over-the-border' consisted of the ancient hundred of Becontree (including Ilford, East Ham, Leyton, Stratford and West Ham) and the nearby Romford Urban District. Although strictly speaking this area was *extra*-metropolitan, in that it was outside the borders of the capital, it seems apt to consider it as 'Metropolitan Essex'

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<sup>91</sup> William Addison, *Essex Heyday* (London, 1949), p. 1.

<sup>92</sup> *Census*, 1881, 1911.

<sup>93</sup> P.H. Reaney, *Essex* (London, 1928), pp. 103-104; J. Charles Cox, *Essex* (London, 1909), pp. 3-4.

in the context of this investigation, as it was ‘within, but not of Essex; outside, but an essential part of London’ according to a contemporary writer; it was served by the Metropolitan Police Force and its men enlisted in the army’s London recruiting district.<sup>94</sup> The area grew with immense speed in the second half of the nineteenth century. West Ham grew quickly in the middle of the century to become one of the country’s most populous boroughs; East Ham and Walthamstow were the fastest growing districts of their size in the twenty years to 1911.<sup>95</sup>

The Metropolitan districts were not uniform in character, the biggest distinction being between the earlier industrial growth in West Ham (which spread into neighbouring East Ham) and the residential growth that characterised the other Metropolitan districts. Both owed their growth in part to the railways, West Ham’s being attributed to ease of transport by rail and water, cheap land, and the lax by-laws that allowed factories to produce noxious gases banned within London proper.<sup>96</sup> Walter Besant wrote in 1901 that West Ham was ‘a huge town of two hundred and seventy thousand people [...], like East Ham, entirely consisting of working-people.’<sup>97</sup> In fact, away from the waterfront, they were also home to skilled workers and ‘the “black-coated proletariat” of teachers, clerks and shop assistants’, more like the other Metropolitan districts.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Reaney, *Essex*, p. 104; *Kelly’s Directory of Essex*, 1914; *Census*, 1911; Mark Connelly uses the same term in his *The Great War, Memory and Ritual: Commemoration in the City and East London, 1916-1939* (Woodbridge, 2002), Ch. 1.

<sup>95</sup> *Victoria History of the County of Essex* (hereafter *VCH*), 10 vols (London, 1903-) vol. v, pp. 26, 44, 49, 57; *VCH*, vol. vi, pp. 2, 241, *Census* 1911.

<sup>96</sup> E.G. Howarth and M. Wilson, *West Ham: A Study in Social and Industrial Problems* (London, 1907), pp. 143-45.

<sup>97</sup> Walter Besant, *East London* (London, 1901), pp. 8, 3, 9.

<sup>98</sup> Connelly, *Great War*, pp17-18; Julia Bush, *Behind the Lines. East London Labour 1914-1919* (London, 1984), p11.

While East and West Ham contained industry and docks, the rest of Metropolitan Essex was ‘merely residential, for it consists chiefly of London business people and craftsmen who merely reside in Essex’ and contained the “dormitories of London”, the homes of thousands of London workers who pour into Liverpool Street every day.<sup>99</sup> By 1912, around 200,000 passengers travelled through the London terminus at Liverpool Street every day.<sup>100</sup> The Great Eastern Railway Company (GER) ran most of the services from Essex into Liverpool Street and Fenchurch Street stations, some 76 million in 1903-5, along with 13 million run by the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway Company (LT&SR). Ninety percent of the GER passengers travelled less than twelve miles, mainly bringing them in from the Metropolitan districts.<sup>101</sup> By 1911 only around one in five residents of the Metropolitan boroughs (and Southend, which shared many characteristics of London-over-the-border) had been born there, with a similar proportion born elsewhere in Essex, and around one third born in London.<sup>102</sup> West Ham bucked the trend with more native residents, thanks to its earlier period of growth.

Employment in the two parts of Metropolitan Essex reflects the reasons for their growth. Chemical works, docks, light industry and the railways were among the major employers in East and West Ham, along with engineering, building and food

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<sup>99</sup> Cox, *Essex*, p. 41; Reaney, *Essex*, p. 104.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> P.P. 1905 (Cd 2597) ‘Report of the Royal Commission on London Traffic’, p. 65. GER and LT&SR were the only companies running trains to and from Liverpool Street and Fenchurch Street.

<sup>102</sup> *Census* 1911. Southend-on-Sea also does not quite fit the pattern, with its population being one-quarter native, nearly half from London and less than ten per cent Essex-born migrants. Nonetheless it, along with Ilford and East Ham was among the large towns with the smallest proportion of native residents in 1911.

production.<sup>103</sup> Beyond those boroughs, many of the men living in areas like Wanstead, Woodford, Leyton and Ilford were clerks, professionals and merchants and nearly half travelled into London for work.<sup>104</sup> The area was, then, largely made up of recent migrants from London, the rest of Essex, and further afield; its residents worked in offices and companies in the capital or in the docks and industrial area along the Thames.

*The rest of Essex*

Outside Metropolitan Essex, the railways played an equally major role, spurring the growth of both market towns and seaside resorts. There was a huge difference in growth and fortunes between those areas with access to rail routes and those without. As well as commuting, the GER set out to promote seaside holiday travel on its train routes in East Anglia; the LT&SR served commuting and holiday routes in the south of the county.<sup>105</sup> The railways gave inland towns like Colchester and Braintree great opportunities for growth, with faster trade links to places further afield; although they did not match the Metropolitan districts, these towns grew markedly in the nineteenth century. As well as trading their traditional agricultural and tailoring produce (a market that declined partly due to competition from other well-connected towns), these towns had the opportunity to develop light industries and commercial enterprises.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *Census* 1911; *VCH*, vol. v, pp. 12-16.

<sup>104</sup> *Census*, 1911.

<sup>105</sup> Harry Paar and Adrian Gray, *The Life and Times of the Great Eastern Railway, 1839-1922* (Welwyn Garden City, 1991), p. 31; H.D. Welsh, *The London, Tilbury and Southend Railway* (South Godstone, 1951), p. 26; *SWG*, 10/7/1914.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 96-98; Cox, *Essex*, pp. 45-49; Michael Baker, *The Book of Braintree and Bocking* (Buckingham, 1981), p.129.

The impression of rural and metropolitan areas of the county being divided by time, rather than space, is borne out in H.G. Wells' description of a fictional Essex village on the eve of the war:

[O]nce you are away from the main Great Eastern lines Essex still lives in the peace of the eighteenth century [...]. In Matching's Easy, [...] there are half-a-dozen old people who have never set eyes on London in their lives—and do not want to.<sup>107</sup>

Similarly, the real-life village of Great Leighs had 'no resident in the habit of going regularly to London. [...The village] is quite away from any railway station'.<sup>108</sup>

The same railway lines that took produce from Colchester and Braintree and commuters from Forest Gate and Buckhurst Hill also brought in holiday-makers to the Essex coast and resorts like Southend-on-Sea, Clacton-on-Sea, Frinton-on-Sea and Walton-on-the-Naze. In the first decade of the century, the three fastest-growing urban districts in the county were Frinton, Southend, and the latter's neighbour Leigh-on-Sea. These resorts grew faster even than the industrial and residential areas closer to London.<sup>109</sup> By 1914, Southend was 'a favourite resort of Londoners in summer and autumn', and in July a major boost to its attractions came with a visit from the Royal Navy's Third Battle Squadron. It was estimated that 70,000 people visited the town for the occasion. 'During the summer months' reported the Medical Officer of Health for Southend, 'there is an average of 30,000 temporary visitors, and on some days there may be 90,000 day trippers.'<sup>110</sup> Up the

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<sup>107</sup> H.G. Wells, *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (London, 1933 [1916]), p. 11.

<sup>108</sup> Clark diaries, Introductory Notes, p. 2.

<sup>109</sup> *Census*, 1911.

<sup>110</sup> *Sell's Directory*, 1914, p245; *Essex County Council Minutes: Medical Officer's Report on Southend*, 1913.

coast at Clacton, the holiday season saw an increase in the population ‘from 9,887 [the estimated resident population] to nearly 70,000.’<sup>111</sup>

While Metropolitan Essex and the seaside resorts were straining under the weight of their growing populations, growth in the rural areas away from railways was largely at a standstill. Some village populations declined in the nineteenth century, while generally rural and small-town populations increased in the first half of the century, stalled and declined in the second half.<sup>112</sup> By the end of the century, where the six largest boroughs had only a minority of Essex men, outside them around two-thirds of the population was Essex-born.<sup>113</sup> The figure was probably higher still in rural areas away from London; evidence drawn from the birth-places of men killed in the Great War suggests that slightly under two-thirds of those residing in Colchester and Chelmsford were born in the county, with more Suffolk-born men living in Colchester and Londoners in Chelmsford.<sup>114</sup>

In the rural districts, agriculture was still central to Essex life, employing two in every five men in these as ‘mainly’ or even ‘purely’ agricultural areas.<sup>115</sup> Essex agricultural workers were among the lowest paid in a low-wage industry and many

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*: Medical Officer’s Report on Clacton, 1913.

<sup>112</sup> Kevin Schurer, ‘Migration, Population and Social Structure: A Comparative Study of Rural Essex, 1850-1900’ (University of London, Ph.D. Thesis, 1988), pp 135-42.

<sup>113</sup> *Census*, 1911.

<sup>114</sup> *Soldiers Died in the Great War*, v2.0 [CD-ROM]; these are the only two Essex towns for which the number of complete records allow useful interpretation of the data.

<sup>115</sup> *Census*, 1911; *Essex County Council Minutes: Medical Officers’ Reports*, 1913.

lived below the poverty line.<sup>116</sup> Towns across the county also contained a number of agricultural workers, but light engineering and trading were becoming a major part of local employment, fuelling growth in towns linked to the rest of the county and country by the railways. Chelmsford and Halstead each had over fifteen percent listed in light industry in 1911, and in Braintree seventeen percent were employed in iron and steel works alone;<sup>117</sup> these men earned substantially more than those who remained on the land.

The employment of women is notoriously under-represented in censuses; thus in Essex only 1,129 women are listed in agricultural work, a figure which most likely ignores the irregular and seasonal work done by women, such as fruit, pea and stone picking, which was important in supplementing their family income.<sup>118</sup> The dominant permanent female employment, outside care for home and family, was in domestic service; a quarter of 'occupied' Essex women (40,000) were employed thus, a quarter of these working in rural districts in the 1911 census. One study gives a figure of 28.9 percent of non-migrant village women employed in domestic service, compared with 40 percent who were housewives or occupied with housework.<sup>119</sup> In some areas, particular local trade and female employment

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<sup>116</sup> B. Seebohm Rowntree and May Kendall, *How the Labourer Lives, A Study of the Rural Labour Problem* (London, 1917 [1913]), pp. 28, 38, and case studies from Essex.

<sup>117</sup> Eilidh Garrett *et al*, *Changing Family Size in England and Wales: Place, Class, and Demography, 1891-1911* (Cambridge, 2001) Table D1, pp. 475-77; *Census, 1911*.

<sup>118</sup> Andrew Phillips and Patrick Denney, '“Taking the Tailoring”: Rural Outwork and the Colchester Clothing Industry, 1840-1914' in Michael Holland and Jacqueline Cooper (eds), *Essex Harvest: A Collection of Essays in Honour of Arthur Brown* (Chelmsford, 2003) p. 140; see examples of pickers in Rowntree and Kendall, *How the Labourer Lives*, p. 87.

<sup>119</sup> *Census, 1911*; A.B. Hill, *Internal Migration and its Effects upon the Deathrates: With Special Reference to the County of Essex* (London, 1925), p.90.

networks have been identified, including tailoring in and around Colchester, which employed around 4,500 to 5,000 local women, providing vital extra incomes for the families of agricultural labourers.<sup>120</sup>

### *Military Essex*

The county was home, in 1911, to nearly 10,000 soldiers and sailors (2.4 percent of its occupied males), most notably in the garrison town of Colchester and the port at Harwich; smaller numbers were based at the Essex Regiment's headquarters at Warley (Brentwood), coastal defences at Tilbury, and the gunnery school at Shoeburyness. The garrison's presence, with its construction contracts and increased spending, is credited with saving Colchester from the decline suffered by much of North Essex during the agricultural depression of the late nineteenth century; it has been estimated that over £100,000 extra was spent in the town each year on account of the soldiers, exclusive of construction contracts.<sup>121</sup> The regular army and navy were not the only defence against an enemy invasion. Army reforms in the early years of the Liberal government of 1906 saw the creation of a Territorial Force (TF) explicitly for home defence, replacing the old, inefficient Volunteer and Militia; Essex had four TF battalions of infantry formed from different areas of the county and countywide cyclist, yeomanry and artillery units.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> *Census*, 1911; Phillip and Denny, "Taking the tailoring", pp151-159.

<sup>121</sup> A.F.J. Brown, *Colchester 1815-1914* (Chelmsford, 1980), p. 25; *VCH*, vol. ix, pp. 185-86, 253; A.F.F.H. Robertson, 'The Army in Colchester and its influence on the social, economic and political development of the town, 1854-1914' (University of Essex, Ph.D. Thesis, 1991), pp. 450, 361-62.

<sup>122</sup> John William Burrows, *The Essex Regiment: The Essex Territorial Infantry Brigade* (Southend, 1932), pp. 28, 363.

The idea that Essex might need these home defence units was supported by history, literature, and military exercises. Preparations had been made in the county to guard against a French invasion a century earlier.<sup>123</sup> The prewar flurry of books depicting a German invasion of Britain frequently cited Essex as a landing ground, most notably Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands* and William Le Queux's *The Invasion of 1910*, but also P.G. Wodehouse's unsuccessful spoof *The Swoop!*<sup>124</sup> Fear of spies laying the groundwork for such an invasion reached such a scale that questions were asked in the House of Commons, such as by Colonel Mark Lockwood, MP for Epping, who claimed that a German staff ride had already taken place preparatory to an invasion.<sup>125</sup> A potential landing on the Essex coast was not confined to the pages of invasion novels and *Hansard*; major army manoeuvres in 1904 saw a force land on the coast at Clacton before making its way inland.<sup>126</sup>

### *Religious Essex*

In matters of religion, Essex again occupied a position statistically between London and the other counties of East Anglia, with 53.4 percent of the sites in Essex registered for the solemnization of marriage Anglican; this sat between the figures for London and Surrey and for Kent and Hertfordshire, and was well below the nearly three-quarters recorded in Suffolk and Norfolk.<sup>127</sup> The county was also 'a

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<sup>123</sup> Ken Smith, *Essex Under Arms, the early years to 1900* (Romford, 1998), p. 116.

<sup>124</sup> Erskine Childers, *Riddle of the Sands* (London, 1903); William Le Queux, *The Invasion of 1910, with a Full Account of the Siege of London* (London, 1906); P.G. Wodehouse, *The Swoop! Or How Clarence Saved England: the Tale of a Great Invasion* (London, 1909).

<sup>125</sup> Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service: the Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London, 1985), pp40-46.

<sup>126</sup> Marion Harding, 'The Invasion of Essex, 1904', in *National Army Museum Year Book 1* (London, 1989).

<sup>127</sup> P.P. 1914-16 (Cd 7780) 'Seventy-sixth annual report of the registrar-general of births, deaths, and marriages in England and Wales, 1913', p. 21. The figure does

stronghold of nonconformity, all sects being well represented'; the strongest sect was the Congregationalists, followed by the Methodists, smaller numbers of Catholics and Baptists and a scattering of Presbyterian and Plymouth Brethren places of worship. The spread of places of worship varied between types of settlement. Around one quarter to one third in each town were Established Church with a wide variety of other denominations.<sup>128</sup> Methodists, Congregationalists and Baptists each had around half the number of churches or halls as the established church. In general, the metropolitan areas had slightly fewer places of worship than the market and seaside towns. In the villages there was, understandably, one Anglican church in each parish, and nearly half had only this one church while elsewhere non-sectarian meeting or mission rooms catered for non-conformists.<sup>129</sup>

A survey in 1903 found that nine percent of West Ham's population attended some form of Sunday morning service, and 10.75 percent in the evening. Cumulatively this is roughly in line with churchgoing proportion of Londoners and is at the lower end of the national average of around 18-30 percent in the first decade of the new century.<sup>130</sup> Hugh McLeod points out the difficulty of establishing the degree of religious observance among the rural working classes, but notes that Essex and Suffolk seem to have had unusually high levels of attendance in the Edwardian period. He also notes that the Anglican Church was strongly linked to authority in such areas, the two interacting with the vicar joining the local elite and the local

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not represent all places of worship in Essex, but is a useful guide to relative proportions.

<sup>128</sup> Observations based on entries about 16 towns and 34 villages in *Kelly's Directory*, 1912.

<sup>129</sup> *VCH*, vol. ii, p. 81.

<sup>130</sup> Howarth and Wilson, *West Ham*, pp. 387-88; Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-century Britain* (Harlow, 2006), pp. 47, 27.

squire being active in the church.<sup>131</sup> Churches and priests thus had a prominent position in society, particularly in the countryside, even if religious observance was far from universal.

*Essex people and 'Essexness'*

H.G. Wells, a contemporary resident of the county, has left a rather rose-tinted view of the separation of London and Essex.

Essex is not a suburban county; it is a characteristic and individualised county which wins the heart. Between dear Essex and the centre of things lie two great barriers, the East End of London and Epping Forest. Before a train could get to any villadom with a cargo of season-ticket holders it would have to circle about this rescued woodland and travel for twenty unprofitable miles [...] <sup>132</sup>

Clearly, this was not true of the *whole* of the county; as we have seen, half of the population lived in urban areas 'within, but not of' Essex,<sup>133</sup> more akin to the capital than to villages like 'Matching's Easy' or Pebmarsh, or towns like Maldon or Saffron Walden; meanwhile others commuted from well beyond Epping Forest.<sup>134</sup> What Wells expressed was the feeling evoked by thoughts of Essex, which could be imagined as a purely rural county.<sup>135</sup> Wells, or at least his characters, clearly regarded the suburbs as part of London rather than part of Essex; thus we can see a major divide in the cohesion of any county-feeling.

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<sup>131</sup> Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (London, 1996), pp. 66, 112, 173.

<sup>132</sup> Wells, *Mr Britling*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>133</sup> Reaney, *Essex*, p. 104

<sup>134</sup> For example a Mr Tarleton commuted from Witham to London (Clark diaries, 26/10/1914).

<sup>135</sup> Addison, *Essex Heyday*, p1. By contrast, the modern image of Essex is largely of London overflow beyond the old Metropolitan districts into much of the south of the county.

A prewar novelist's picture of Essex encapsulates this lack of county identity. It was, he wrote:

[A] remarkable county from the number of districts it comprises, all closely abutting on one another, and yet each so absolutely distinct and separate from the others [...]. There is the "upper part of the county," near London; and the lower part, running towards Suffolk and the sea-coast; the Brentwood and Chelmsford neighbourhood, which we look on as rather smart; the Maldon and Braintree centre; the Colne Valley region, of which all the rest of Essex itself knows little beyond its name; Colchester, which means "the camp;" the "Sokens" and their adjoining centres, which make up a corner by themselves; Brightlingsea, Wyvenhoe [sic], and Rowhedge, with a population and a language differing from all the rest.<sup>136</sup>

Here we see not only the division between Metropolitan Essex and the rest, but also the distinctions between the populations in the rural areas. As we have seen, Wells wrote that rural Essex 'still lives in the peace of the eighteenth century', while Clark described his village as 'singularly isolated' and its work as 'self-centred' despite being only seven miles from Chelmsford. Far from being seen as 'rather smart', the 'more intelligent' people of Clark's district looked down on those from Chelmsford as 'illiterate'.<sup>137</sup> People's villages, towns and districts were much more part of their lives than the county; settlements around the county's towns were linked by bus, tram and cart networks that gave form to the districts described above, in the same way that the Metropolitan districts were connected to London.<sup>138</sup>

The nineteenth-century restoration of organizing power to English counties has been identified by Robert Colls as marking a renewal of county cohesion.<sup>139</sup> While this may have been true of people interested in reading the new *Victoria County*

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<sup>136</sup> Frances G. Burmester, *John Lott's Alice* (London, 1902), p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> Clark diaries, Introductory Notes, and 24/10/1914, quoted by kind permission of Dr J. Munson.

<sup>138</sup> A.R. Hope Moncrieff and L Burleigh Bruhl, *Essex* (London, 1909), pp. 136, 149.

<sup>139</sup> Robert Colls, *The Identity of England* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 225-8.

*Histories* and nostalgic for Essex's post-Roman past as a Saxon kingdom,<sup>140</sup> or serving as magistrates and interacting with the Lord Lieutenant, the sheer scale of the difference between the major regions of Essex runs counter to a cohesive sense of 'Essexness'. With so many of the residents of the Metropolitan boroughs being Londoners by birth and lifestyle and working in the capital, the people of this area would have had more in common with, and links to, the capital than to the administrative county of Essex. The absence of even local feeling was lamented by the *East Ham Echo* over the lack of celebration of Queen Victoria's jubilee in 1897 in that town and Little Ilford, where people felt a greater sense of belonging to London than to the suburbs in which they lived.<sup>141</sup>

Benedict Anderson's view of nationality as a function of a collectively 'imagined community' is also useful for sub-national communities, but at the local level community feeling was created by experience and interaction, particularly in rural society.<sup>142</sup> Anderson's notion of 'print-as-commodity' as part of the creation of fellow-feeling is limited by the fact that many people in rural areas did not read newspapers in 1914,<sup>143</sup> and by the diversity of communities and the number of newspapers serving them. There was little attention paid in those serving 'London-over-the-border' to the affairs of the rest of the county, exemplified by their lack of coverage of the north-Essex agricultural strike in 1914. The circulation of

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<sup>140</sup> See A.C. Edwards, *A History of Essex with maps and pictures* (Beaconsfield, 1965 [1958]), Ch. 2.

<sup>141</sup> *EHE*, 25/6/1897.

<sup>142</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), pp. 6, 37-46. Anthony P. Cohen, 'Belonging: the experience of culture' in his (ed.) *Belonging: Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures* (Manchester, 1982).

<sup>143</sup> James Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War, the Diaries of the Reverend Andrew Clark, 1914-1919*, (Oxford, 1988), caption to photograph opposite p. 201.

newspapers reflects divisions in the county: while some were at least nominally county-wide, most were either very localised in one borough or town, or had regional circulations: while the *Essex Weekly News* claimed readership in ‘Chelmsford, Colchester, Southend and throughout the county’, the *Essex and Halstead Times* was distributed in Colne Valley (the area around Halstead) and the east and north of Essex. The *Southend and Westcliff Gazette* claimed to report ‘all the interesting news of South-East Essex’, and the town’s other newspapers were mainly read in that region. Tellingly, the *Eastern Mercury* (based in Leyton and Leytonstone) was a newspaper covering the ‘Eastern suburbs of the Metropolis’ as well as South-West Essex.<sup>144</sup>

The county of Essex on the eve of the Great War was made up of communities based around towns and rural areas, with very distinct experiences of life, and it is possible to categorise them into three rough types. The first is the largely agricultural areas, made up of rural districts and small towns; second are the larger towns whose growth and prosperity were based on railway links, bringing markets, engineering and holidaymaking; lastly, the Metropolitan districts, although diverse, were distinct enough from the rest of Essex to be considered together, with their ties to and similarities with London.

#### *The last days of peace*

The start of July 1914 saw the county enjoying fine weather, taking part in outdoor activities and entertainments and beginning to take their annual holidays.

Thousands had flocked to Southend to see naval warships docked there and many

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<sup>144</sup> *Sell's Directory*, 1914.

more were expected for the Bank Holiday weekend. Meanwhile, workers from Southend and elsewhere were taking their work days out in other resorts and daytrip destinations in London, Essex and further afield.<sup>145</sup> The summer also brought the military out into public view, with sports and summer camps. The Essex Territorial battalions and yeomanry began their camps near Clacton and Maldon respectively. The Colchester Rose Show on July 1st featured massed bands and a parade by the brigade then stationed in the town, two battalions of which held sporting events the same week.<sup>146</sup> The Rose Show was only the first of dozens of horticultural displays put on across the county in July, thirteen being reported in one week's *Essex County Chronicle*.

Traders, entertainers, hostel owners and railway companies, and others across the county were hoping for fine weather, better at least than the previous summers had seen. The long, hot summer of 1914 has passed into folklore, but this seems to be a slight simplification of the facts,<sup>147</sup> one inspired no doubt by the contrast with the previous two Julys and the retrospective feeling that this was the 'last summer of the Golden Age'.<sup>148</sup> After a very hot start and 'brilliant weather' reported for the Ilford carnival on 11 July, by the middle of the month, the weather was

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<sup>145</sup> *SWG*, 24/7/1914, 31/7/1914; *ECT*, 14/7/1914; *ECC*, 17/7/1914.

<sup>146</sup> *IR*, 17/7/1914; *ECC*, 17/7/1914; Burrows, *Essex Territorial Infantry Brigade*; p. 29; *ECT*, 4/7/1914

<sup>147</sup> See James Cameron, *1914* (London, 1959), p. 1, and Modris Eksteins *Rites of Spring: the Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (London, 1990), p. 90.

<sup>148</sup> *Times*, 2-10/7/1914 for previous years' figures; quotation from Correlli Barnett, *The Swordbearers: Studies in Supreme Command in the First World War* (London, 1963) pp.39-40. Kit Good notes the construction of the glorious summer image ('England Goes to War 1914-15' (University of Liverpool, Ph.D. Thesis, 2002), pp. 20-21).

unpredictable to the extent that worries were expressed in late July that ‘[d]ull weather of the type common last week’ might harm the harvest if it continued.<sup>149</sup>

While holidaymakers flocked to the seaside in the hope of sun, and towns and villages prepared for their annual flower shows, there was one area of the county where the summer festival atmosphere was not so strong. This was in the rural North-West, especially in the villages around Helions Bumpstead, where unrest among agricultural labourers had grown since union members were locked-out by local farmers in February.<sup>150</sup> Although the first few weeks were characterised by ‘something of a carnival atmosphere’, attitudes were hardening by May and a haystack was burned in a farmer’s field.<sup>151</sup> A strike was called in June to demand an increase from 13 to 15 shillings per week as a standard wage (the former below even the Essex average); this soon grew from 150 picketing the original Bumpstead farm to a total of over 400 in Essex and the neighbouring counties. Beginning in good humour with football and cricket matches, the strike spread erratically until assaults and attacks on buildings used by replacement workers occurred. Socialist speakers came to support the strikers, who also had the backing of local newspapers. By the end of July a series of strikes and demonstrations was spreading, with one meeting at Haverhill attracting 1,500 people and ‘a major conflict at corn harvest’ time was prepared for.<sup>152</sup> Events across Europe meant that within weeks conflict of a different sort subsumed this local disruption: as July 1914

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<sup>149</sup> *Times*, 2/7-1/8/1914, regarding the ‘slow harvest’ 27/7/1914

<sup>150</sup> A.F.J. Brown, *Meagre Harvest: the Essex Farm Workers’ Struggle Against Poverty, 1750-1914* (Chelmsford, 1990), p. 232.

<sup>151</sup> Roy Brazier, *The Empty Fields, the Agricultural Strike of 1914* (Romford, 1989), pp. 6-11, 15-16

<sup>152</sup> Brazier, *Empty Fields*, pp. 20-24, 29, 33, 37-38, 42-43, 50, 54-55; *ECC*, 25/7/1914, *ECC*, 24/7/1914; Brown, *Meagre Harvest*, pp. 233-4.

came to an end, European war came into the consciousness of Essex people as a real possibility.

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By the time the bells of victory finally tolled on 11 November 1918, around 224,000 Essex men were serving or had served in the armed forces.<sup>153</sup> Roughly 29,800 of them died.<sup>154</sup> Those who did not serve were subject to air raids and feared invasion, they faced price increases, food crises, labour shortages and constant anxiety about their loved ones in khaki and blue. This thesis explores their experiences of the war and why they continued to support fighting the war to a victorious conclusion.

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<sup>153</sup> This figure is based on the 141,390 voters registered absent as on naval or military service in the summer of 1918; the national total of 3.89 million absent voters was 63.2% of the number of Britons who served in the war; increasing the Essex figure by the same ratio gives around 224,000. Figures from P.P. 1918 (138) 'Return showing, with regard to each Parliamentary Constituency in the United Kingdom, the Total Number, and, as far as possible, Number in each Class of Electors on the Register for the year 1918'; Winter, *Great War and the British People*, p. 75.

<sup>154</sup> A figure for war dead is hard to estimate, although a very rough estimate can be made of slightly over 2% of the 1911 population (at least 27,000), based on the numbers commemorated locally. A better figure can be estimated from a number of sources combined: the 1921 *Census* estimated the overseas war dead at 3.1% of that year's male population, giving 21,794 for Essex; increasing that number by 21.88% to account for the number of war deaths in the UK gives 26,562; accounting for the excess male absent voters in Essex over the national average (36.59% compared to 32.65 nationwide) gives another 12.1% increase. The result is a rough estimate of 29,800 Essex men who died during the war, 2.2% of the 1911 population and 13.3% of my estimated number of Essex servicemen. Figures from *Census, 1921, Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War. 1914-1920* (London, 1922) and 'Return of Electors, 1918'.

## Chapter 1 – To War, 1914

Meanwhile at home we do our bit.  
 In fact we're rather proud of it!  
 The Wounded all our thoughts engage,  
 To nurse them now is all the rage. [...]

G\_\_\_ leads her girls to sing them hymns.  
 When Rose knits comforts for their limbs.  
 Percy encourages Recruits  
 The Front will shortly see the fruits.<sup>1</sup>

Reactions to the start of a war are of great importance for popular support for the conflict. Acceptance of a war's necessity and purpose are integral parts of gaining public consent for the conflict, and the image of initial unity is often moulded and utilised later on in the war and afterwards.<sup>2</sup> In the case of 1914, and Great Britain in particular, this image covered up the fact that this acceptance and unity of purpose actually grew gradually during August and with renewed vigour following news of the British retreat from Mons. From this point, we can see the narratives of the war's defensive purpose and the evil enemy coming to the fore, along with the voluntary sacrifice of men who joined the army and other people giving up time and money to aid the war effort. Looking at responses at each stage from the initial war crisis, through August, and following desperate news from Mons, we can judge the progress of public opinion from doubt and anxiety to active support. This chapter charts this shift and investigates various manifestations of that support across the diverse county of Essex.

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from 'Christmas War Rhyme, 1914' composed by and about the Luard family (ERO, D/DLu/55/79, miscellaneous correspondence of the Luard Family).

<sup>2</sup> Adrian Gregory, 'British "War Enthusiasm" in 1914: a reassessment' in Gail Braybon (ed), *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* (Oxford, 2003) and Jeffery Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany* (New York, 2000). See SE, 3/8/1918, for a wartime-Essex example of simplification and an image of unity.

## Reactions in Essex, August-September 1914

Leigh-on-Sea schoolboy Arthur Joscelyne recalled the outbreak of war in his autobiography:

When the news broke that Britain had declared war on Germany a complete hysteria seemed to sweep through the people. It is impossible to describe the atmosphere. Wild patriotism mixed with anger at the audacity of the Germans to question England's power. The disturbance of the holy of holies, the British Bank Holiday, and the underlying fear of the few who realized the sufferings the war brought with it, were all mixed up. But most of all was the patriotism that swept through the crowds and the complete certainty that "we would show 'em", and the equal conviction it would be all over and won by Christmas, until history proved otherwise.<sup>3</sup>

British popular responses to the outbreak of the First World War have been simplified and stereotyped in popular memory, as reflected in Joscelyne's account; recent scrutiny from historians such as Adrian Gregory has produced a more nuanced view. This has seen the academic view of the opening days of the war change from a picture of united popular 'war enthusiasm' to a more mixed response, with 'enthusiastic' scenes largely confined to certain classes in urban areas.<sup>4</sup> Works by Jean-Jacques Becker and Jeffrey Verhey have critiqued and complicated the image of enthusiasm in France and Germany, showing similar variations in reactions and behaviour to those found in Britain as well as dominant

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur Joscelyne (born 1903), *Joscelyne's Beach: A Memoir of Leigh-on-Sea* (Southend-on-Sea, 2004), p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> Gregory, 'British "War Enthusiasm"'. Catriona Pennell's 'A Kingdom United: British and Irish popular responses to the outbreak of war, July to December 1914' (Trinity College, Dublin, Ph.D. Thesis, 2008) only became available to view as work on this thesis was coming to an end. It is currently under review for publication with Oxford University Press 2011-12. See also Cyril Parry, 'Gwynedd and the Great War, 1914-1918', *Welsh Historical Review*, 14/1 (1988), pp. 78-117, and (for a dominion perspective) Grant Mansfield, "'Unbounded Enthusiasm': Australian Historians and the Outbreak of the Great War', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 53/3 (2007), pp. 360-374. On one aspect of responses to the war see Stuart Hallifax, "'Over by Christmas": British popular opinion and the short war in 1914', *First World War Studies*, 1/2 (2010), pp. 103-121.

feelings of resignation and duty; meanwhile Benjamin Ziemann describes responses in rural Bavaria as ‘depression.’<sup>5</sup> How did the people of Essex respond to the coming of war?

*The Bank Holiday and the war crisis*

News and thoughts of coming war built up in the British public consciousness from around 27 July into the August Bank Holiday weekend.<sup>6</sup> Local newspapers reported the mobilisation of the Great European Powers’ armies, but did not call for action by Britain.<sup>7</sup> Coming on the eve of the Bank Holiday weekend, public feelings about the war can be sensed through public reactions to this holiday. Clacton had increased visitor figures for most of the weekend, but by Monday (3 August) the number was only two-thirds that of 1913; Southend and Walton suffered similarly on the Monday, usually the year’s busiest day, and also had fewer visitors each day than in 1913 (see Figs. 1.1-1.3). Southend’s decline in visitor numbers bucked a ten-year trend of growth;<sup>8</sup> the numbers leaving Metropolitan areas for their holidays were large, but smaller than usual.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jean-Jacques Becker, “‘That’s the Death Knell of Our Boys...’” in P. Fridenson (ed.), *The French Home Front 1914-18* (Providence, 1992); Verhey, *Spirit of 1914*; Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany, 1914-1923*, trans. Alex Skinner (Oxford, 2007), Ch. 1.

<sup>6</sup> By contrast the crisis was spread through July in Germany (Verhey, *Spirit of 1914*, Ch. 1; Roger Chickering, *Total War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 61-66).

<sup>7</sup> See *ECC*, 31/7/1914 and *ECS*, 1/8/1914. *SWWN*, 31/7/1914, for example, called for a continuation of ‘splendid isolation’.

<sup>8</sup> From around 100,000 in 1905-9 to 165,000 in 1913 (*BA*, 8/8/1914).

<sup>9</sup> *IR*, 7/8/1914; *EHE*, 7/8/1914.

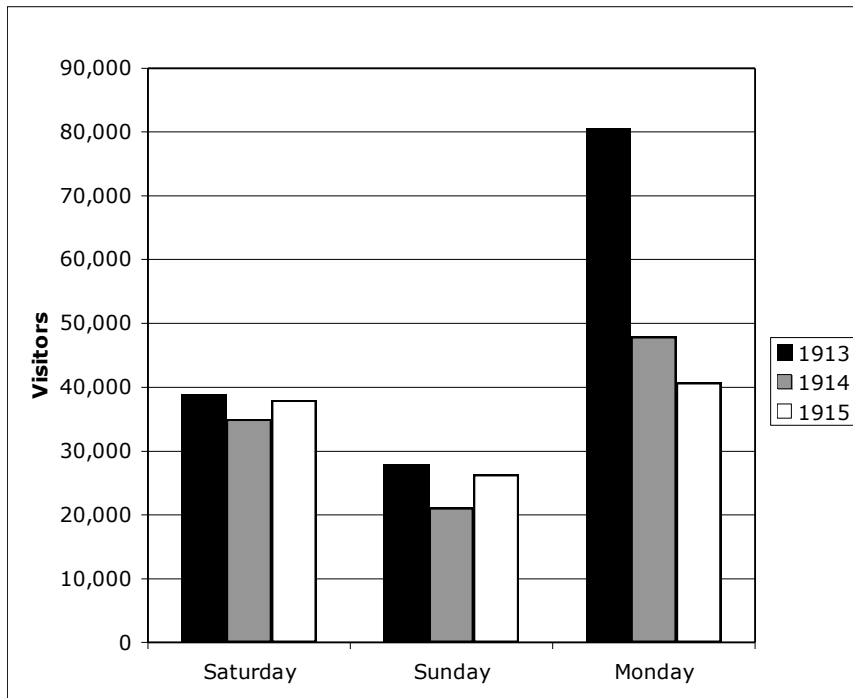


Fig 1.1 – August Bank Holiday railway visitors to Southend-on-Sea, 1913-15.<sup>10</sup>

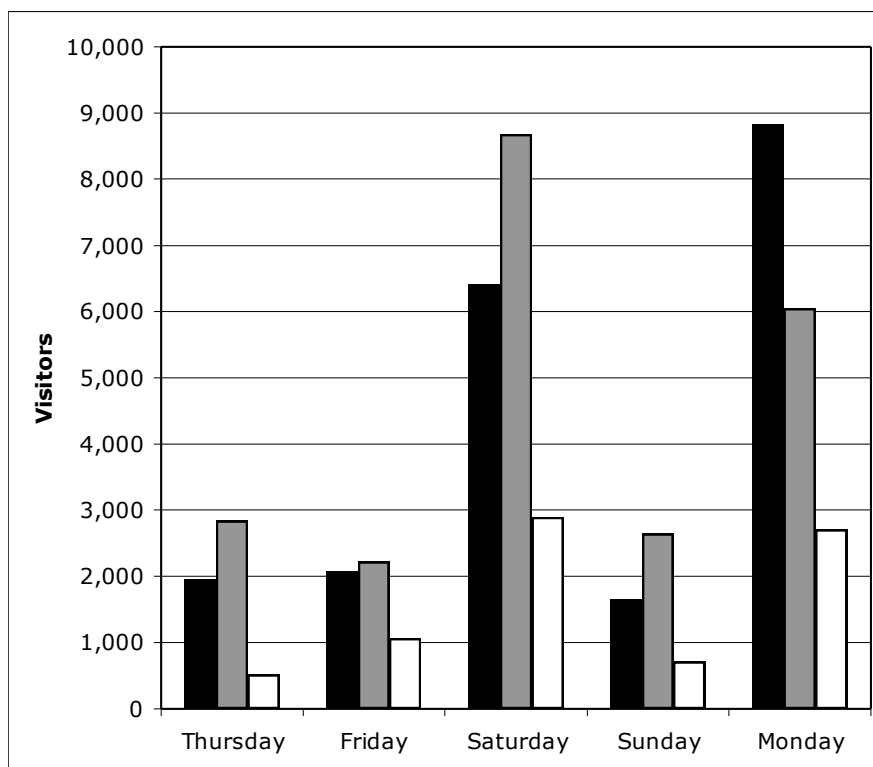


Fig 1.2 – August Bank Holiday railway visitors to Clacton-on-Sea, 1913-15.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> BA, 8/8/1914; SWG, 6/8/1915.

<sup>11</sup> ECS, 8/8/1914 and 7/8/1915.

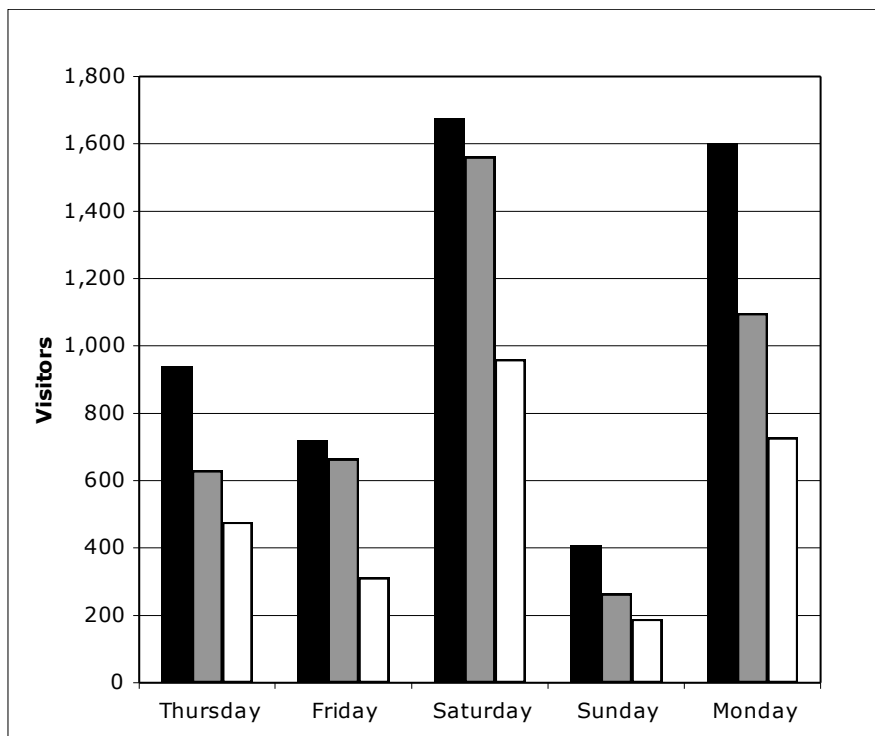


Fig 1.1 – August Bank railway Holiday visitors to Walton-on-the-Naze, 1913-15.<sup>12</sup>

While we cannot quantify the mood of these holiday crowds, the *Southend and Westcliff Graphic* noted that:

The holiday mood was damped, and although the average Londoner is apt to be theatrically patriotic, as during the days of the South African campaign, there was very little flag waving, and the anxiety to purchase the different editions of the papers showed the deep interest aroused.<sup>13</sup>

Other sources confirm that deep interest and a desire for news were the dominant features of the holiday crowd; in H.G. Wells' fictional Essex village of Matching's Easy, 4 August was 'a day of vast anticipation' dominated by rumour, war-talk and the desire for news.<sup>14</sup> Across Europe, news was 'a precious commodity',<sup>15</sup> and in

<sup>12</sup> *ECS*, 8/8/1914 and 7/8/1915.

<sup>13</sup> *SWG*, 7/8/1914. See Kit Good's comments on comparisons with the Boer War in 'England Goes to War', p. 248.

<sup>14</sup> H.G. Wells, *Mr Britling Sees It Through* (London, 1933 [1916]) p. 128; see also ERO, T/Z 25/656, anonymous *Age Concern* essay on War Memories (written in the 1960s);

<sup>15</sup> Chickering, *Freiburg*, p. 64.

Essex large crowds were reported reading official proclamations outside town halls.<sup>16</sup> Eagerness to hear the latest news does not inherently mean that war was not welcomed, but the tone of reports certainly suggests that the news was awaited in an atmosphere of fear and tension rather than pro-war excitement.

The days leading up to the war saw several prominent examples of opposition to the war. Two local Members of Parliament spoke out, in very different ways, against the war on Sunday 2 August: Walthamstow's Liberal MP Sir John Simon privately offered his resignation as attorney general in opposition to war with Germany, while Will Thorne, the Labour MP for West Ham South, addressed a pro-neutrality demonstration in Trafalgar Square.<sup>17</sup> In Essex itself, Non-Conformist ministers and those on the political left led the peace campaign. In Southend, Revd D. Ewart James spoke out against war and with two fellow ministers urged 'a day of universal Christian protest against war and prayer for peace,'<sup>18</sup> while two meetings at the Chelmsford Adult School on 2 August, led by a Justice of the Peace and several Non-Conformist and Labour speakers, passed resolutions in favour of peace before singing the National Anthem. The Seven Kings Men's Meeting stated their belief that it was their Christian duty to avoid war and their fellows at Ilford were told of the costs of war: loss of money, life, work, food, and 'friendly feeling'.<sup>19</sup> While these were primarily non-conformist, liberal or socialist voices, warnings by ministers and newspapers of various political hues about the dire economic effects

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<sup>16</sup> *EADT*, 5/8/1914; *WHSEM*, 7/8/1914.

<sup>17</sup> Bodleian Library, MSS Simon 1, Simon to Asquith 2/8/1914.

<sup>18</sup> *SWG*, 7/8/1914. Of the three, two were Congregationalists (including Ewart James) and one a Baptist.

<sup>19</sup> *ECS*, 8/8/1914; *IR*, 7/8/1914.

of a modern war were also common.<sup>20</sup> Neither local elites nor the public were united in their support for the war before 4 August; instead anxiety and concerns over distress and disruption were prominent.

*The outbreak of war and crowd behaviour in early August 1914*

The dominant image of Britain on 4 August 1914 is of great crowds greeting and even encouraging the declaration of war in Westminster. Without the police or teachers' reports used to analyse responses in Germany and France,<sup>21</sup> and without a selection of contemporary daily writings such as are available for later periods of the war, the reported behaviour of crowds is the best indication we have of people's attitudes in the first days of war. These crowds could be characterized as 'enthusiastic', one of Jeffrey Verhey's three main types of crowd noted in Germany in July and August; alongside this, he describes 'curious crowds' anxious for news and the 'panic crowds' rushing to stock up on food or withdraw savings from banks.<sup>22</sup> To these we should add mobilisation crowds, which gathered to see off soldiers; although they might easily be described as 'enthusiastic', the actual behaviour of mobilisation crowds belies that term. With its non-conscript army, Britain also witnessed crowds associated with recruitment, but these were more characteristic of late August and September in Essex, as we shall see.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> ECS, 1/8/1914.

<sup>21</sup> Verhey, *Spirit of 1914*; Becker, "Death-Knell".

<sup>22</sup> Verhey, *Spirit of 1914*, Ch. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: the Raising of the New Armies 1914-1916* (Manchester, 1988) Chs 1 & 2, Gregory, 'British "War Enthusiasm"', pp. 69, 80.

There can be no doubt that there *were* excited crowds in some places, even if they were smaller than the later myth would suggest.<sup>24</sup> These cheering crowds were largely an urban phenomenon and reached out of London into Metropolitan Essex. Julia Bush cites one in Stratford as evidence of war enthusiasm and the success of government propaganda,<sup>25</sup> but a closer look at newspaper reports reveals the more complex nature of this crowd:

Crowds assembled in the Broadway, Stratford, on Tuesday night, in the hope of witnessing the departure of Territorial troops, but they were disappointed. At one o'clock in the morning there was a large crowd still, and the announcement of the declaration of war was received with cheers.<sup>26</sup>

Clearly, there was a cheering crowd in Stratford and it grew in size towards 1a.m.; however, it did not gather to greet the war's declaration, but rather in the hope of seeing the Territorials depart. They were a potential mobilisation crowd (albeit at the enthusiastic end of this grouping), which developed into a curious crowd and later an outright enthusiastic one when war was declared. A similar gathering was reported outside the Territorial offices in Ilford, remaining to hear the declaration of war.<sup>27</sup>

By contrast, the non-metropolitan areas did not witness these late-night crowds.

Those gathering to hear the news the following day were much more subdued.

Never were Colchester people so obsessed with one subject as on Wednesday [5 August], when they awoke to find that England was at war with Germany. Yet there was no hysterical excitement. The crowds

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<sup>24</sup> Gregory, 'British "War Enthusiasm"', pp. 68-72.

<sup>25</sup> Julia Bush, *Behind the Lines: East London Labour 1914-1919* (London, 1984), p. 36. Oddly, Bush describes the scene as taking place at 1 a.m. on the Tuesday morning.

<sup>26</sup> *EHE*, 7/8/1914.

<sup>27</sup> *IR*, 7/8/1914.

that lined the streets in the evening waited calmly and patiently for news.<sup>28</sup>

These towns witnessed much activity but little enthusiasm in the first days of war, and certainly no excited crowds on the Tuesday night: instead they ‘awoke’ to the news the next morning. There is an important distinction between excitement in the sense of heightened feelings, greater activity and interest, and enthusiasm in the sense of demonstrative showing of support for the war.<sup>29</sup> The *East Ham Echo*, reported ‘an atmosphere of hardly suppressed excitement’, but ‘little sign of what has become known as “mafficking” or “jingoism”!’ as did a local paper in Southend.<sup>30</sup> Kit Good notes the recalling of Boer War ‘mafficking’ as something to avoid repeating by many newspapers.<sup>31</sup> ‘Calmness and equanimity’ or even ‘consternation and dismay’ among the population marked the initial response of many towns.<sup>32</sup> The picture for the villages of Essex is harder still to ascertain but neither Revd Reeve at Stondon Massey nor Andrew Clark at Great Leighs recorded any great reaction to the war until soldiers arrived in the area, an event that was greeted with excitement.<sup>33</sup> Although the Metropolitan districts did witness a small number of ‘enthusiastic’ crowds on the night of 4-5 August, this was limited to

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<sup>28</sup> *ECS*, 8/8/1914. Complaints about noise in Colchester High Street in previous weeks’ papers suggest that any late-night disturbance would have been reported.

<sup>29</sup> Niall Ferguson makes a similar point about wariness around the term ‘enthusiasm’ of describing crowds in his *Pity of War* (London, 1999 [1996]) p. 177

<sup>30</sup> *EHE*, 7/8/1914; *Southend Standard*, 6/8/14, quoted in Paul Rusiecki, *The Impact of Catastrophe: The People of Essex and the First World War* (Chelmsford, 2008), p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Good, ‘England Goes to War’, p. 248.

<sup>32</sup> See *IR*, 7/8/1914 and *EADT*, 7/8/1914.

<sup>33</sup> ERO T/P 188/3, Stondon Massey, Materials for a History of the Parish, Volume III (hereafter Stondon diary), c. 6-11/8/1914. Reeve appears to have written his notes up shortly after the events described. Clark was in Oxford over the Bank Holiday weekend; excitement is recorded in many of the essays of schoolchildren on the arrival of soldiers in the village, see James Munson (ed.) *Echoes of the Great War, the Diaries of the Reverend Andrew Clark, 1914-1919* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 5, 8.

those areas and the popular attitude over the following days was mixed. There was some patriotic display, and the sale of poor-quality Union Flags to children was commented upon,<sup>34</sup> but this too was most likely associated with the mobilisation crowds. More generally, the feeling was one of interest and consternation, suggesting that people were not completely behind the war and that thoughts still revolved around the impacts rather than the purpose of the war.



Fig. 1.4 – Mobilisation crowd: Territorial Cyclists departing from Saffron Walden, 1914<sup>35</sup>

The gathering of people to see the mobilisation of local troops or to watch soldiers passing through towns or villages was the most widely reported public activity after

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<sup>34</sup> *WHSEM*, 7/8/1914.

<sup>35</sup> H.C. Stacey *Saffron Walden in Old Photographs* (Saffron Walden, 1980), pl. 174. Every effort has been made to contact the copyright holder.

the war news was absorbed.<sup>36</sup> Becker's study of French responses to war in 1914 shows a distinct shift from a negative or resigned reaction to the declaration of war to a positive, dutiful, though not wildly enthusiastic attitude at the time of the departure of troops.<sup>37</sup> The mobilisation of a mass conscript army was a greater and more widespread experience in France than the departure of British Territorials and Reservists,<sup>38</sup> but the emotional reactions in Essex were similar to those found by Becker.

The crowds and their attitudes reflected the type of soldiers they were there to see and the civilians' relationship to them. It seems natural that one would be more enthused by the departure or arrival of soldiers to whom one has little or no personal attachment, since one would be less concerned about the consequences of their departure and potential injury or death, particularly where they were professional soldiers. Thus crowds cheered trains carrying troops passing through local stations,<sup>39</sup> Essex Territorials, mainly not local to the Harwich area, were greeted with cheers and 'an enthusiastic response' on their arrival there.<sup>40</sup> Even where troops were unknown to civilians, however, emotions could be mixed, one rifleman recorded a mixture of enthusiastic flag-waving, the distribution of newspapers, jeering young men, and tearful women as his battalion marched from Felixstowe to Colchester.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See Catriona Pennell's 'A Kingdom United', p. 220 for an interesting photograph of such a crowd in Sutton Coldfield.

<sup>37</sup> Becker, "Death Knell", esp. pp.30-32.

<sup>38</sup> Leonard V. Smith sees mobilisation and departure as a key part of the 'rite of passage' in French soldiers' writings, see *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers' Testimony of the Great War* (London, 2007), pp. 22-30.

<sup>39</sup> *EADT* 6/8/1914.

<sup>40</sup> *BDA*, 8/8/1914.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Lyn Macdonald, *1914* (London, 1987), pp. 50-51.

Where the soldiers were local, the type of soldier they were was important and the mixture of emotions was again marked. Territorials, usually relatively young and inexperienced as soldiers, were often described as ‘cheery’ and cheering crowds marked their departure.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, where Reservists departed, the feeling was more solemn. These men were mainly former soldiers and as such they were generally older than their Territorial counterparts and often had families, in addition to which they may well have had experience of war, or at least active service, and known more of its hardships.<sup>43</sup> Among the crowd looking for news of mobilisation in Colchester ‘sympathy [was] felt with the “married people” of the various regiments, and the wives and children seem[ed] naturally anxious and restless’, and as Reservists departed and arrived in the town ‘[v]ery little excitement prevailed’, on the same day that Territorials were cheered at the station. Little was written of the Essex villages at this time, but in nearby Suffolk villages, a ‘wonted air of quietude’ prevailed as soldiers mobilised.<sup>44</sup> In Metropolitan areas there were large crowds, but ‘many distressing scenes were witnessed’ as Leyton men departed, and in East Ham there ‘were tears and good-byes mixed up with the general rejoicing’<sup>45</sup> as the mixed emotions provoked by mobilisation were brought together.

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<sup>42</sup> *BDA*, 8/8/1914; a ‘good send-off’ was accorded to Essex yeoman leaving Tiptree on 5 August, and similar crowds saw off Southend’s artillery Territorials on the way to Shoebury (*BA*, 8/8/1914)

<sup>43</sup> A fairly direct comparison (if slightly confusing thanks to their titles) can be made between the British Reservist and the French Territorial soldier, both were older than other soldiers and their departure and attitudes more serious. Smith, *Embattled Self*, p. 121 on the French Territorials.

<sup>44</sup> *EADT*, 5/8/1914 and 6/8/1914; At Chelmsford some Reservists were ‘lively [sic] enough, but most of them took matters very seriously.’

<sup>45</sup> *LEI*, 8/8/1914; *WHSEM*, 7/8/1914.

Public responses to the start of the war, then, ranged between enthusiastic and depressed. The prime factor appears to have been the closeness of the war to the people whose reactions are reported: danger would have felt much more remote to those gathered on Stratford Broadway at 1 a.m. than to those awaiting news of their own or family members' mobilisation or fearing the war's economic consequences. The crowds greeting or seeing-off soldiers fell into the middle-ground and often embodied both responses: a show of patriotic support competing with personal worries. In any case, these visible public responses diminished after the initial news and troop movements had passed and some kind of normality had returned. One newspaper reported on 7 August:

At Witham and in the surrounding villages [in mid-Essex] everything is proceeding as before the outbreak of war. [...] As one parishioner remarked, "We neither swank nor funk, but go on."<sup>46</sup>

These responses do not show a great enthusiasm for war, or an immediate feeling that the war would be one for the nation's very existence. Indeed, the response was one of concerns over the consequences of fighting a war, whether potential glory or pain for soldiers (depending on one's relationship to them), or distress likely to be brought on by disruption to trade. The actual declaration of war removed outright opposition from the mainstream of public debate action, but did not automatically produce a war fervour or apocalyptic vision of its importance.

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<sup>46</sup> *EADT*, 7/8/1914. Arthur Marwick comments on the short life of this initial burst of 'enthusiasm', *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London, 1965), p. 29.

*Reactions through August: 'an incredible and detestable dream.'*<sup>47</sup>

After the variety of views expounded prior to 4 August, feelings soon coalesced in support of the war. Britain's innocence in the war crisis and the need to alleviate the suffering caused by war were dominant themes.<sup>48</sup> The lecture subjects at the Ilford and Seven Kings Men's Meetings in August 1914 give a good illustration of the change, although these swung from anti- to pro-war to a greater degree than was common. The meetings on 3 August warned of the disastrous effects of war and proclaimed their Christian duty to avoid it; the following week, the groups heard of Britain's 'clean hands' in the affair and the need to defend small nations, and offered prayers for women and children who would suffer from the war. Ilford Men's Meeting's 17 August lecture on the 'glorious good' that must come from the war was a long way from that delivered two weeks previously.<sup>49</sup> Although an extreme example, these lectures indicate the shift into acceptance of war in public discourse, often based on belief in Britain's 'clean hands' but also including aspects of war as a redemptive experience. There was still not an apocalyptic vision of the war, but the change shows the rallying of opinion around acceptance of the conflict.

Large crowds quickly saw off anti-war meetings in Saffron Walden, Ilford and Manor Park, often with violence.<sup>50</sup> Those seen as undermining the war effort were also treated badly. An angry crowd gathered at the scene when a landlord's wife refused to allow soldiers to be billeted in their pub, and a man was ejected from an

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<sup>47</sup> *ECS*, 8/8/1914.

<sup>48</sup> This was repeated across the country: see S.J.L. Gower, 'The Civilian Experience of World War I: Aspects of Wolverhampton.' (University of Birmingham, Ph.D. Thesis, 2000), pp.129-31; *ECS*, 15/8/1914; *BDA* 8/8/1914.

<sup>49</sup> *IR*, 7/8/1914, 14/8/1914 and 21/8/1914.

<sup>50</sup> *ECS*, 8/8/1914; *BA*, 8/8/1914; *EHE*, 7/8/1914; *IR*, 14/8/1914.

East Ham theatre for refusing to sing the National Anthem.<sup>51</sup> Others targeted German shops and shopkeepers. These anti-German attacks appear to have been largely confined to the Metropolitan districts of the county: ‘slight disturbances’ in South West Ham were reportedly the work of mischievous children, while other attacks and ‘un-English’ behaviour directed against Germans occurred in East Ham and Leyton.<sup>52</sup> In Southminster and nearby Burnham, a German reservist and ‘a man, said to be a German’, who made disparaging remarks against the British government and army were ‘punished’ by locals.<sup>53</sup> Such attacks on German individuals were not particularly widespread in the first weeks of the war; for instance local anger at Germany’s detention of Brightlingsea sea-farers did not manifest itself in violence.<sup>54</sup>

More common than anti-German violence was suspicion or outright hostility towards those thought to be a threat to the British cause. A confectioner in East Ham suffered ‘unfair treatment’, in the view of the local press, when London newspapers linked an explosion on his property with bombs and espionage.<sup>55</sup> It is notable that the actions of these crowds were generally not aimed at Germans in general, but at those seen as acting against the interests of Great Britain, whether as potential combatants or spies or simply denigrating the war effort. This reflected a general public attitude that was hostile towards the German state and its leaders, who were seen as having started the war, rather than German people themselves.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *BA*, 22/8/1914; *EHE*, 14/8/1914.

<sup>52</sup> *SE*, 8/8/1914.

<sup>53</sup> *BDA*, 8/8/1914.

<sup>54</sup> *EADT*, 7/8/1914.

<sup>55</sup> *EHE*, 14/8/1914.

<sup>56</sup> H.G. Wells describes Mr Britling’s struggles over this issue in *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* ((London, 1933 [1916]), Book II). The importance of the enemy appearing

This feeling could be used as a weapon against commercial rivals, as traders stressed their Britishness and even accused foreign traders of ‘suspicious behaviour’.<sup>57</sup>

Intolerance of explicitly anti-war views suggests that it was no longer acceptable to publicly oppose the war; however, it was still acceptable and almost expected that its dire consequences would be highlighted, as in Ewart James’ calls for help for those who were suffering, including foreign citizens. The ‘Peace Society’, accepting that opposition to the war was no longer possible, called for the exercise of self-control in these troubled times.<sup>58</sup> The dominant narrative in those weeks was of a regrettable war, but a just cause ; worries continued about its impact, but outright opposition was no longer tolerated.

What should we conclude from public actions and rhetoric in Essex after the outbreak of war? Hew Strachan warns against dismissing the presence of enthusiasm in popular reactions to the outbreak of war,<sup>59</sup> and indeed there were outbursts of patriotic feeling in Essex at the start of the war and greeting troop movements. Both exuberance and depression seem to have been results of heightened feelings in wartime, which could spark flag-waving demonstrations or despair. The opinions given in churches and newspapers, along with the publicly expressed feelings of Essex people, give an impression of the war being understood as unfortunate but just. They do not, though, indicate a feeling that the war brought

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as the aggressors is highlighted in Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I* (London, 1971 [1927]), p. 50.

<sup>57</sup> *EHE*, 14/8/1914; *ERO*, J/P 12/6, ‘Suspects’ register, especially the case of fishmonger Alfred Pawle in Burnham (#7a).

<sup>58</sup> *BA*, 8/8/1914 and 15/8/1915.

<sup>59</sup> Hew Strachan, *First World War*, vol. i: *To Arms* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 103-104.

apocalyptic danger to Britain or to civilisation itself. In fact, it was the negative effects of fighting the war that occupied much public effort and worry, rather than what was at stake were Britain to be defeated.

### *Late August and the Mons Effect*

A sense of urgency and apocalyptic purpose around the war took hold rapidly in the last week of August and early September. On 21 August a local newspaper commented that ‘precisely what is happening at the seat of war is a mystery’, but only a few days later this changed dramatically. The process began with the reports published in the *Times* from 25 August with the first accounts of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in action over the previous days, and culminating on the 30th with reports of heavy casualties, which stated that the battle ‘has so far gone ill for the Allies’ and warned that more bad news must follow.<sup>60</sup> The region’s daily paper, the (Suffolk-based) *East Anglian Daily Times*, duly reported the same accounts and the weekly press carried official and semi-official accounts of the action and rumours of German atrocities.<sup>61</sup> From this moment, there was a hardening of public attitudes and a great increase in enlistment for the armed forces as the apocalyptic narrative took much clearer shape in the minds of the public.

As a newly apocalyptic slant on the war emerged, the enemy was demonised. Anti-German feeling rose to such a level that, by October, even former pacifist Revd Ewart James expressed his regret that he could not enlist to fight that ‘hellish

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<sup>60</sup> *BDA* 21/8/1914; *Times* 30/8/1914, quoted in Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>61</sup> *EADT* 25/8/1914 and 31/8/1914; see also ERO T/B 245/3-4 Microfilm Robert Taylor Bull’s diary (hereafter ERO Bull diary) 24-31/8/1914.

creed’!<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile, public rhetoric in recruiting meetings and newspapers shifted from the need to defend small nations to the defence of civilisation itself. This extreme view, with Germany as the ‘foe of mankind’ was largely rooted in reports of German atrocities in Belgium and France, reports of which appeared alongside the first reports of British troops in action.<sup>63</sup> Although exaggerated in their details, these stories were based on the genuine brutality of the German invasion and were widely believed at the time, aided by the earnest word of prominent locals and Belgian refugees.<sup>64</sup> This sense that the Germans were a threat to civilisation added to the already heightened atmosphere in what John Horne calls a ‘totalising logic’ until the war was seen as a defensive, all-or-nothing struggle.<sup>65</sup> The new narrative gave the war a clear and vital purpose and the nation an enemy that could be easily identified and vilified.

Locally, this renewed anger saw a more intense repeat of actions seen earlier, with spy scares and attacks on Germans or German-sympathisers; unlike earlier outbursts of anger, this was based on nationality as well as perceived threats to the British war effort. There were ‘exciting scenes’ in October as a large crowd forced the early closure of a German-owned pork butchers shop in Leyton High Street before

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<sup>62</sup> *SWG*, 9/10/1914.

<sup>63</sup> See local press from 29/8/1914 onwards; quotation from *ECS* 5/9/1914; Bull records the destruction of Louvain ‘with its lovely buildings’ (ERO Bull diary 31/8/1914).

<sup>64</sup> Clark diaries, 29/10/1914 and 8/12/1914. *SWG* 9/10/1914; Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (Harlow, 1998), p. 188. For an account of the reality and myths of the atrocities, see John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: a History of Denial* (London, 2001)

<sup>65</sup> John Horne, ‘Introduction: mobilizing for “total war”, 1914-1918’ in his (ed.) *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe During the First World War* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 3; Pierre Purseigle, ‘Beyond and Below the Nations: towards a comparative history of local communities at war’ in Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle (eds), *Uncovered Fields: perspectives in First World War Studies*, History of Warfare, 20 (Leiden, 2004), p. 98.

moving on to two other shops in the area.<sup>66</sup> An angry mob outside the Saracen's Head pub in Chelmsford prompted soldiers to release the innocent man they had arrested as a suspected spy through the rear exit.<sup>67</sup> A timpanist playing on Clacton bandstand was among those accused of unpatriotic behaviour, his misdemeanour being to remain seated during the National Anthem (despite the necessity of sitting down to play his instrument).<sup>68</sup> New to this wave of anti-German agitation were accusations made of prominent people, questioning their nationality and allegiance: Revd G.M. Behr in Colchester, C.H. Kuhner in Burnham and even the Mayor of Maldon (H.A. Krohn) were forced to respond to these accusations in public and in the press.<sup>69</sup> The most newsworthy aggressive reaction was that of the people of Saffron Walden to the presence of Germans in the house of local councillor Arthur Midgley. A crowd said to be up to 500 strong (one in 15 of the population) gathered outside Midgley's house and stones were thrown. The newspaper stressed that the crowd contained many respectable members of the community, while a friend of the councillor complained that the police had done nothing to help.<sup>70</sup> As we shall see in Chapter 2 the most common responses were suspicion and spy fears, both accentuated by government actions; like violence, these responses increased in the wake of the battle of Mons and news of German atrocities.

In a country with voluntary military service, the rate of enlistment for the armed forces is a key indicator of feelings about the war. The increase in pro-war (and

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<sup>66</sup> *BA* 24/10/1914, also reported in *ECS*.

<sup>67</sup> *EWN*, 28/8/14.

<sup>68</sup> *ECS* 5/9/1914.

<sup>69</sup> *ECS* 5/9/1914; *BDA* 7/11/1914, and 14/11/1914.

<sup>70</sup> *SWWN*, 23/10/1914 and 31/10/1914. Kit Good and Catriona Pennell both refer to the incident: Good, 'England Goes to War', pp. 193-4, and Pennell, 'A Kingdom United', p. 140.

anti-enemy) feeling in late August can be judged in part from the huge rise in enlistment: enlistments increased dramatically after the news from Mons; Essex figures more than doubled in the week after 25 August and rose even more sharply the following week (see Fig. 3.1, p. 131). The reasons for men's enlistment were complex, as we shall see in Chapter 3, but the fact remains that the 'rush to the colours' began in the last week of August and peaked in the first week of September. This rush came alongside the hardening of attitudes that we have seen across the county, at the point when the nation and even civilisation itself seemed most at risk.

Mass enlistment added new types of crowd to those we have already seen: men waiting to enlist, recruiting meetings, and the civilian crowds watching their departure from the area. From the daily enlistment figures (which peaked at 231 for Colchester and 337 for Warley<sup>71</sup>) it is not possible to judge how much of a presence enlistees had on the streets around recruiting offices, but photographs taken in Southend and the fact that a church around the corner from the Colchester High Street recruiting office offered rest and refreshment to men queuing outside suggest that there were long queues at times.<sup>72</sup> Facilitating this enlistment were recruiting meetings, which aimed to convince men that they should join up and provided a setting for them to do so; dozens of men often came forwards at the larger meetings.<sup>73</sup> The direct impact of these meetings on recruitment can easily be

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<sup>71</sup> TNA, NATS 1/398, recruits raised daily.

<sup>72</sup> *SWG* 28/8/14; ERO, D/P 178/28/84, Parish magazine of St. Peter's Church, Colchester, October 1914.

<sup>73</sup> For example, a meeting in Barking drew 30 recruits in early September, *BA*, 5/9/14.

exaggerated,<sup>74</sup> but they were a major feature of public life in the last few months of 1914 and created an arena for apocalyptic anti-German rhetoric. Where groups of men did volunteer at meetings, they were often seen off in organised parades (usually a few days later) attempting to recreate the more positive of the scenes when soldiers departed a month earlier. In Grays, 76 men ‘were given a hearty send-off’ by locals in early September, accompanied by a naval boys’ band.<sup>75</sup> A photograph of a similar parade in the town (Fig. 1.5, possibly the same week) appears to show an interested, rather than enthusiastic, crowd, and one that included a number of military-aged men. The heartiest parts of the send-offs seem to have occurred when the recruits reached railway stations.<sup>76</sup> Given the mixed feelings shown when Territorials and Reservists left in August, it would be surprising if these September send-offs were universally enthusiastic, but other emotional responses were not recorded in the press; what is more likely is that they were mixed but encouraging along their route, and rounded off by an organised finale with bands and flags as the recruits reached their immediate destination, the railway station.

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<sup>74</sup> See pp. 134-44.

<sup>75</sup> *BA*, 5/9/14.

<sup>76</sup> See the send-off for men from Felsted and Rayne at Braintree station (*ECS* 5/9/14).



Fig. 1.5 – Enlistment & mobilisation crowd: New recruits in Grays and the band of TS *Warspite*, probably early September 1914.<sup>77</sup>

#### *Reactions in August and September*

The weeks between the Bank Holiday weekend and the peak of recruiting in early September saw a great change in public attitudes and actions in Essex. From a starting-position of anxiety and concern about war-related distress, opinions resolved gradually at first but with greater speed in late August around support for the war and, increasingly, an apocalyptic view of the conflict that held the Germans to be evil aggressors and the war to be a defence of civilisation. This feeling is reflected in both words and actions recorded in the county in the late summer; this period laid the groundwork for the war's narratives and the discourse of sacrifice that were prominent features of understandings of the war thereafter. The apocalyptic image gave the nation an obvious enemy and a clear purpose in defeating it; the recruiting boom reflected an acceptance of the idea of willing sacrifice that would serve as a yardstick against which others' sacrifices could be measured. The possible course of the war was less prominent as a narrative in 1914

<sup>77</sup> ERO, I/Mb 357/1/17, reproduced by courtesy of Essex Record Office

than later, although possible defeat offered one image of its course that spurred efforts to support the war effort and beat the Germans. Nonetheless, by September, a set of ideas about the war's purpose, the enemy and the need for voluntary sacrifice was in place that would remain for months and even years to come.

### **Civic mobilisation and voluntary sacrifice**

Later chapters deal directly with the two most prominent embodiments of the understanding of the war in 1914-15, the enemy and voluntary enlistment in the armed forces,<sup>78</sup> but they were far from the only ways that communities mobilised themselves for war.<sup>79</sup> In the remainder of this chapter, we shall see how local communities responded to the war over the first few months, how these actions reflect the narratives of the war and the discourse of sacrifice and how certain aspects were driven by self-interest that coincided with seemingly patriotic acts.

The political science literature on support for wars stresses the influence of elite opinions and leadership on the opinions of the general public. In Essex in 1914 it is not clear whether local elite actions led or reflected public opinion, but they were certainly attuned to it and these actions reflect broader ideas about the war and its impacts. As in the USA after Pearl Harbor,<sup>80</sup> the decline in mainstream opposition to intervention was important in Essex in 1914; beyond this, elites acted as the leaders of manifestations of civic mobilisation, reacting in similar ways to the local populations, with concerns about distress being prominent from early August and the need for soldiers coming to the fore from the end of that month.

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<sup>78</sup> Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>79</sup> See John Horne, 'Introduction: mobilizing for "total war"'.

<sup>80</sup> Adam J. Berinsky, *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq* (London, 2009), Ch. 3.

From the start of the war, prominent citizens and organisations rallied to the war effort by mobilising their resources to address the dire consequences they expected from the conflict by providing for civilians and servicemen in need. On 10 August, J. Herbert Tritton, squire of Great Leighs, wrote to the parish priest that local people could help the war effort by caring for soldiers' families, making supplies for hospitals and sowing extra vegetables in their gardens; he also commented that 'larger householders everywhere' would 'doubtless' offer their properties as hospitals.<sup>81</sup> Thus the various layers and aspects of civil society, including prominent men (MPs, mayors, landowners) and women (often prominent men's wives and daughters, but also independent ladies), newspapers, businesses, and town and village authorities, mobilised their efforts for the cause. This mainly took the form of charitable and voluntary work for distress relief, hospitals and soldiers' comforts. Aside from the recruiting campaign, the actions of local elites changed little after the news from Mons, reflecting concerns continuing from the earliest weeks of the war.

### *Distress relief*

On 6 August, the Prince of Wales launched a National Relief Fund (NRF);<sup>82</sup> an Essex branch was soon formed, in addition to which many districts began their own separate distress committees and funds. The various levels of civil society were mobilised in support of these efforts. The Liberal MP for West Ham North gave £1000 to the NRF in the first week of war; in Colchester £1764 was raised in the

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<sup>81</sup> Clark diaries, Tritton to Clark, 10/8/1914.

<sup>82</sup> Marwick, *Deluge*, p. 34.

same period, while smaller settlements raised smaller amounts in their districts.<sup>83</sup> As well as prominent large donations, local tradesmen donated their takings to distress funds,<sup>84</sup> and lists of subscribers to both local and national funds were published in local newspapers;<sup>85</sup> as in the recruitment drive,<sup>86</sup> these acknowledged those who had contributed and implicitly highlighted who had not done so. Further encouragement to subscribe came in the form of concerts, public collection-boxes and house-to-house collections.<sup>87</sup>

Churches and workplaces also led fund-raising efforts; for instance the employees of Hoffman's in Chelmsford donated £20 per week to charity. It became common for at least one Sunday's collection per month in each church to be put towards war charities and the amount raised was often greater than those for other local funds or church repairs.<sup>88</sup> By November, charitable work had become such a prominent part of local elites' roles that it was felt 'only right' that the first official engagement for West Ham's new mayor should be a concert in aid of Belgian refugees and the NRF.<sup>89</sup> Such was the scale of war-charity collection, that some worried it would deter subscription to other funds. The Essex County Hospital in Colchester appealed for desperately-needed funds in December, having given up their Sunday collection so as not to interfere with donations for war charities. Burnham's annual Aged and

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<sup>83</sup> *EHE* 14/8/1914; *ECS*, 22/8/1914.

<sup>84</sup> *BDA*, 15/8/1914; *EHE*, 28/9/1914.

<sup>85</sup> For example *BDA*, 12/9/1914; *ECS*, 22/8/1914.

<sup>86</sup> See p. 149.

<sup>87</sup> *SWWN*, 21/8/1914; *BDA*, 3/10/1914; ERO, D/B 7 M3/3/1, Chelmsford Local Committee for Relief of Distress.

<sup>88</sup> Clark diaries 8/12/1914; ERO, D/P 300/28/10, St Mary the Virgin, South Benfleet, parish magazine 1914; ERO, D/P 235/28/4, St Margaret's Church, Margareting, parish magazine, 1914.

<sup>89</sup> Newham Local Studies Library, Councillor H Dyer's cuttings book, cutting from *SE*, 11/11/1914.

Poor Christmas Fund appeal warned of this danger to their cause but eventually raised almost as much as 1913.<sup>90</sup>

As the weeks and months went on, the feared and initially-present distress abated and in most places funds collected for distress-relief were well beyond what was needed in 1914-15. Workers at some major factories, such as Hoffman's in Chelmsford, both Paxman's and Mumford's in Colchester, Courtauld's in Braintree and the Brantham 'Xylonite' works in Manningtree, were forced to work on short-time in the first weeks of the war, but they were soon back to full time, in part due to war contracts and in part thanks to the enlistment or mobilisation of some employees.<sup>91</sup> While recruiting helped to take up early slack in the industrial labour market, the recruiting boom at the end of August coincided with the end of the harvest in Essex, giving seasonal workers an obvious and honourable route out of unemployment. Stephen Gower points out that in Wolverhampton, although fears of distress seemed realistic, there was very little need for relief by the time that relief committees were in operation.<sup>92</sup> In Essex, reports on distress show a similar mismatch between expectations and reality. From early September into October, reports found little or no distress in most areas of the county; the Chelmsford Distress Committee reported only one applicant, who subsequently found work at Hoffman's, while Stansted council asked whether it was necessary to have a

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<sup>90</sup> Clark diaries 1/12/1914; *BDA*, 1/1/1914, 28/11/1914, 5/12/1914 and 2/1/1915. Other funds also carried on their annual collections, such as the Clacton Lifeboat Sunday in August (*ECS* 29/8/1914).

<sup>91</sup> *ECS* 15/8/1914, p. 2; Andrew Phillips, *Steam and the road to glory: the Paxman Story* (Colchester, 2002) p. 457; E.A. Hunt (ed.), *Colchester War Memorial Souvenir* (Colchester, 1923), p. 82.

<sup>92</sup> Gower, 'Civilian Experience', Ch. 3.

committee at all when there was no reported war distress.<sup>93</sup> The major exceptions to this trend were in coastal areas, where fishing, dock work and tourism were affected by restrictions on sea and rail travel, the latter also from the tensions of wartime.<sup>94</sup> While the docks in South Essex were said to have recovered by late August, the Clacton tourist trade received aid from distress funds and made appeals for holidaymakers to return to the East Coast,<sup>95</sup> and the fishing industry was still reportedly troubled in Burnham in December.<sup>96</sup> In general, though, the distress anticipated and prepared for in the county did not arise in 1914.

### *Hospitals*

The NRF and local distress funds were not the only war charities seeking money at the time: efforts were also made to support the Red Cross and Belgian refugee relief. By December, Mrs Nathan Smith was apparently raising 10s per week outside Hoffman's on payday 'with her huge dog on whose back a Red Cross Collecting Box is strapped'; by August 1915, Mrs Smith and Brenda the dog had raised over £111.<sup>97</sup> On the whole, collections for the Red Cross were not as

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<sup>93</sup> *ECS*, 5/9/1914; *BA*, 3/10/1914; ERO, D/B 7 M3/3/1 Chelmsford Local Committee for Distress Relief, and C/DC 14/1 County War Distress Committee minutes.

<sup>94</sup> ERO, C/DC 14/1 County War Distress Committee minutes, minutes of 4/1/1915 meeting; *SWG*, 2/10/1914.

<sup>95</sup> *BA*, 29/8/1914. No distress was reported in the docks at Tilbury at the end of the year, ERO, C/DC 14/1 County War Distress Committee minutes, report on Distress 31/12/1914; *ECS*, 3/4/15. See pp. 82-4 below for more on tourism.

<sup>96</sup> ERO, C/DC 14/1 County War Distress Committee minutes, report on Distress 31/12/1914; *BDA* 14/1/1915 – oddly the same newspaper reported little distress in October.

<sup>97</sup> Clark diaries 8/12/1914; A.K. Loyd (ed), *The County Branches, Their Organization and Work During the First Months of the War...*, (London, 1917) p. 153.

substantial as those for distress relief,<sup>98</sup> although the former continued collecting with much greater success than the NRF in the years after 1914.<sup>99</sup> Money was not the only way that the voluntary philanthropic effort could help the Red Cross, though: the largely Red Cross-trained Voluntary Aid Detachments (VAD) were already a sizeable force before the war with 71,000 members nationally, 1,800 in its Essex units; local membership reportedly reached 2,000 by late August and 2,773 by the end of 1915.<sup>100</sup> Like charities, the VAD gave opportunities for women to take an active public role from the start of the war effort both at home and, for some, overseas. Women formed three-quarters of VAD members and staffed 53 of the 70 Essex detachments in 1915.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, VADs offered men the chance to train for a non-combatant role in the war; a Chelmsford-based detachment saw over one hundred members pass through into the army by the end of 1915 from a unit strength of just 54.<sup>102</sup> The detachments' main function was to staff the new hospitals that opened in a flurry in late-1914, just as Tritton had predicted. Several were opened in August and even before the first action involving the BEF it was claimed that 2,000 wounded men could be accommodated in the county.<sup>103</sup> Many detachments spent their first months solely treating Territorials stationed in the local area; some also assisted with transportation of wounded men from hospital trains to

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<sup>98</sup> £1204 was raised for the NRF in Chelmsford by 7 September, but only £153 was raised for the Red Cross; by the end of the year, the figures stood at £1894 and £264 (ERO, D/B 7 M3/3/1, Chelmsford Local Committee for Distress Relief).

<sup>99</sup> The NRF raised £5.5 nationwide by August 1915 and only £300,000 more thereafter; in Barking £850 was raised in by July 1915 and only £50 over the next year, in Chelmsford £1894 was raised in 1914 and only £284 by April 1916 (*Times*, 7/8/1915; P.P. 1919 (Cmd 16), 'Report on the administration of the National Relief Fund up to the 30th September, 1918', p. 7; *BA*, 9/7/1915 and 8/7/1916; ERO, D/B 7 M3/3/1, Chelmsford Local Committee for Distress Relief, pp. 14, 27.)

<sup>100</sup> Loyd, *County Branches*, pp. xxxvi, lxi; *ECT* 25/7/1914; *EADT* 31/7/1914.

<sup>101</sup> *ECS* 15/8/1914; Loyd, *County Branches*, pp. 144-45.

<sup>102</sup> Loyd, *County Branches*, p. 145

<sup>103</sup> *ECS*, 15/8/1914.

hospitals, as did some of the county's wealthier citizens, who lent their cars for the purpose.<sup>104</sup>

At least twenty new hospitals were opened in Essex by the end of 1914. The properties used varied from country houses like Thorpe Hall in Thorpe-le-Soken (home of the future Field Marshal Julian Byng) and Theydon Towers to rooms in schools and workhouses. The latter were a contentious matter for local authorities as they attempted to weigh their patriotic duty up against the needs of their own residents. Tendring Board of Guardians disagreed over the matter in August, the chairman stating that the workhouse should be kept functioning while other members were wary that it might be requisitioned anyway. A month later, Halstead Rural District Council also discussed whether their buildings would be needed, which they eventually were, with 60 beds. Rooms in workhouses were also used in Dunmow and Braintree, although the Red Cross reportedly preferred to use whole buildings rather than wards of larger institutions.<sup>105</sup> With the range of properties came a corresponding variety of capacity, from as few as four at Ivylands, Epping, to sixty-five at Coombe Lodge, Warley; in fact, the headmaster of Brentwood Grammar School remarked in December that there were too many hospitals given the static course the war had taken, Coombe Lodge still being empty three weeks after it opened.<sup>106</sup> In addition to these buildings, existing civilian hospitals took in wounded soldiers. Such was the scale of voluntary provision that the Red Cross were easily able to reject accommodation that had been prepared but was not up to

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<sup>104</sup> For example, *ECS* 19/9/1914.

<sup>105</sup> *ECS* 15/8/1914 and 19/9/1914; Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 125; Clark diaries, 7/11/1914.

<sup>106</sup> Loyd, *County Branches*, pp. 150-52. ERO, D/DBq 80/5, J.F. Hough to Edwin Bean 4/12/1914 (Bean, an ex-headmaster, was the father of war correspondent Charles Bean, an Old Brentwoodian).

standard: this was fate of the parish room at St Mary's-on-the-Wall church in Colchester and a room lent by the Essex and Suffolk Fire Office and prepared by the church; eventually St Mary's succeeded in helping to open a hospital at nearby Gostwyke House.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, J.H. Tritton tried repeatedly to have his house accepted as a convalescent home for wounded officers.<sup>108</sup> By early 1915, there was an additional foreseen threat to the civilian population and several ambulances and VAD centres were set up in Southend in anticipation of air raids in the town.<sup>109</sup> Just as with distress charities, hospital and nursing work was supported by the actions of prominent citizens, local organisations, and the donating and volunteering public.

### *Comforts*

With the departure of local men and the arrival of soldiers in the county, many people and institutions also provided for the comfort and welfare of soldiers in or from their areas. Colchester led the way in catering for the tens of thousands of men stationed there with the opening of 35 recreation rooms in the town, scattered across churches and political clubs; two were opened specifically for soldiers' wives. These offered newspapers, writing paper and non-alcoholic refreshments.<sup>110</sup> Colchester council set up its own 'Social Club for Troops' in 1914, which had served around 400,000 meals by late 1915 and provided men with half a million sheets of writing paper by October 1916.<sup>111</sup> Recreation rooms existed across the

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<sup>107</sup> Hunt (ed.), *Colchester War Memorial*, pp.75-76.

<sup>108</sup> Clark diaries 9/11/1914, 26/11/1914, 1/12/1914, 6/12/1914, 11/12/1914 and 20/12/1914.

<sup>109</sup> ERO, D/BC 1/7/1/4 Southend Chief Constable's Orders, #67a, 26/1/1915.

<sup>110</sup> Hunt (ed.), *Colchester War Memorial*, pp. 58-59; *ECS*, 19/9/1914. A map was published in the *ECS* in October (see 10/10/1914).

<sup>111</sup> ERO, C948, Social Club for Troops, minutes of Annual Meeting 28/10/1915 and Annual Report 1/10/1916; the latter admits that on the matter of whether this paper

county, such in the Grammar School and the Corn Exchange in Chelmsford and schools in Bocking, but obviously only where there were sufficient troops to use them: in West Ham there were no concentrations of troops and so no need for social clubs until 1915.<sup>112</sup> They were clearly not universal as the War Office issued an appeal for just such provision in October, to which the *Essex County Standard* reacted with a gleeful observation that it was unnecessary in Colchester.<sup>113</sup> The Shire Hall in Chelmsford, as well as providing recreation space for soldiers, also had a room for VAD volunteers to mend soldiers' clothing; a similar effort organised by the Laundry and Mending Guild in Colchester combined this with providing work for unemployed tailoresses.<sup>114</sup>

More broadly, there was a large campaign led by prominent women to provide garments and 'comforts' to soldiers nearby and from the area. This followed the precedent of charitable and philanthropic work during the Boer War.<sup>115</sup> The *Burnham Advertiser* reported on a meeting on the subject in mid-August and printed encouragement and practical suggestions for making hospital garments.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, collections were made for cigarettes and other items for soldiers.<sup>117</sup> At Christmas, a renewed effort was made to send gifts to servicemen, local employers

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was used for love letters, 'or amateur efforts at poetry on the beauties of Colchester after 7 p.m. under the latest lighting restrictions, the Committee are unable to say'.

<sup>112</sup> Clark diaries, 10/9/1914 and 24/9/1914.

<sup>113</sup> *ECS*, 17/10/1914.

<sup>114</sup> Clark diaries, 10/9/1914; Hunt (ed.), *Colchester War Memorial*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>115</sup> Andrew Thompson, 'Publicity, Philanthropy and Commemoration: British Society and the War', in David Omissi and Andrew S. Thompson (eds), *The Impact of the South African War* (Basingstoke, 2002).

<sup>116</sup> BDA, 22/8/1914; NAM, 1984-06-135, diary of Mrs E.A. Courtauld (hereafter Courtauld diary), 4/8/1914; Clark diaries, 19/9/1914; ERO, D/B 7 M3/3/1, Chelmsford Local Committee for Distress Relief.

<sup>117</sup> *SWG*, 18/9/1914.

and towns providing gifts, the latter paid for by public subscription,<sup>118</sup> in localised versions of the national fund to send the ‘Princess Mary Gift Tin’ (containing tobacco and cigarettes) to soldiers.<sup>119</sup>

### *Guarding the county*

Recruitment was a major part of the response to the war in 1914, both for military-aged men and those promoting enlistment. Local organisations and prominent citizens organised, hosted and addressed recruiting meetings from the recruiting boom in early September onwards through 1915; although these will be addressed in more detail later, it is worth noting that meetings occurred in every kind of settlement and included large open-air events and marches across the county by locally-raised army units.<sup>120</sup> Through these events, prominent local figures hoped to lead local opinion, help to defend their country, increase the prestige of their district by finding volunteers, and promote the image of an apocalyptic war against a demonic enemy. As we shall see in Chapter 3, this aim was only partly fulfilled as meetings became less successful in drawing in recruits. Another avenue of involvement was local defence, through the creation of a Special Constabulary and local defence units; these were elite-led but involved a large number of local people. Like the promotion of recruitment, special constabulary service provided a way in which those unable through age or fitness to join the armed forces could help (and

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<sup>118</sup> Courtauld’s factories in Braintree and Bocking and the town of Burnham-on-Crouch each sent gifts to over 200 men, the latter with £12-10s raised by a local fund. NAM, 1984-06-135 Courtauld diary, 24/11/1914; *BDA*, 5/12/1914 and 9/1/1915.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Princess Mary’s Gift to the Troops, Christmas 1914’ [website] <<http://collections.iwm.org.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.994/setPaginate/No>> accessed 13/9/2008. This too followed a Boer War precedent.

<sup>120</sup> See pp. 134-44.

be seen to help) the war effort.<sup>121</sup> An element of civic competition similar to that in the military recruitment campaign was involved in the enrolment of ‘specials’ with the numbers in various towns and villages reported in the newspaper. By mid-September there were reportedly 17,000 special constables in Essex.<sup>122</sup>

The actual military value of the work done by special constables was quite minimal. Most districts contained little of military importance and much fun was made of spurious arrests, such as those of local tramps.<sup>123</sup> Special constables grumbled about pointless patrols.<sup>124</sup> These patrols may have put the minds of local people at ease, though, and their enforcement of the lighting restrictions in force from mid-September to prevent signalling was regarded as being a useful pre-emptive precaution against the air raids that many expected in the last months of 1914.<sup>125</sup> The home defence units formed around the same time shared some of the characteristics of the ‘specials’ in their appeal: men could do something (and appear to be doing something) to defend their homes, without actually having to join up. Similarly, they had little practical value as soldiers, although their work digging defensive trenches may have helped convince citizens that the defence of the county was in hand; they also provided basic military training for some men who later enlisted, although they seem to have been seen by some as a way to avoid joining up.<sup>126</sup> Nonetheless, the home defence groups (and the Volunteer Training Corps into which they merged later) were examples of the actions of both local elites in

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<sup>121</sup> Ferguson, *Pity of War*, p. 198.

<sup>122</sup> BDA, 3/10/1914 and 21/11/1914; ECS, 5/9/1914.

<sup>123</sup> Clark diaries, 30/10/1914; BDA, 5/10/1914.

<sup>124</sup> Clark diaries, 2/11/1914, 29/10/1914, and 16/11/1914.

<sup>125</sup> W.T. Reay, *The Specials, how they saved London* (London, 1920), p.109; on the ‘long awaited’ air raids see ERO D/DBq 80/12, Hough to Bean 21/1/1915

<sup>126</sup> ECS, 14/4/1917.

forming the units and ordinary citizens in filling their ranks;<sup>127</sup> these actions fit with the narrative of potential invasion and the need for defence, as well as the call for voluntary sacrifice – albeit a call not accepted to the extent of actually leaving one’s home and job.

### *Leisure*

The decline of professional sports, as leisure became seen as a waste of manpower and time and local organisations and those leading them became occupied with other things, is well documented. Association football was criticised as a haven for shirkers among players and spectators (it was claimed in response that football had drawn in thousands of new soldiers<sup>128</sup>) and declined as an organised sport for civilians but later became an important part of soldiers’ leisure and training.<sup>129</sup> As across the country, local teams and leagues wound up their activities across Essex in 1914 and early 1915, especially in the north of the county.<sup>130</sup> The larger teams also suffered, with Southend United selling off kits, goalposts and eventually their ground, while West Ham United’s attendances fell by around a half, although significant numbers still travelled there for matches with Millwall and Chelsea.<sup>131</sup> Although teams in the major leagues, like West Ham, played as many games as

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<sup>127</sup> See K.W. Mitchinson, *Defending Albion: Britain’s Home Army 1914-1918* (Basingstoke, 2005).

<sup>128</sup> See Colin Veitch, ‘‘Play up! Play up! and Win the War’ Football, Nation and the First World War 1914-15’ in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20/3 (1985), pp. 363-378.

<sup>129</sup> Eliza Riedi and Tony Mason, ‘‘Leather’’ and the Fighting Spirit: Sport in the British Army in World War I’, *Canadian Journal of History*, 41/3 (2006), pp. 486-516; James Roberts, ‘The Best Football Team, The Best Platoon’: The Role of Football in the Proletarianization of the British Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918’, *Sport in History*, 26/1 (2006), pp. 26-46.

<sup>130</sup> Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, pp. 255-58.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 260-61; John Northcutt and Roy Shoesmith, *West Ham United: A Complete Record 1900-1987, includes Thames Ironworks 1895-1900* (Derby, 1997), pp. 126-28, 294-300.

before the war,<sup>132</sup> the amateur majority of the sport was more heavily affected and declined markedly.<sup>133</sup> Instead, matches were played between military teams, the few remaining amateurs teams and munitions teams: a ‘munitionettes’ team beat drummers from the London Regiment 10-6, the soldiers having no goalkeeper and playing with one arm tied up.<sup>134</sup> There were also a large number of charity matches and, in 1915, a large but unsuccessful recruiting event was organised around a football match.<sup>135</sup> Other sports declined similarly in their public and amateur forms but continued to be played by military teams;<sup>136</sup> for example, cricket matches were played at Lyons Hall military camp in Great Leighs, and although the county leagues were cancelled there was a suggestion that victory in the summer of 1916 might allow a few league games that year.<sup>137</sup>

The decline in acceptability of and time for leisure had an equally dire effect on tourism. We have seen how the war crisis affected travel to Essex coastal resorts; a similar decline was extended over the whole of the holiday season that year and appeals were made for visitors to come to Essex and for the railway companies to reinstate cheap excursion fares. Some boarding-house keepers attempted, with

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<sup>132</sup> Around 36-40 per season, see Northcutt and Shoemith, *West Ham United*.

<sup>133</sup> See Veitch, ‘Play up! Play up!’, p. 375.

<sup>134</sup> *ECS*, 26/1/1918; see also Patrick Brennan, *The Munionettes: A History of Women's Football in North East England during the Great War* (Rowlands Gill, 2007), on the subject of women war workers’ football elsewhere in England; for all-male matches, see for example *ECS*, 19/10/1918, p. 4. After the war, women’s football was banned in the UK (‘TheFA.com – History of women’s football’ [website]

<[http://www.thefa.com/GetIntoFootball/Players/PlayersPages/WomensAndGirls/History\\_of\\_womens\\_football](http://www.thefa.com/GetIntoFootball/Players/PlayersPages/WomensAndGirls/History_of_womens_football)> accessed 16/10/2010).

<sup>135</sup> On charity games, see *BDA*, 16/1/1915 and 27/2/1915; John Bailey, *Not just on Christmas day: an overview of association football during the First World War* (Upminster, 1999). p. 35. See p. 138 below on the football match, which brought only three fit recruits from over 3,000 spectators.

<sup>136</sup> See Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, Ch. 11.

<sup>137</sup> Clark diaries, 9/9/1916; *ECS*, 10/6/1916.

limited success, to take legal actions against people who had booked holidays and did not arrive; more widespread, though, were depression in the trade and appeals for financial assistance.<sup>138</sup> Even from that unsuccessful summer there was a distinct decline in tourists arriving in the Essex resorts over the August Bank Holiday weekend of 1915, although the decline was much less marked at Southend than elsewhere. A combination of factors undermined the season that year, including restrictions on travel and cheap rail fares, and the reduced numbers of potential patrons with so many men in the armed forces. Essex was particularly badly affected by the threat of air raids and invasion, the former of which was brought home all too vividly in May with air raids on Southend, with the added problem that the locations of subsequent raids had been censored, giving the impression that Southend was uniquely vulnerable.<sup>139</sup>

The threat of invasion was clearly visible to visitors when they did arrive: James Hough visited Frinton in April 1915 and found ‘pickets every 1/2 mile along the coast and [...] barbed wire entanglements to prevent a landing’<sup>140</sup> – hardly the desired look of a holiday destination! *The Times* noted that Victoria station in London was overcrowded as holidaymakers headed south and west rather than to the imperilled east coast.<sup>141</sup> From late 1915, the Canadian government granted £150,000 in aid to East Coast towns affected by the war; it is notable that only £19,500 each went to Essex and Kent resorts compared to £39,000 each in

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<sup>138</sup> Paul Rusiecki, ‘NE Essex Seaside Resorts in World War One: The Resort Economy’, *Essex Victoria County History, Works in Progress*, p. 3, <[http://www.englishpastforevereveryone.org.uk/resources/assets/R/Resorts\\_in\\_WW1\\_Economy\\_2\\_5968.pdf](http://www.englishpastforevereveryone.org.uk/resources/assets/R/Resorts_in_WW1_Economy_2_5968.pdf)> accessed 1/9/2009.

<sup>139</sup> *SWG*, 11/6/1915.

<sup>140</sup> ERO, D/DBg 80/21, J.F. Hough to Edwin Bean, 23/4/1915

<sup>141</sup> *Times*, 2/8/1916.

Yorkshire and Norfolk, perhaps suggesting that proximity to London helped the former to survive and that naval bombardment had a greater impact than air raids.<sup>142</sup> Southend was allocated the largest block of money in Essex with £7,250, while Walton was granted £500, Frinton £50, Harwich £75 and Clacton £1,875, although the latter eventually received over £4,000 from the fund.<sup>143</sup> The direct and indirect impacts of the war severely affected tourism in Essex from the start of the war as busy people took fewer holidays and tended not to head to towns threatened by invasion and air raids.

#### *Billeting and economic benefits*

Distress caused by the war was minimal outside the districts that relied on tourism and widespread, if uneven, benefits were brought by the arrival of around 100,000 troops in the county.<sup>144</sup> By the end of the year, there were said to be 22,000 in Chelmsford borough and another 8,000 within a few miles, a great increase in the male population in a town with around 18,000 inhabitants and a surrounding rural district home to 22,000.<sup>145</sup> The presence of soldiers gave rise to ‘evil’ rumours about the morals of young women in Chelmsford, Halstead and elsewhere in early 1915.<sup>146</sup> Soldiers were reportedly spending £1,600 per day in Chelmsford, in

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<sup>142</sup> The remaining money went to Northumberland and Durham (£1,000) and Lincolnshire (£8,000) (*Times*, 23/12/1915, p. 3).

<sup>143</sup> Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p.174, and ‘Resort Economy’, p. 4.

<sup>144</sup> *Essex County Council Minutes*, ‘Summary of the Report of the County Medical Officer of Health, 5 Jan 1915’, p. 181.

<sup>145</sup> Clark diaries (visits to Oxford), 20-21/11/1914; *Census* 1911. Roughly the same number were probably to be found around the more populous borough of Colchester since both towns were home to roughly a full division.

<sup>146</sup> Clark diaries, 21/4/1915; Clark notes that this report was later contradicted (28/5/1915), while comments about factory girls visiting soldiers reappeared in 1916 when a camp arrived in Great Leighs (see 9/10/1916). See also Angela Woollacott, “‘Khaki Fever’ and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual

addition to some £20-25,000 per week spent by the government in housing and feeding them, amounts in keeping with those said to have been spent in other towns.<sup>147</sup> The presence of soldiers in Chelmsford had a similar effect in boosting local trade as had occurred in nineteenth-century Colchester.<sup>148</sup> One business that undoubtedly benefited from having soldiers nearby was the public house: one soldier told his wife that he only spent a small amount at the Red Lion in Chelmsford one week so as to save money to visit home, suggesting that he would usually have spent more; meanwhile restricted opening hours caused dismay among Colchester's publicans.<sup>149</sup> Other traders took advantage of the presence of soldiers to sell photographic services or postcards.<sup>150</sup> In a trend that continued through the conflict, advertising picked up on war themes, presenting goods alongside images of soldiers, references to the war and even military items and dioramas in shop windows.<sup>151</sup>

The benefits that soldiers brought to the local economy were acknowledged in an appeal from tradesmen in Burnham for soldiers to be billeted in the town and questions asked by Saffron Walden's MP in the House of Commons along the same lines. There were disadvantages, such as the reduction of local provision-buying as

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Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29/2 (1994), pp. 325-347.

<sup>147</sup> Clark diaries, 8/12/1914 and 12/12/1914; Desmond Chapman-Huston and Owen Rutter, *General Sir John Cowans GCB, GCMG, The Quartermaster-General of the Great War*, vol. ii (London, 1924) p. 26; Peter Simkins, 'Soldiers and Civilians: the billeting in Britain and France', in Ian F.W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds), *A Nation In Arms: a social study of the British Army in the First World War*, (Manchester, 1985), p. 174.

<sup>148</sup> See p. 38.

<sup>149</sup> IWM, P329, Gilbert Nash to his wife, (n.d. [winter 1914-15]); *ECS*, 12/9/1914 and 24/10/1914.

<sup>150</sup> Clark diaries, (visits to Oxford), 20-21/11/1914, and diary entry 4/11/1914; *SWG*, 4/9/1914.

<sup>151</sup> Clark diaries, 10/9/1914 and 14/12/1914; *ECS*, 29/8/1914; *BDA* 17/10/1914.

army-issued food was often used to feed host families as well as billeted men, but the advantages were felt to be greater. The County Distress Committee noted the positive impact of the Sportsmen's Battalion on the economy at Romford, and the departure of Territorials from Little Waltham caused grief, their presence having boosted local business immensely.<sup>152</sup> The desire to have troops based in a town was clearly not only based on a desire to witness and support the war effort, but also to make some money from it if possible.

The financial benefits were not confined to businesses. As well as potentially being able to share their guests' rations, the housing of soldiers could be a useful source of income. Army regulations provided 9d per night per soldier, with over two shillings for the provision of three meals (where rations were not supplied), or 3s per night for an officer. Since soldiers could be housed in unfurnished rooms and could share beds, several could easily be taken into one house. Although some examples of non-payment by the authorities were pursued by local MPs, it would appear that billeting was generally successful.<sup>153</sup> Some worried about having soldiers in towns or too close to one's house or specifically relating to certain types of soldier,<sup>154</sup> but the experience seems to have been accepted and then welcomed by most.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *BDA*, 12/12/1914 and 19/12/1914. ERO, C/DC 14/1, County War Distress Committee minutes, report on Distress 31/12/1914; Clark diaries, 18/10/1914.

<sup>153</sup> Simkins, 'Soldiers and Civilians', p. 174; IWM, 80/32/1, Memoir of Sir G. Christie-Miller, p. 49; Hansard H.C. (series 5) Vol 70, col. 805 (3/3/1915); British Library, Add MSS 54192A Parliamentary Recruiting Committee minutes, 21/10/1914.

<sup>154</sup> Clark later preserved a letter from Revd Boutflower at Terling regretting the proximity of the planned camp to the vicarage, and recorded worries about 'rough' Scottish soldiers (Clark diaries, 5/5/1916 and 19/12/1914).

<sup>155</sup> Simkins, 'Soldiers and Civilians', pp. 186-87.



Fig. 1.6: Billeting: the Hicks family in Bocking with billeted soldiers from the Notts & Derby Regiment. Note markings on doorframe denoting six men of the 8th Battalion to be billeted in the house, similar markings were a common (if fleeting) presence in villages across Essex.<sup>156</sup>

### *Civic Mobilisation*

The major public activities of the second half of 1914 broadly reflected the concerns raised *before* the battle of Mons: distress, both real and expected, and the needs of soldiers in the field or when sick or wounded. These were joined (but not replaced) by an invigorated sense of the need for men to defend the country and the local area through enlistment in the army or in local defence bodies. As we shall see again in later changes to the war's narratives and the discourse of sacrifice, it was an accumulation of meanings and roles over time. The coalescence of opinion around

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<sup>156</sup> Derrick Brisley, *Braintree and Bocking in Old Picture Postcards*, vol. iii (Romford, 1992), pl. 9; every effort has been made to contact the copyright holder for this image

the idea of an all-or-nothing war against an evil enemy did not negate the need to assist the war's victims, whether of its economic or battlefield dangers. The idea of voluntary sacrifice was clearly prominent not only in calls for people to part with their money and men with their civilian status, but also in the flurry of activity among the local elites, the landowners, MPs, councillors and others who organised local campaigns, meetings and charitable collections. The decline in leisure activities shows the extent of the war's impact on people's lives, while the keenness to have or to keep men billeted locally was often prompted by self-interest rather than a desire to assist the war effort.

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Writing long after the events, a former Ilford journalist compared public attitudes in 1914 and 1939:

I had seen the start of World War One greeted almost jubilantly and with an air of excitement. There was none of that in September 1939 – only a deep fear. There was no spirit for war. That only arose after Dunkirk when invasion of Britain looked likely.<sup>157</sup>

Hindsight has clearly exaggerated the difference between the two wars in this summary.<sup>158</sup> In fact, the war was greeted with successive waves of reactions in 1914, both in attitudes and actions. From the declaration of war on 4 August, the war was accepted as justified but regrettable. The apocalyptic narrative was not fully present, with the actions of prominent local individuals, organisations, and the general public indicating concern about the war's effects in terms of distress and

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<sup>157</sup> Basil Amps, quoted in Terry Day 'The Borough of Ilford and the coming of the Second World War: The Peace Ballot, the press and public opinion, 1933-39', (Roehampton Institute of Higher Education, unpublished essay, nd.) p. 40.

<sup>158</sup> In a sense, what happened in 1940 with the fall of France and the invasion threatened thereafter were exactly what was feared in 1914.

injury rather than seeing the war as an all-embracing battle of good and evil. This more frightening narrative did emerge, though, in the wake of the British retreat from Mons, with fears of defeat and a repeat of German atrocities in Britain. Xenophobic and directly pro-war activities (such as enlistment) increased in the weeks from the end of August.

It does not appear that local civic elites led popular opinion directly during these months, but rather that they responded to the same motivating factors that drove wider public opinion and their actions facilitated efforts made by the population, both in charitable work and in recruiting. Attention shifted from distress to defence very quickly in late August, led by events and apparent evidence of German barbarity. Although the news was mediated through newspapers and public meetings, which tended to exaggerate the excesses of violence, it was the events themselves and the perceived threat to Britain that motivated the shift in attitudes in late August. The most pertinent roles of local elites were in the removal of opposition from the public sphere in early August and in facilitating broader voluntary initiatives in terms of enlistment and charitable work. By September, the narratives of an apocalyptic war against an evil enemy were in place, as were both the discourse of voluntary sacrifice and the (also voluntary) role of local elites in promoting it.

## Chapter 2 – Enemies

‘Our very existence is at stake. [...] It is quite possible that [the Germans] may reach the coast opposite Dover within sight of the white cliffs of Kent. [...] The evidence of German espionage in England has accumulated until it is now established beyond all doubt that this country has been literally swarmed with them for years. We are such a trusting people that we have not recognised the existence of this ignoble army in our midst.’<sup>1</sup>

Through the last months of 1914 and during 1915, actual, anticipated, and rumoured actions by the Germans combined to create a real feeling among Britons of an existential threat that did not go away throughout the war. The demonisation of the enemy is an integral part of creating the apocalyptic narrative central to justifying a major war.<sup>2</sup> Harold Lasswell’s groundbreaking work on propaganda correctly identified key aspects of this process, including the enemy being seen as the aggressors and having previous form as barbaric, cruel and destructive;<sup>3</sup> by the end of September 1914, the Germans had fulfilled these in the eyes of the British public. In addition to the threat of invasion and the Zeppelin raids that began in 1915, the actions of Germans beyond Essex further built up resentment, fear and hatred. From the atrocities in France and Belgium that were highlighted in public meetings and newspaper reports, and apparently confirmed by the Bryce Report in May 1915,<sup>4</sup> to the use of poison gas at Ypres in April and rumours of a Canadian soldier being crucified by the Germans. The icing on the ‘frightfulness’ cake in 1915 came on 7 May, when a German submarine sank the RMS *Lusitania* off the Irish coast, killing almost 1,200 people. In later years the campaign of ‘piracy’ by German

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Between Ourselves’ column, *EWN*, 28/8/1914.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Smith, *Why War? The Cultural Logic of Iraq, the Gulf War, and Suez* (London, 2005), p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I*, (London, 1971 [1927]), p. 5 and Ch. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Lasswell highlights the importance of experts like Bryce and eye-witnesses (*Propaganda Technique*, p. 88); eye-witnesses appeared in local papers from Autumn 1914 (for example, *ECS*, 5/12/1914).

submarines and mistreatment of British prisoners of war only added to the image of an enemy that would stop at nothing to conquer Europe (and Britain in particular) and whom, therefore, no effort should be spared to defeat.<sup>5</sup> We shall see in a later chapter how the image of a ‘German peace’ was used as a contrast to Britain’s own war aims and ideals;<sup>6</sup> this chapter deals with the intimately linked but separate issue of attitudes towards the enemy

Essex people’s attitudes towards the Germans manifested themselves in three main observable forms: violence against supposed internal enemies; suspicion and public campaigns against those within the county thought to be enemies or their sympathisers; and campaigns and attitudes surrounding the enemy in general, most notably relating to air raids and calls for reprisals against German cities. Each of these gives us an insight into the general local fear and hatred of the enemy. As both a potential site of invasion and an easy target for German air raids, Essex was easily susceptible to the feelings of fear, hatred and suspicion that this threat caused. The twin threats of invasion and aerial bombardment meant that the county was not an agreeable place for Germans live, to paraphrase a soldier serving there in 1915.<sup>7</sup> Thanks to these threat, the actions of the Germans elsewhere and a combination of public rhetoric and official action, Germans and those living in the county thought to be German or sympathetic to them suffered greatly from suspicion and, in May 1915, unprecedented violence. These were acts that sought to symbolically exclude

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<sup>5</sup> This narrative is recounted in Revd Reeve’s summary of the war, ERO, T/P 188/3 Stondon Massey, Materials for a History of the Parish, Volume III (hereafter ERO Stondon diary), pp. 364-376.

<sup>6</sup> See pp. 190-5.

<sup>7</sup> IWM, 80/32/1, Memoir of Sir G. Christie-Miller, pp. 64-65; Christie-Miller refers specifically to Basildon and local persecution of a Mr Uberle, but could easily be applied to most of the county.

Germans from local and national communities, but whose actions in defining the new wartime communities' boundaries grouped existing outcasts with the new enemies.<sup>8</sup>

### *Alien enemies in Essex*

When anger, suspicion and official sanction were turned against Germans, they often manifested themselves against the 'alien enemies' (as citizens of Germany, Austria-Hungary and their allies were termed) in the county, the most obvious targets of exclusionary acts. Germans formed the largest group of foreign citizens in Essex, with 2,838 living in the county; in the UK as a whole they formed the second largest group in 1911.<sup>9</sup> Four-fifths of the Essex Germans lived in the six largest boroughs, with 23-25 per 10,000 citizens in each, except for Southend with 36.6. The remaining 353 were spread out across the remainder of the county (around nine per 10,000 citizens). The county also contained 319 citizens of Austria-Hungary in 1911, all but 39 in the six 'Great Towns'.<sup>10</sup> In the metropolitan districts there were local German communities, including churches.<sup>11</sup> Across the county there is evidence of the incorporation of Germans into existing local communities; many were married to English wives and working as respected

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<sup>8</sup> The idea of symbolic exclusion is used by Kit Good and is similar to the idea of 'fictive kinship' described by Nicoletta Gullace (Kit Good, 'England goes to War, 1914-15', (University of Liverpool, Ph.D. thesis, 2002), Ch. 5; Nicoletta F. Gullace, 'Friends, Aliens and Enemies: Fictive Communities and the Lusitania Riots of 1915', *Journal of Social History*, 39/2 (2005), 245-67).

<sup>9</sup> Only London and Middlesex held more Germans than the 1,970 in the Administrative County of Essex (i.e. excluding the 868 in West Ham); Russian Jews were the UK's largest migrant group by 1911 (Panikos Panayi, *The Enemy in our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (Oxford, 1991), p. 1).

<sup>10</sup> *Census*, 1911.

<sup>11</sup> Panikos Panayi, *German Immigrants in Britain During the Nineteenth Century, 1815-1914* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 166, 204-205.

traders.<sup>12</sup> Germans and their descendants were prominent in local communities and business; for example, the mayor of Maldon and the founders of Chelmsford engineering company Hoffmann's. One prewar steward of the Southend Conservative Club was a German veteran of the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>13</sup> Certificates of naturalisation as British citizens were gained on the basis of these strong connections to an immigrant's local area and by 1911 there were 353 German-born and 40 Austrian-born naturalised citizens in Essex.<sup>14</sup>

When war was declared, these alien enemies immediately faced restrictions. More than half of Essex came within the coastal 'prohibited zone';<sup>15</sup> all aliens living in these areas had to register their presence and alien enemies were removed; they were thereafter only allowed to visit with a permit (enemies from September 1914, and all aliens from April 1915) and from February 1916 all aliens in the country had to register their addresses.<sup>16</sup> Male alien enemies of military age were interned from September 1914, although some were later released before a major round-up after May 1915; women could be repatriated to Germany.<sup>17</sup> There were a number of early arrests of aliens who failed to register and some confusion over the status of men

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<sup>12</sup> IWM, P336, memoirs of Richard Noschke, p. 53; ERO Stondon diary, 30/10/1914.

<sup>13</sup> *SWG*, 4/9/1914.

<sup>14</sup> Laura Tabili, "Having Lived Beside Them All The Time": Negotiating National Identities Through Personal Networks', *Journal of Social History*, 39/2 (2005), pp. 369-87; *Census*, 1911.

<sup>15</sup> ERO, J/P 12/1, Home Office memoranda and police correspondence on restrictions placed on aliens, letter from Essex Chief Constable Capt. J Unett to the undersecretary of state at the Home Office, 30/7/1919. Curiously, the whole of Suffolk and Norfolk were restricted zones.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, memoranda dated 5/8/1914, 14/9/1914, 21/4/1915 and 4/2/1916.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, memoranda dated 7/9/1914 and 20/10/1914; Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, Ch 3.

who had renounced their German citizenship but not become naturalised Britons.<sup>18</sup> Two Essex Regiment soldiers were arrested for failing to notify police of their changed addresses when mobilised; one received a warning, the other a penal sentence.<sup>19</sup> Curiously, the prohibited zone did not include the Metropolitan Police District, so that aliens were at greater liberty there than in most of Essex, although they still faced difficulties finding work and running businesses and suffered animosity in the street.<sup>20</sup> Beyond limiting aliens' movements and residence, specific restrictions against them, and others for the whole population, served to alert the population to possible signs of espionage. The act of registration, along with internment or removal from the prohibited zone, reinforced the message that there were enemies in the midst of the Essex population but failed to reassure the public that they had been dealt with. With German frightfulness abroad and attacks on British civilians, this combination made life hard for those of German (or more broadly foreign) origin, and for others who did not fit in.

### **Causes of antipathy**

#### *Spy and invasion fears*

Before the war, Essex was considered to be in the front line of a potential German invasion both in the popular image based on pre-war invasion literature and in the official view reflected in exercises on the Clacton coast.<sup>21</sup> This continued into the war as public rhetoric stressed the dangers of invasion, as witnessed in Belgium,

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<sup>18</sup> See *EWN*, 18/9/1914, 9/10/1914, 30/10/1914 and 11/12/1914.

<sup>19</sup> *EWN*, 16/10/1914 and 30/10/1914.

<sup>20</sup> The Metropolitan Police District covered the metropolitan areas of Essex. IWM, P336, Noshke memoir, pp. 2-3; Anna Gerbis commented that animosity was not constant but after May 1915 she did not feel able to reopen her interned husband's shop (TNA, HO 45/10787/298199, Aliens: Alleged maltreatment of German and children in the United Kingdom, #10).

<sup>21</sup> See pp. 38-9.

and was backed up by visible military preparations for the defence of the county. Three lines of trenches were dug across the county to prevent a force landing at Harwich or Clacton from reaching the capital.<sup>22</sup> Newspapers and recruiters played a parallel and mutually-supporting role in highlighting the danger of invasion as both stressed the vulnerability of Essex and the horrors wrought in Belgium. Catriona Pennell notes that, although only 5.2 percent of the *Essex County Standard's* articles on the war in late 1914 referred to potential invasion, they almost all addressed it as a 'real and dangerous possibility' at a time of severe fighting in Flanders and the naval bombardment of the East Anglian coast.<sup>23</sup>

The naval bombardments of Scarborough, Hartlepool, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft caused outcry in the county and local newspapers speculated that they might have been intended for Essex towns.<sup>24</sup> The county's most prolific recruiting speakers, Captain C.B. Norman and Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Taylor, used invasion and atrocity fears in their talks. Taylor was more circumspect,<sup>25</sup> but Norman's talks, particularly towards the end of 1914, contained gruesome allusions to the German plans and frightfulness, as in the story of a wounded German officer with wounds inflicted by scissors and bites who was carrying a young woman's severed hand when captured; Norman's narrative suggests that this murder (and

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Kent, 'The Fixed Defences' in Gerald Gliddon (ed.), *Norfolk and Suffolk in the Great War*, (Norwich, 1988), especially pp. 7-8 and Fig. 2. The diarists Reeve, Clark and Courtauld all record their descriptions of these defensive lines.

<sup>23</sup> Catriona Pennell, "'The Germans have landed!': Invasion fears in the South-East of England, August to December 1914' in Heather Jones, Jennifer O'Brien and Christoph Schmidt-Supprian (eds), *Untold War: New Perspectives in First World War Studies*, History of Warfare, 48 (Leiden, 2008), pp. 113-14. On the other hand, Kit Good states that invasion was not considered a real threat (Good, 'England goes to War', p. 210), but the evidence from across Essex supports Pennell's description.

<sup>24</sup> ERO Bull diary, 21/12/1914; *ECS*, 26/12/1915 and 2/1/1915.

<sup>25</sup> *ECS*, 29/8/1914 and 7/5/1915.

implied rape) would be repeated in England.<sup>26</sup> The threat to Essex was particularly prominent in Norman's speeches:

Essex would be the first county to bear the brunt of the invasion. Supposing the Germans came to Chelmsford! [...] The Mayor, the Bishop and other prominent citizens would be taken as hostages [and killed if ransoms were not paid].<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, J.H. Tritton at Great Leighs spoke about 'the infamy of German warfare in Belgium, [showing] what an invasion of this country would be if the Germans ever came here.' Another recruiter called the Germans 'the worst savages that ever lived.'<sup>28</sup> It was not only recruiting meetings that carried these stories to the public: 'patriotic meetings' held for Belgian distress charities stressed the destruction wrought by the invading Germans, while newspaper reports and published letters from soldiers told of atrocities against civilians.<sup>29</sup>

How much weight did fears of invasion carry with ordinary people? They were often seen as directly threatening to one's own home: one Great Leighs lady reportedly considered an invasion likely but doomed to fail, while another in Boreham felt that the decisive battle would be fought opposite her cottage.<sup>30</sup> Revd Reeve similarly feared that 'in the case of hostilities, little would be left of the

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<sup>26</sup> ERO, T/P 181/12/3, Cuttle Cuttings: Great Waltham, 4/12/1914. One might wonder whether Norman's shady past, which included dismissal from the Indian Army for financial irregularities and imprisonment in Turkey, in any way undermined his position of authority on the 'truths' of the war (ERO, J/P 12/6, 'Suspects' register, #232). Norman continued his propaganda work, penning articles for MI7b, throughout the remainder of the war (NAM 1987-11-118, Capt. C.B. Norman papers).

<sup>27</sup> EWN, 27/11/1914.

<sup>28</sup> Clark diaries, 6/9/1914; BA, 5/9/1914.

<sup>29</sup> For example 'The War and Belgium' leaflet for a patriotic meeting in Walthamstow to include lantern slides of 'towns before and after the German invasion', 17/12/1914, (WFA, Acc. 7927); see also ECS, 24/10/1914.

<sup>30</sup> Clark diaries, 11/2/1915 and 4/2/1915.

village [which was on one of the defensive lines]. The Church would almost certainly be destroyed, as a gun is to be established in its near vicinity and would draw the shells of the enemy.<sup>31</sup> By early 1915, the military threat was largely diminished as public fears abated and, by June, farmers and soldiers in Braintree were said to consider any invasion impossible.<sup>32</sup> Fears were still expressed privately as late as 1916,<sup>33</sup> and the military practised for a landing at Clacton that year.<sup>34</sup> There were serious fears about how the public would react to an invasion: Great Leighs Special Constabulary leader William Brown felt that an invasion would prompt “a most awful fright” and wild scenes of panic’.<sup>35</sup>

Lord Warwick, Lord Lieutenant of Essex, was careful to stress that his establishment of committees in late 1914 to plan for evacuation did indicate increased threat of invasion.<sup>36</sup> The first meetings of these committees took place in December and January, and they planned routes of evacuation westward across the county to Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire.<sup>37</sup> Lists were drawn up of the numbers of infirm and young who would need to be transported,<sup>38</sup> of the livestock that would need to be driven or destroyed, and of able-bodied men who could carry out this

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<sup>31</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 30/10/1914. Ongar man George Rose wrote similarly about the fate of Temple church in London if the nation were attacked; ERO, D/DU 418/15, diary of G.H. Rose, 6/12/1914.

<sup>32</sup> Pennell, “The Germans have landed!”, p. 111, cites H. R. Moon, ‘The invasion of the United Kingdom: Public Controversy and Official Planning, 1888-1918’, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, 1968), p. 328; Clark diaries, 14/6/1915.

<sup>33</sup> ERO, D/DGd C44, Marion Todd to Revd Dixon, 27/4/1916.

<sup>34</sup> TNA, AIR 1/646/17/122/343, Papers relating to a Sham attack at Clacton.

<sup>35</sup> Clark diaries, 15/3/1915.

<sup>36</sup> *EWN*, 4/12/1914; ERO, D/BC 1/7/1/4, Southend Chief Constable’s Orders, #55, 12/11/1914.

<sup>37</sup> See *BDA* 26/12/1914, 2/1/1914 and 9/1/1915 and ERO Stondon diary, 15/12/1914. For more detail see Pennell, “The Germans have landed!”, pp. 105-106, 109-12.

<sup>38</sup> See ERO Stondon diary, 15/1/1914 and Clark diaries 15/3/1915.

work.<sup>39</sup> In most places these plans were made public in February 1915, being posted up in the villages and published newspapers in some areas, or distributed on cards.<sup>40</sup> In Great Leighs, Brown feared provoking panic and so only distributed the information to farmers with livestock.<sup>41</sup> Evacuation routes were marked out across the county with arrows painted on trees and walls to direct the refugees, offering a very visible symbol of the threat.<sup>42</sup> A dry-run in August 1918 revealed problems with the plans as local animosities caused some people to refuse to work with others.<sup>43</sup> Another potential problem was that able bodied men might prefer to help their own families rather than the local sick and infirm.<sup>44</sup> Fear of invasion was quite real, especially in the first six months of war; it is hard to distinguish between general fear of suffering an invasion and the specific fear of barbarous German invaders. Either way, awareness of the risk of invasion and preparations both kept alive and were reinforced by the image of a barbarous enemy during the first winter of the war, and occasionally thereafter.

The harsh treatment likely to be meted out to Britons after a German invasion was apparently confirmed by stories of mistreatment of British prisoners of war arriving in Germany. Heather Jones has shown how a cycle of violence in the treatment of prisoners of war grew during the war, much of it rooted in indignation about the

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<sup>39</sup> See IWM, 87/53/1, B.E. Todhunter records relating to emergency planning in the Saffron Walden area, and Pennell, "The Germans have landed!", p. 110-11.

<sup>40</sup> *ECS*, 13/2/1915 and 6/2/1915.

<sup>41</sup> Clark diaries, 15/3/1915.

<sup>42</sup> Pennell, "The Germans have landed!", pp. 110, 114; this was commemorated with a small plaque in Ugley near the Hertfordshire border.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 111-12.

<sup>44</sup> W.W. Lawrence, *W.W. Lawrence, 1888-1968* (unpublished memoir held at ERO), p. 50; Michael Bardell, 'Total War 1914-1918, An Essex Village Diarist's View' (University of Essex, MA Dissertation, 2002), pp. 31-46.

treatment of each nation's soldiers when captured by their enemies.<sup>45</sup> In Britain, where German prisoners had received an inquisitive rather than aggressive reception, the treatment of Britons in Germany was a matter of public discussion and horror from early in the war.<sup>46</sup> Public agitation intensified from 1917, with a government report and comments in public meetings.<sup>47</sup> Locally, comments were made about German maltreatment of British prisoners showing their ingrained hatred of Britain, in contrast to Britain's 'soft' treatment of civilian internees. Those who organised comforts for Essex Regiment prisoners of the Germans stressed their atrocious treatment; they were 'in the hands of an enemy who had been shown to be capable of absolutely everything that was brutal.'<sup>48</sup> The deportation of Belgian civilians 'to work and slave for their German task-masters' was also known,<sup>49</sup> adding further to the image of a vile enemy willing to abuse unarmed prisoners of war and captive civilians. Such stories, on top of news and allegations of atrocities in 1914, may not have heightened expectations that an invasion would happen, but they certainly painted a fearful picture of the horrors that an invasion would entail.

#### *Zeppelins and air raids, 1915-16*

As preparations for evacuation proceeded and the threat of invasion receded at the start of 1915, the enemy opened another line of attack. A first venture over Dover

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<sup>45</sup> Heather Jones, 'The Enemy Disarmed: Prisoners of War and the Violence of Wartime: Britain, France and Germany, 1914-1920', PhD thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 2006, and 'Encountering the 'enemy': prisoner of war transport and the development of war cultures in 1914' in Pierre Purseigle (ed.) *Warfare and belligerence: perspectives in the First World War studies History of Warfare*, 30 (Leiden, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> Jones, 'The Enemy Disarmed', pp. 102-3, 106.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, Ch. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *WG*, 25/5/1917 and 13/4/1917, quotation from 2/11/1917.

<sup>49</sup> *ECS*, 13/4/1918.

on Christmas Day alerted people to the genuine threat of air raids, but they were treated with derision and interest as much as fear when the first raids on Essex failed to strike any significant target or kill anyone.<sup>50</sup> As time went on and the raids became more concerted, deadly and accurate, derision turned to fear and anger, often directed towards internal enemies. Indeed, as we shall see, it was at the time of the first deadly air raids that violence and suspicion aimed at alien enemies and other perceived enemy sympathisers was at its peak; alongside battlefield atrocities and actions at sea, air raids proved once more the perfidy of the Germans.

As with the risk of invasion, the threat of destruction from the sky was seen as directed against one's own patch of Essex. Even the absence of obvious local targets for raiders was no solace. Revd Reeve in Stondon Massey recorded his feelings in September 1915:

There are times when it is an advantage to be of little importance and inconsiderable. Certainly it is a satisfaction when Zeppelins are soaring overhead to feel that we are not worth the expense of the bombs they carry! Not that the Germans would neglect to take an opportunity, we may suppose, even in rural districts, if at any time it presented itself.<sup>51</sup>

People had learned from the bombardments of seaside towns and early air raids that this ruthless enemy would not restrict himself to sites of real military importance.<sup>52</sup>

Discussions among the McNarry family in Leyton and Romford reveal sleepless

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<sup>50</sup> Southminster draper H.L. Buxton specialised in war-themed advertising; one began '50 GERMAN ZEPPELINS OVER ESSEX/ Could not destroy my splendid reputation', while another had the Zeppelin's crew navigating across the Dengie peninsula based on the pilot's awareness of the quality of Buxton's boots (*BDA*, 17/4/1915 and 1/5/1915). See also *ECS*, 24/4/15.

<sup>51</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 13/9/1915.

<sup>52</sup> German claims that their targets had been fortified towns were repeatedly published in Essex newspapers, see *ECS*, 30/1/1915 and *SWG*, 14/5/1915.

nights and preparations to escape provoked by the raids.<sup>53</sup> The raids caused a great deal of distress among the Essex population; unlike the later Gotha raids, the Zeppelins were deeply feared across the county.

If there is a single dominant image in Essex civilians' war recollections, it is that of the Zeppelin, and particularly the small number that were shot down in flames over or within sight of Essex.<sup>54</sup> Accounts of these events show mixed emotions but the dominant feeling was glee at the death of a feared enemy: 'the shouting in the streets was terrific, there cries was [sic] burn you b----- burn.'<sup>55</sup> While jubilation was the most common response, some had mixed feelings, as Mrs McNarry wrote: 'Amidst all the cheering I could not help thinking of the crew in the Zepp being burned to death. Of course in their journey they were dealing death on their way.'<sup>56</sup>

Young Mary Blakeley thought that she could see the crew on fire:

I cried out: "There are 40 men burning"  
My mother cried: "They would have killed my children".  
We kept repeating our macabre duet, even, at times, during the  
following day.<sup>57</sup>

Although feelings of humanity and sympathy were expressed towards these crews, the overwhelming feeling was that, by targeting civilians – women and children –

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<sup>53</sup> Ruth Meldrum, *The McNarrys, circa 1750 to 1950* (privately published, Manitoba, 1995), pp. 309-11, letters dated September and October 1915.

<sup>54</sup> Eight Zeppelins were destroyed in or near to the UK (seven in 1916), of which two fell in Essex in September 1916, two more were destroyed nearby (A.A. Foster, 'Strategic Bombing and the Community: Some Effects and Consequences of the Zeppelin campaign of 1914-1918 on the County of Essex, with Special Reference to the County Borough of Southend-on-Sea', unpublished dissertation, Cambridge (1996), Appendix C).

<sup>55</sup> Quotation from ERO, T/Z 25/690, Age Concern essay by Mrs Wilks (see also 25/651 by Mrs Cockhill).

<sup>56</sup> Meldrum, *McNarrys*, p. 325, letter written 23/9/1915.

<sup>57</sup> ERO, T/Z 25/655, Age Concern essay by Mary Blakeley. In her narrative, Blakeley notes that she was mistaken in the number of crew.

the Zeppelin raids breached the rules of war and of civilised behaviour. By 1916, this was almost expected behaviour from this hated enemy.

## **Responses, 1914-16**

### *Anti-German Violence*

Up to spring of 1915, there had been scattered violence against Germans and their supposed sympathisers, often coinciding with periods of particularly severe fighting and news of atrocities, such as in August and October 1914.<sup>58</sup> News about the sinking of the *Lusitania*, though, sparked the greatest attack on immigrants in modern British history, as attacks flared in towns across England, growing to a peak on 12 May.<sup>59</sup> In Metropolitan Essex the pattern of attacks largely followed that seen elsewhere and earlier in the war.<sup>60</sup> ‘Disturbances’ were reported outside German shops, spilling over into rioting in the evening with attacks across East Ham, Plaistow, Upton Park and Barking Road; a dance academy between East Ham and Upton Park was also attacked. In the latter district, a butcher’s shop was broken into and looted but a large dog prevented the same happening at a neighbouring jeweller’s.<sup>61</sup> Rioting spread across the area, with West Ham and the London boroughs of Poplar and Limehouse facing some of the worst incidents.<sup>62</sup> In West Ham, twenty trading properties were damaged in somewhat indiscriminate attacks. A crowd of up to 3,000 that attacked a Leytonstone butcher’s shop also attacked the

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<sup>58</sup> See pp. 61-2 and 65-67.

<sup>59</sup> Panayi, *Enemy in our Midst*, pp. 257, 240-47.

<sup>60</sup> See Good, ‘England goes to War’, p. 193, and Catriona Pennell, ‘A Kingdom United: British and Irish Popular Responses to the Outbreak of War, July to December 1914’ (Trinity College, Dublin, Ph.D. Thesis, 2008), p. 145.

<sup>61</sup> *East Ham Recorder*, 14/5/1915; *ECC*, 14/5/1915; TNA, HO 45/10787/298199, Aliens: Alleged maltreatment of German and children in the United Kingdom, #10.

<sup>62</sup> W.T. Reay, *The Specials, How They Saved London* (London, 1920), pp. 160-61.

pub of a Scotsman named Strachan, while another British publican (this time one with a foreign name) suffered the same in Stratford.<sup>63</sup> Home Office reports of an incident in Plaistow similarly record the progression of a 5,000-strong crowd from smashing up a German-occupied house to attacking a British pub.<sup>64</sup> Although most of the attacks reported in the press were on German-owned (or German-sounding) commercial properties, the *Essex County Chronicle* noted that continuing trouble on 13 May in Canning Town had extended to English traders, in reprisal for these traders' kindness to 'blacklegs' in the 1912 Dock Strike.<sup>65</sup> Kit Good reports similar attacks on pre-war strikers' 'enemies' in the Keighley riots of 1914.<sup>66</sup> These events suggest limits to the xenophobic targetting of the attacks; they were sparked by the violence of war events and anti-German anger, but were quickly co-opted for the entertainment of violent thugs and the resolution of existing grudges. At Plaistow, many among the 'hooligans' had travelled from other boroughs specifically to join in the attacks.<sup>67</sup>

Other than a failed attempt to break into a furniture shop in Grays,<sup>68</sup> the only reported violence in non-metropolitan Essex came in Southend. There, the tinderbox of national anger was ignited by the town's experience of the county's first deadly air raid, in which one woman was killed and several buildings destroyed on 10 May. Initial feelings of 'scorn and distain' soon turned to anger against the

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<sup>63</sup> *ECC* 14/5/1915.

<sup>64</sup> This was one of the 26 cases of mistreatment made against Britain by women repatriated during the war. See Gullace, 'Friends, Aliens and Enemies', pp. 256-58; HO 45/10787/298199, Aliens: Alleged maltreatment of German and children in the United Kingdom, #18.

<sup>65</sup> *ECC*, 14/5/1915.

<sup>66</sup> Good, 'England goes to War', p. 181.

<sup>67</sup> HO, 45/10787/298199, #18.

<sup>68</sup> *ECS* 15/5/1915.

‘murderers’ and those in the area supposedly guiding them.<sup>69</sup> Following a street meeting (erroneously) decrying the presence of alien enemies in Southend, a crowd attacked the shops of several Germans who had already left the town, and one with a German name but bearing notices that everyone working there was English, before being dispersed by policemen and soldiers at 10 p.m.<sup>70</sup> Unlike attackers elsewhere, the Southend rioters did not move on to neighbouring British properties. In fact, after smaller-scale rioting in Southend in January 1916 (which did attack non-German-named properties) and in London in summer 1917, claims for damages from anti-German riots showed that two-thirds of the damage caused in Southend was against ‘alien enemies’, compared with between a quarter and one third in the Metropolitan Police District and elsewhere in the country.<sup>71</sup> This suggests that the Southend rioters were more discriminating and those in the Metropolitan riots more likely to attack property belonging to Britons or ‘alien friends’, although naturalised Germans would have been counted as Britons. Again, this suggests a hijacking of efforts to violently define the boundaries of the wartime British community by less ‘patriotically’-motivated rioters.

The attitude of magistrates and local papers was mixed, suggesting sympathy with rioters’ anger, if not for their actions.<sup>72</sup> A relatively small number of rioters were tried and fines were issued by local courts; those who appeared in court were often

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<sup>69</sup> Ken Crowe, *Zeppelins over Southend: the story of South East Essex in the First World War*, (Southend, 2008), pp. 3-6; Foster, ‘Strategic Bombing’, pp. 28-31, 47-49.

<sup>70</sup> *EWN*, 14/5/1915; Foster, ‘Strategic Bombing’, pp. 50-51; *SWG* 14/5/1915; Crowe, *Zeppelins over Southend*, p. 9. It is unclear whether the owner of the last-mentioned shop was British or not.

<sup>71</sup> TNA, HO 45/10944/257142/183, Disturbances: Anti-German Riots

<sup>72</sup> Good comments on press antipathy to riots being rooted in part in their desire for calm and unity, ‘England goes to War’, for example p. 177.

remarkably unrepentant and magistrates tended to condemn their resort to mob rule rather than the xenophobia that inspired it.<sup>73</sup> This language of a brutal enemy was repeated in the local press, with even the liberal *Essex County Chronicle* stating that the story of the crucified Canadian and other atrocities showed Germany to be a savage and barbarous nation.<sup>74</sup> By contrast *East Ham Recorder*'s leader-writer called the crowd 'addle-pated hooligans' who had come from outside the borough simply to cause trouble and suggested that they should be joining up to fight the Germans rather than plundering at home,<sup>75</sup> a feeling echoed elsewhere in the country.<sup>76</sup> The *Southend Observer* condemned the riots,<sup>77</sup> but the *Southend and Westcliff Graphic* railed against the presence of aliens and naturalised citizens:

A person with German blood in them is rightly considered to be a dangerous enemy. The Borough has many of such of both sexes – people who while all the time declaring their allegiance to this country and their hatred of German methods, yet in their heart of hearts are Germans to the core. "Once a German always a German" is absolutely true.

A clean sweep is the **only** remedy.<sup>78</sup>

At the time of the riots, a national 'Anti-German Union' was formed,<sup>79</sup> which sought to push the government into interning all alien enemies, and naturalised citizens of enemy origin. The Union was heartily endorsed by the *Southend and Westcliff Graphic*, and its success may be gauged by the success of a fraudulent

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<sup>73</sup> *ECC*, 14/5/1915; *SWG*, 21/5/1915.

<sup>74</sup> *ECC*, 14/5/1915.

<sup>75</sup> HO 45/10787/298199, #18; *East Ham Recorder*, 14/5/1915.

<sup>76</sup> Gullace, 'Friends, Aliens and Enemies', p. 351; Good, 'England goes to War', Ch. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Good, 'England goes to War', p. 201.

<sup>78</sup> *SWG*, 14/5/1915 (emphasis in original).

<sup>79</sup> See Panayi, *Enemy In Our Midst*, Ch. 7.

Anti-German League, whose Ilford-based organiser was tried in 1916 for obtaining £900 under false pretences.<sup>80</sup>

The anti-German riots largely fit with the major war narrative of the threat posed to Britons by their barbarous German enemy, which created a binary of us versus them, good versus evil. This built upon a prewar history of anti-alien and anti-German feeling, including fear of espionage.<sup>81</sup> As in the late summer of 1914, the language used of the Germans was very much of a savage race, wilfully ignoring the civilised way of war. By 1915, thanks in part to concerns over Germans in the county and government actions that highlighted their presence, and in part to the widely-discussed threat of invasion, the risks posed by an internal enemy were a further matter of deep concern. As we shall see, this concern had a wider impact in provoking fear and suspicion, but in May 1915 it provided targets for violence. Nicoletta Gullace has described wartime British society as a ‘fictive kinship’ group defined on the basis of British blood ties, from which Germans were excluded even where they had been included in the lived communities of prewar days.<sup>82</sup> Good asserts similarly that the riots were part of a ‘violence of belonging’ that sought to define the boundaries of communities in wartime.<sup>83</sup> This analysis is a useful way of understanding how the image of evil Germans and good British was projected back into British communities, through both anti-German rhetoric and official action against and encouragement of suspicion about alien enemies, who were seen as outside the wartime kinship group but inside the nation and thus a threat. The

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<sup>80</sup> *SWG*, 17/9/1915 and 22/10/1915; *IR*, 14/7/1916.

<sup>81</sup> See Panikos Panayi, ‘German immigrants in Britain, 1815-1914’ in his (ed.) *Germans in Britain since 1500* (London, 1996) and David French, ‘Spy Fever in Britain, 1900-1915’, *Historical Journal*, 21/2 (1978), pp. 355-370.

<sup>82</sup> Gullace, ‘Friends, Aliens and Enemies’.

<sup>83</sup> Good, ‘England goes to War’, Ch. 5.

extremity of the language of hatred and fear of the Germans can also be seen reflected in the extremity of the actions taken against German property in the *Lusitania* riots of 1915. They were also in part of continuation of prewar models of political and popular violence, both in their designation of outsiders and, occasionally, in their targets.<sup>84</sup> In other ways, though, the riots were outside the accepted narratives of the war, most notably in their attacks on British property; the ease with which violence directed at specific targets could be widened into attacks on other shops and pubs for the purposes of looting, revenge or simply fun, was clearly worrying to magistrates and some newspaper writers. The war called for the *organised* use of force, as recruiting speeches for the home defence forces formed in 1914 and 1915 stressed; the riots were not this organised use and those men who wanted to fight Germans should have been joining up to fight them in Flanders, not breaking shop windows in Plaistow and Southend.<sup>85</sup>

### *Suspicion*

At around the time of the riots in South Essex, there were rumours around the village of Thaxted about a recently-arrived man with a suspiciously Germanic-sounding name. Two ladies from nearby Great Easton told the police that he ‘takes long walks [...carrying] sketches and maps to which he referred and wanted to know the depth of the well and whether it was the only in that district.’ Despite the rumours, local police could find no solid evidence of wrongdoing by Gustav von

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 186, 192, 206.

<sup>85</sup> Jörg Nagler discusses anti-German feeling similarly running beyond what national leaders desired in the USA in his ‘Pandora’s Box: Propaganda and War Hysteria in the United States During World War I’ in Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, *Great War, Total War: combat and mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 2000).

Holst, musician and ‘hymn writer’.<sup>86</sup> On one level this may seem to be spy-hunting on the level of the character George in the BBC comedy *Blackadder Goes Forth*,<sup>87</sup> but the details of the case highlight many of the sources of suspicion that the wartime atmosphere of fear and hatred aroused, exaggerated and often legitimated. Holst’s apparently-Germanic name aroused suspicion,<sup>88</sup> but his recent arrival in the village (in 1914), inquisitiveness, and what were presumably simply walks around the area obviously also looked suspect.<sup>89</sup>

The kinds of suspicions that focussed on Holst were far more common and widespread than the violence of May 1915. Essex Police recorded nearly 300 examples of individuals, groups, firms, and occurrences brought to their attention as being suspicious.<sup>90</sup> These reports cover the county police force, not the Metropolitan, Southend or Colchester forces that also operated in Essex;<sup>91</sup> however, cases from other forces were often passed on, and the records provide a useful insight into the actions and circumstances that caused suspicion, and of the range of official responses. Like the riots, suspicions were rooted in the sense of a British kinship group that was threatened by members of an enemy population in amongst it hoping for invasion and assisting air raids. The popular image of German

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<sup>86</sup> ERO, J/P 12/6, ‘Suspects’ register, #11.

<sup>87</sup> *Blackadder*: ‘There’s a German spy in the hospital and it’s my job to find him.’/ George: ‘[...] Exciting stuff, eh? Wait a minute! I think I’ve got a plan already. [...] [L]ook down the list of patients and see if there’s anyone here whose name begins with “von” – he’s almost bound to be your bloke’; Richard Curtis, Rowan Atkinson and Ben Elton, *Blackadder: the Whole Damn Dynasty* (London, 1998), p. 427.

<sup>88</sup> The Holsts were of Scandinavian and Russian descent and dropped the ‘von’ in 1918.

<sup>89</sup> Information on Holst from John Warrack, ‘Holst, Gustav Theodore (1874–1934)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, May 2008. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33963>> accessed 31/7/2008.

<sup>90</sup> ERO, J/P 12/6.

<sup>91</sup> Foster, ‘Strategic Bombing’, p. 18.

espionage and intention to invade was reinforced by official measures to counter an invasion and to remove alien enemies from coastal areas. Spy-hunting also gave citizens a role to play in winning the war;<sup>92</sup> they were told that ‘Everyone is only doing his or her duty who calls the attention of the authorities in a discreet way to any suspicious characters that may have fallen under their notice.’<sup>93</sup> This type of appeal prompted reports not only of activities associated with espionage, but also of people whom the reporters disliked or simply knew little.<sup>94</sup> Some reports were made by ‘imaginative’ or serial denouncers.<sup>95</sup> While Germans were being cast as evil outsiders from the British kinship group, outsiders in local communities were seen as potential enemy agents. Such suspicions built upon existing grievances and complaints in communities and cast them in wartime binary terms of friends and enemies, just as dockers in Canning Town used anti-German riots to attack the properties of shopkeepers against whom they held a grudge.

Most reports revolved around suspects’ nationalities and supposed sympathies, or around actions that might be expected of spies. In the first category, a small number of genuine alien enemies were removed following reports, but far more often naturalised citizens and non-enemy aliens were reported. Dutch, Russian, Italian and American citizens came to the notice of the police, along with many naturalised Britons of various origins, thought to be Germans owing to their behaviour, name or

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<sup>92</sup> Ann-Marie Einhaus, ‘Espionage, the Enemy and Home-Front Anxieties: Spy Stories in Popular Magazines, 1914-1918’ (paper presented to International Society for First World War Studies conference, 2009).

<sup>93</sup> *ECC*, 9/10/1914, quoted in *ERO*, T/Z 13/163, Helen Platts, ‘The Effects of the First World War on the Rural Communities of Danbury and Little Baddow’, unpublished essay (1980), p.18.

<sup>94</sup> Good, ‘England goes to War’, pp. 129-30; Pennell, ‘A Kingdom United’, p. 141.

<sup>95</sup> *ERO*, J/P 12/6, #56.

appearance.<sup>96</sup> The Swiss, in particular, caused suspicion: one local newspaper at the start of May 1915 railed against the number of pre-war ‘good Germans’ who had now become ‘good Swiss’.<sup>97</sup> Retired Swiss pipemaker Anton Busser reportedly lived in a house with the unfortunate name of ‘Spions Kop’ (hardly a name showing its owner’s confidence in British arms<sup>98</sup>) overlooking defensive trenches near Vange and was twice reported as a German signalling to the enemy.<sup>99</sup> Businesses were investigated over their owners’ nationality and allegiance, from Hoffmann’s in Chelmsford to Warner’s in Walton; Anglo-Swedish fishsellers Franz Siederman were accused of ‘trading with the enemy’ by someone shocked that a firm with such a name would be trading on the East Coast in wartime.<sup>100</sup> This was an extension of the public campaign against German and Austrian citizens who, in the words of a local paper, ‘have been naturalised and pose as British subjects, yet in their hearts are well-wishers of the countries of their birth in the life-and-death struggle now proceeding’.<sup>101</sup>

Although reports to the police had died down by 1916, the county force was still active in its investigation of suspicious characters and responded to another public outcry against naturalised citizens. German-born residents were put onto two lists of people recommended for deferred internment, meaning that they would be taken

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid* for example: #10, #23, #21, #175.

<sup>97</sup> *SWG*, 4/5/15.

<sup>98</sup> Spion Kop was the name of a major British defeat in the Boer War, in which the Boer fighters held positions overlooking those of the British.

<sup>99</sup> ERO, J/P 12/6, #36. This is not the title given on Busser’s naturalisation forms (HO 144/1351/260739); his accusers had perhaps confused it with another Vange house called ‘De Kopje’.

<sup>100</sup> ERO, J/P 12/6, #82, #154, #158, #159, #201; *EWN* 30/10/14; *SWG*, 28/5/15

<sup>101</sup> *BDA*, 15/5/1915.

into custody in the event of a German invasion.<sup>102</sup> At least 24 people were thus recorded, around a third of the number of naturalised Germans and Austrians living outside the Metropolitan or Southend Police Districts.<sup>103</sup> The lists categorised people as either potentially useful to the enemy or as likely to directly aid the invaders. The latter group, it was stressed, were not a threat at present but ‘would in all probability go and assist [their] countrymen if a favourable opportunity offered itself.’<sup>104</sup> The rhetoric of ‘once a German always a German’ was clearly at play here and men of German origin and ‘uncertain sympathies’ were considered to be a latent threat to the nation.

The other category of dangerous naturalised citizens were those whose inescapable identity as former Germans made them a liability. Their local knowledge (key to their becoming naturalised<sup>105</sup>) and ability to speak German meant ‘that important information could be extracted from [them] once [they were] accessible to the enemy.’<sup>106</sup> Thus, not only were those who might prefer a German victory to be feared but so too were those who would not actively seek to aid an invading army. Such suspicions were the fuel that fired campaigns against naturalised citizens, such as the resolutions passed by Saffron Walden Town Council and others calling for all Germans or ‘part-Germans’ to be interned, whether naturalised or not.<sup>107</sup> The continued feeling of an imbedded threat is reflected in concerns expressed by the

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<sup>102</sup> ERO, J/P 12/6.

<sup>103</sup> There were 63 German-born and 2 Austrian-born naturalised citizens recorded outside the ‘Great Towns’ in Essex in the 1911 *Census*. The 24 included two British men on Mersea Island who were also thought to be untrustworthy.

<sup>104</sup> Taken from ERO, J/P 12/6, #219.

<sup>105</sup> Tabili, ‘Having Lived Beside Them’.

<sup>106</sup> Taken from ERO, J/P 12/6, #216.

<sup>107</sup> ERO, T/P 181/12/6, Cuttle Collection: Saffron Walden, (n.d.); see Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, pp. 216-18.

Chief Constable of Essex in a letter to HM Inspector of Constabulary in March 1919 suggesting the continuation of monitoring of all foreign and naturalised citizens; in response, he was told that a national register would be drawn up.<sup>108</sup>

As well as question-marks over people's nationality, accusations were made that a person was 'pro-German' on the basis of apparent lack of support for the war effort, ranging from anti-war comments to regret over the war's occurrence and disruption. As we have seen, concerns about hardship were common through the first months of the war and great sums were raised to relieve it. By spring 1915, though, there were suggestions that even this level of doubt in the war effort was enough to attract criticism,<sup>109</sup> as could disbelief in various war rumours about spies and enemy agents.<sup>110</sup> A Burnham man was suspected because he had had German governesses and allegedly stated his regret that the nations were at war.<sup>111</sup> In late 1915, W.G. Newman was sent out of the county on account of alleged pro-German talk in a pub, not helped by his pre-war practice of claiming to be German to enhance his reputation as a clock-maker.<sup>112</sup> The fear and risks of being falsely thought to be German are suggested by numerous cases of slander settled in and out of court,<sup>113</sup> by the flurry of advertisements in the press in 1914-15 that stressed the Britishness of local businesses and individuals,<sup>114</sup> and by the police investigation into a woman

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<sup>108</sup> ERO, J/P 12/1, Home Office memoranda and police correspondence on restrictions placed on aliens, Captain J Unett to Sir L Dunning, 29/3/1919, and Dunning to Unett 31/3/1919.

<sup>109</sup> See Major Caldwell's remarks, Clark diaries, 7/3/1915.

<sup>110</sup> ECS, 1/5/1915.

<sup>111</sup> ERO, J/P 12/6, #196.

<sup>112</sup> EWN, 12/11 and 27/11/14; ERO, J/P 12/6, #162

<sup>113</sup> ECS, 17/4/1915 and 10/2/1917.

<sup>114</sup> BDA, 14/11/1914; EWN, 30/10/1914.

after she jokingly told a local ‘busybody’ who questioned her about her nationality that she ‘must be a real Prussian.’<sup>115</sup>

Actions and words that were deemed to be anti-war were widely regarded as ‘pro-German’, as were comments that seemed to undermine the commitment of the nation’s entire strength to the war effort. A speech by Bertrand Russell at the Ilford (Congregationalist) Men’s Meeting, discussing peace principles for avoiding future wars, was decried in the letters page of the local paper as part of a ‘stab-my-country-in-the-back’ campaign that the minister had no moral right to allow. For several weeks, the paper carried accusations of pro-Germanism, countered by defences of the meeting, the minister, and the policies of the Union of Democratic Control, whom Russell was representing.<sup>116</sup> From the start of the war, actions that were deemed to hinder recruitment were illegal, as well as being dubbed ‘pro-German’, while the latter tag was applied even more broadly to those who campaigned for peace throughout the war and, after January 1916, to conscientious objectors and those who supported their legal right to object to military service.<sup>117</sup> Among them was Sir John Simon, MP for Walthamstow and now Home Secretary, who was also accused of being pro-German when *Reynold’s Newspaper* demanded that he confirm or deny the claim that he had threatened to resign from the Cabinet rather than support a war against Germany.<sup>118</sup>

With invasion and air raids seen as a real threat through the first winter and spring of the war, activities more directly linked to espionage were commonly reported.

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<sup>115</sup> ERO, J/P 12/6, #90.

<sup>116</sup> *IR*, 23/7/1915, 30/7/1915, 6/8/1915 and subsequent editions.

<sup>117</sup> For example *EWN*, 14/1/1916 and *WHSEM*, 8/6/1917.

<sup>118</sup> Reported in *ECS*, 24/7/1915.

These mainly concerned communications and the gathering of information. The possession of telephones, homing pigeons and wireless apparatus was restricted within the prohibited zone.<sup>119</sup> While the former could cause trouble for foreign traders, the others provided grounds for many reports to the police, most bizarrely when a pigeon on a Maldon roof attracted two or three hundred onlookers and provoked a police investigation that found nothing suspicious.<sup>120</sup> Even more common were reports of signalling with lamps; regulations demanded that houses were to be blacked out to prevent signalling and to hinder enemy aviators' navigation and special constables enforced regulations, infringements of which carried heavy fines, particularly for repeat offenders.<sup>121</sup> Any unexpected light, especially if it appeared intermittently, could be cause for suspicion, from a flapping blind to a distant motorcar.<sup>122</sup> Suspicions of motorcar lights provoked comments in the press about allegedly upturned headlights guiding Zeppelins; motorists were reported to police even when the suspect was not in the area at the time of the incident.<sup>123</sup>

As in the case of Gustav von Holst, the use of a map or the questioning of local people caused instant suspicion. Local soldiers hounded a man out of Stondon Massey on the basis of his possession of Ordnance Survey maps and alleged 'foreign' accent.<sup>124</sup> A foreign-sounding stranger making maps around Great Leighs

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<sup>119</sup> ERO, D/BC 1/7/1/4, Southend Chief Constable's Orders, #47 (14/10/1914) and #112 (17/12/1915); *ECS* 17/7/1915; *EWN* 23/10/1914.

<sup>120</sup> ERO, J/P 12/6, #3, plus other pigeon cases: #29, #155, #179; see also NAM 1984-06-135, diary of Mrs E.A. Courtauld (hereafter NAM Courtauld diary), 10/10/1914.

<sup>121</sup> For example, *ECS*, 20/3/1915 and *BDA*, 26/6/1915.

<sup>122</sup> ERO, J/P 12/6, #84.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, #85

<sup>124</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 5/7/1915.

was repeatedly arrested by soldiers but turned out to be a Swiss Ordnance surveyor.<sup>125</sup> From the start of the war, artists and photographers were stopped and arrested across the county.<sup>126</sup> The risks of military information being found out by enemy agents led the local police to issue instructions to constables not to give information on regiments, numbers or locations of troops to strangers,<sup>127</sup> despite regiments' names appearing on their uniforms, vehicles and headquarters buildings and often being reported in local newspapers. Similarly, early restrictions on access to the defensive trenches gave way in some places to organised tours.<sup>128</sup>

Alongside activities identifiably associated with espionage, people who were not known locally or whose actions might be identified as deviant were also suspected. In Shenfield, a newcomer was apparently regarded as a spy on the basis of having moved to the area only in July 1914 and occupying the house next to the village constable.<sup>129</sup> Suspicions were heightened when these factors combined with a foreign name like the Roeppels in Burnham, French-Swiss publican Emile Rudin in Danbury, or the Swede Jens Boving, and with 'suspicious' behaviour such as using a motorcar, as in the case of a visitor to the vicar of Tolleshunt Major.<sup>130</sup> Numerous others were reported by reason of their being unknown and often quiet and reserved,

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<sup>125</sup> Clark diaries 20/10/1914. Presuming that this was his real identity, this seems a peculiarly insensitive assignment on the part of his employers.

<sup>126</sup> ERO, D/Du 418/15 Diary of G. Rose, 6/8/1914; *ECS* 22/8/1914; *EADT*, 7/8/1914.

<sup>127</sup> ERO, J/P 7/5, Essex Chief Constable's General Orders, 7/2/1915.

<sup>128</sup> Revd Reeve described the trenches from a distance in November but notes their heavy guard in mid-December (ERO, Stondon diary, 10/11/1914 and 15/12/1914). When Clark noted in December 1914 that trenches at Panfield were open to the public (Clark diaries, 9/12/1914), Mrs Courtauld had already been to visit them (NAM, Courtauld diary, 3/12/1914).

<sup>129</sup> ERO, J/P 12/6, #12.

<sup>130</sup> ERO, J/P 12/6, #154, #10, #208, #168; Platts, 'Danbury and Little Baddow', p. 18.

such as a Clacton postmaster described as ‘of so austere and unapproachable character that nobody appears to know anything about him’.<sup>131</sup> Other behaviour was reported that was considered more straightforwardly ‘deviant’ in the period, such as a man seen to consort ‘in an odd way with sailors and talk to them’.<sup>132</sup> Keepers of a temperance hotel reported a local soldier as suspicious after he repeatedly stayed out past midnight.<sup>133</sup> Trade rivalry or simply over-imaginative minds also accounted for several of the cases reported in 1914-15.<sup>134</sup> Overactive special constables also arrested vagrants, as much from need of activity as from a sense of danger.<sup>135</sup>

One exception to this trend of fear and suspicion was the use of German prisoners of war as replacement labour on farms. There was some concern about using Germans in the prohibited zone, but this was soon overcome and applications for labourers began in late 1916.<sup>136</sup> Although initially treated with curiosity and some animosity, Germans soon became sought-after labourers on farms and for other projects.<sup>137</sup> By June 1918, there were over 1,300 Germans working on the land in Essex and hundreds more had been applied for.<sup>138</sup> Unlike German civilians interned

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<sup>131</sup> ERO, J/P 12/6, #8, see also #66, #99 and #195 for reserved characters

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, #38, see also #51, and IWM 86/32/1, Memoir of Sir G. Christie-Miller, pp. 65-66.

<sup>133</sup> ERO, J/P 12/6, #134

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, #7a, #56, #110, #112

<sup>135</sup> See verse in Clark diaries, n.d. [following 31/12/1914].

<sup>136</sup> ERO, D/Z 45/15, County War Agricultural Executive Committee minutes, 27/10/1916 and 24/11/1916. Prisoners were also widely used in Kent, another county that was largely a prohibited zone, W.A. Armstrong, ‘Kentish Rural Society during the First World War’ in B.A. Holderness and Michael Turner (eds), *Land, Labour and Agriculture 1700–1920: Essays for Gordon Mingay* (London, 1991), pp. 118-9.

<sup>137</sup> Pamela Horn, *Rural Life in England in the First World War* (Dublin, 1984), pp. 146-49.

<sup>138</sup> See ERO, D/Z 45/19, minutes of the Agricultural Executive Committee June-October 1918 (statistic from minutes of Labour Committee 17/6/1918) and ERO, D/Z 45/15, minutes of the War Agricultural Committee (Executive).

in 1914 and 1915, who suffered verbal and physical assaults in Essex,<sup>139</sup> these prisoners were apparently respected once they had begun to work.<sup>140</sup> This exception could be due to their having fought on the battlefield rather than potentially being underhanded spies;<sup>141</sup> however, it is equally likely that the necessity (and financial benefit) of their labour was recognised and so their presence accepted.<sup>142</sup>

Just as Holst embodied several factors that attracted distrust, so too did the owner of Stisted Hall, Cecil Sebag-Montefiore. Having moved there in 1907, he spent vast sums on his estate (which included the local village) and became part of the Essex scene as a local guardian, a deputy lieutenant, and host of the Essex Agricultural Show.<sup>143</sup> Early in 1915, Andrew Clark recorded ‘a wild legend that is spreading like flame through Bocking and Braintree’ that Sebag-Montefiore had been arrested for signalling and was being held as a German spy.<sup>144</sup> Two months later another rumour had German aviators landing in the grounds of Stisted Hall.<sup>145</sup> These allegations, which never made it into police records, seem all the more crass and bizarre given that that Sebag-Montefiore was in fact serving in the army overseas and was seriously wounded in an explosion in May 1915.<sup>146</sup> The claims were undoubtedly

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<sup>139</sup> For example, Rudolf Rucker, *The London Years*, trans. Joseph Leftwich (London, 1956), p. 258, and IWM, P336, Richard Noschke memoir, pp. 21-22.

<sup>140</sup> Jim Priest, *Parndon Recollections* (Harlow, 1980), pp. 66-67.

<sup>141</sup> Pennell regards the calm and inquisitive reception of German prisoners in 1914 to be a function of the timing of their arrival, before anti-German fervour was at its peak, ‘A Kingdom United’, pp. 151-2.

<sup>142</sup> P.J. Flood notes a similar use (with early qualms) of German prisoners on the land and in other industrial sectors in the Isère *département* of France, *France 1914-18. Public Opinion and the War Effort* (Basingstoke, 1990), pp. 69-73.

<sup>143</sup> *Times*, 12/6/1913 and 29/11/1913; Bruce Ballard *The History of Stisted Hall*, (Ingatestone, 1998), p. 20; *Times* 12/2/1923; Clark diaries, 7/3/1915.

<sup>144</sup> Clark diaries, 7/3/1915.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 8/5/1915.

<sup>146</sup> His wounds probably contributed to his ‘unsound mind’ when he committed suicide in London in 1923: *Times*, 12/2/1923; *Jewish Chronicle*, 16/2/1923.

based on his unpopularity rather than suspicious behaviour; whether this was because he was a Jew, had only arrived relatively recently, was planning to sell the estate, or because he had attempted to force men to enlist in 1914 is impossible to judge, but each probably played a part.<sup>147</sup> For Holst and Sebag-Montefiore, as for many less prominent citizens, outsider status or local distrust could see one cast as an enemy in the binary of wartime belonging, just as the new ‘enemy within’ in the form of German-born citizens were being cast as outsiders.

### **Air raids and reprisals, 1917-18**

Air raids, as we have seen, brought home the reality of war and the vulnerability of their own homes for Essex people; they also, according to one observer, undermined the spread of pacifism in the eastern counties.<sup>148</sup> The threat changed slightly as Zeppelin raiders became less successful and were replaced by heavier-than-air bombers in 1917.<sup>149</sup> The growing success in destroying Zeppelins and later apparent success in downing Gotha bombers increased confidence in Britain’s air defences to protect people from German ‘frightfulness’; this was undermined, though, by successful raids.<sup>150</sup> Defences around London were increased to the

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<sup>147</sup> Ballard, *Stisted Hall*, pp. 20, 23-24; *Times*, 11/6/1914; *BA*, 29/8/1914; *ECS*, 5/9/1914; see Chapter 3 for more on heavy-handed recruiting techniques.

<sup>148</sup> Quoted in David Monger, ‘The National War Aims Committee and British patriotism during the First World War’ (King’s College, London, Ph.D. Thesis, 2009), p. 98.

<sup>149</sup> Of the 20 Zeppelin raids that targeted Essex (often among various targets), more than half came in 1915 and none after June 1917; Foster, ‘Strategic bombing’ Appendices A and B.

<sup>150</sup> Six Zeppelins were destroyed in the last four months of 1916; examples of confidence in the defences include WFA, Acc 10218, letter from Ellen to Haydn Mackey, 19/2/1918.

extent that the guns themselves became a source of fear on raid nights.<sup>151</sup> In addition, the shift to aeroplane raids provided less of a spectacle; a combination of the smaller aircraft and people growing used to air raids made them less notable occurrences when not targeting one's own town.<sup>152</sup> By the time that Gothas arrived, the novelty of air-raiders had diminished and along with it the inherent terror of bombers.<sup>153</sup> The sight of raiders caused anger in those not directly threatened, but not the level of fear provoked by Zeppelins; whereas Revd Reeve had feared that insignificance would not save Stondon Massey in 1915, by 1917 Frinton was simply considered 'too unimportant to be bombed', although some attributed its safety to the (supposed) presence of aliens.<sup>154</sup> There was still a significant aerial campaign, but fear of it was largely confined to the large towns and urban districts it targeted.

In the metropolitan districts that were on the receiving end of much of this German airborne aggression, raids were very much feared and frequently the topic of discussion in letters to men in the armed forces. As well as civilians' letters, this topic is prominent in soldiers' letters home, even where comments were dismissive;<sup>155</sup> an Essex regiment officer wrote home in late 1916 that although he wished his family safety from Zeppelins, there were 'sundry folk' at home whom he would like them to visit.<sup>156</sup> Edith Bennett in Walthamstow was particularly prone to depression and worry, a trait upon which air raids played with great effect;

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<sup>151</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 8/9/1917; Clark diaries, 16/8/1917, 7/10/1917, 14/12/1917 and 28/1/1918.

<sup>152</sup> See Mrs Courtauld's comments on hearing a raid on Harwich while at Frinton (NAM, Courtauld diary, 4/7/1917).

<sup>153</sup> Thanks to Heather Jones for her suggestions on this and other aspects of this chapter.

<sup>154</sup> NAM, Courtauld diary, 7/7/1917 and 22/7/1917.

<sup>155</sup> See IWM, Con Shelf, letter from Jack Sweeney to Ivy Williams, 15/10/1917

<sup>156</sup> *10th Essex in Peace*, 3 (April 1925), p. 12.

throughout 1917 she was nervous and shaken up following raids and feared for her life. Despite attempting to reassure her husband in January 1918 that she was getting used to them, she was clearly still upset by the nighttime visits from ‘Uncle Bill’.<sup>157</sup> After Southend was again attacked, Revd D. Ewart James’ sick wife was too distressed by the air raid threat to allow him to leave the town.<sup>158</sup> Civilians often played down the fears and destruction caused by air raids, such as in Ellen Mackey’s insistence that she was not impressed by the Gotha raiders and Edwin Bennett’s father’s comment that the raiders’ worst offence was the destruction of a local pub.<sup>159</sup> As in the days of the Zeppelins, those at risk spoke of perfect ‘raid weather’ and often changed their plans accordingly.<sup>160</sup> Public responses changed as worry and threat concentrated in urban areas and the spectacle (and apparently more indiscriminate nature) of Zeppelin raids was replaced by more difficult to spot but more deadly heavier-than-air machines. Nonetheless, air raids continued to inspire fear and hatred of the enemy.

One consequence of the stirring up of emotions caused by air raids was the campaign to launch reprisal raids against German cities. Local newspapers began to discuss the issue in early 1916 and a pattern was soon established with newspapers supporting attacks on German civilians and religious figures opposing them.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> IWM, 96/03/1, letters from Edith to Edwin Bennett, for example 27/6/1917, 7/7/1917, 9/7/1917, 19-23/8/1917, 5/9/1917, 15/1/1918 and 11/8/1918.

<sup>158</sup> ERO Bull diary, 28/9/1917.

<sup>159</sup> WFA, Acc 10218, letters from Ellen and Haydn Mackey, 27/12/1917 and 13/3/1918; every effort has been made to contact the copyright holder for this collection. IWM, 96/03/1, letter from his father to Edwin Bennett, 25/6/1918. Ellen Mackey was far from honest with her husband over her ongoing illness, so this reassurance may not have been convincing.

<sup>160</sup> NAM Courtauld diary, 29/9/1917; IWM, 96/03/1, letter from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 24/1/1918.

<sup>161</sup> See *EWN*, 14/4/1916 and 21/4/1916; *ECS* 5/2/1916 and 26/2/1916.

Southend council passed a resolution in favour of reprisal air raids in August 1917, followed within three months by others including Walthamstow, Leyton, Chingford, and a meeting of Metropolitan mayors.<sup>162</sup> In Bocking ‘they loudly cursed the government for its pigheadedness in going on with its murderous (to English people) policy of non-reprisals’, while calls were made in Stondon Massey for reprisals, ‘not by way of revenge, but in order to bring home to the German apprehension the irregularity of dropping bombs promiscuously on a civilian population.’<sup>163</sup> Many of those in favour of the raids stressed that they were not in order to kill Germans, but to stop them from bombing the UK, or simply to undermine German resolve, although one correspondent to the *Southend and Westcliff Graphic* pointed out that raids had not broken British resolve so could not be relied upon to work in Germany.<sup>164</sup> It is clear that the killing of German civilians was not felt to be a legitimate end in itself, but only in order to prevent further deaths of British women and children; even if some people did want to kill German civilians it was not a publicly-acceptable desire. The Bishop of Chelmsford spoke out against any raids that were not for a military purpose and the Bishop of London, who had earlier talked of an exterminatory crusade, also attacked the idea of reprisals against civilians.<sup>165</sup> In response, one newspaper claimed that ‘there is a consensus of opinion in train, tram and ’bus, in the market place, and by the family hearth, whatever might be thought in high places, such as pulpits, editorial sanctums, and Whitehall offices, that German “frightfulness” has been encouraged

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<sup>162</sup> *SWG*, 24/8/1917; *WG*, 9/11/1917 and 5/10/1917.

<sup>163</sup> Clark diaries, 5/7/1917; ERO Stondon diary, 3/10/1917.

<sup>164</sup> *WG*, 5/10/1917; *SWG*, 31/8/1917.

<sup>165</sup> *ECS*, 13/7/1917; Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 168; Adrian Gregory and Annette Becker, ‘Religious sites and practices’ in Jay Winter, Jean-Louis Robert *et al*, *Capital Cities at War, Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919. Volume 2: A Cultural History*, (Cambridge, 2007), p. 394.

by our own Government's kid-glove and rosewater methods.'<sup>166</sup> Reports from National War Aims Committee speakers in late 1917 show evidence of widespread support for reprisals among the crowds in West Ham.<sup>167</sup> Although some ministers were actively supportive of the reprisals campaign,<sup>168</sup> most did voice some opposition, causing at least one newspaper to comment on priests having espoused all-out pursuit of the 'holy and righteous war' in earlier years and now seeming wanting to prevent just such an effort.<sup>169</sup> Like the suspicions of the first years of the war, the reprisals campaign shows the extent to which the wartime narrative of fear of the enemy could outgrow its useful (to the authorities) purpose of inspiring unity and fear of defeat.

### **Hatred and acceptance of Germans**

The high-water marks of overt anti-German feeling were the riots in May 1915 and the campaign for reprisal air raids from 1917. Although rioting was not repeated on such a scale, smaller disturbances in 1916 and 1917, reactions to the demise of Zeppelin crews, and continued campaigns against naturalised citizens show a continuing animosity towards the Germans. The reminiscences of children reveal something of the level of animosity felt towards Germans in the Great War. A Miss Cockhill recalled that 'Hate was the predominant emotion then. There were so many things we hated the Germans for. We had heard of the sinking of the Lusitania and many other ships. [...] We hated the Germans and we sang "Hang the Kaiser". He was the devil people said.'<sup>170</sup> Similar attitudes underlay recollections of others. One

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<sup>166</sup> *WHSEM*, 1/6/1917.

<sup>167</sup> TNA, T 102/25, Speaker's report: West Ham, 20/10/1917.

<sup>168</sup> For example, the vicar of Walthamstow (*WG*, 31/5/1918).

<sup>169</sup> *WG*, 13/7/1917.

<sup>170</sup> ERO, T/Z 25/651, Age Concern essay by Miss DL Cockhill

child in Dovercourt later recalled seeing a group of German prisoners marching and singing, the man in the lead bleeding from having had a stone thrown at him but nonetheless singing heartily; the girl felt some admiration for this man although she ‘knew they were hateful people’. Clearly she was not the only one to fear or hate Germans as someone had attacked the prisoner; indeed ingrained animosity is suggested by her comment that she did not remember any anti-German feeling, despite recounting this incident.<sup>171</sup> Edith Bennett’s attitude towards the Germans can be ascertained from her disinclination to use the word, instead writing ‘G\_\_\_\_\_’ in some letters;<sup>172</sup> meanwhile another young girl carried the animosity picked up in the Great War through her life into the 1980s.<sup>173</sup>

Not everyone subscribed to this binary division of British and German that wartime rhetoric and official actions delineated. Inside the Metropolitan Police District it was still possible for German citizens to live and work, albeit with restrictions on their lives. The persistence of German residence and communities uncovered by anti-German campaigners gives an indication of the acceptance by some local communities of ‘enemies’ in their midst until 1917 and even beyond. In May 1917, the British Empire Union (successor of the Anti-German Union) successfully closed down a small German Lutheran church service in Walthamstow, saying they had no right to meet and claiming that prayers had been offered for success of German

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<sup>171</sup> IWM Sound Archive, 12599, Margaret S Clenaghan, quoted by permission of the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum.

<sup>172</sup> IWM, 96/03/1, letters from Edith to Edwin Bennett, for example 10/9/1916 and 30/5/1918; every effort has been made to contact the copyright holder for this collection.

<sup>173</sup> Information from Mrs Prue James regarding her aunt Josephine Bunting, who was born in 1908 and grew up in Colchester.

arms.<sup>174</sup> Similarly, that September, a nearby factory was criticised for allegedly giving preferential treatment to Germans in the use of their air raid shelter. Their response that the shelter had not yet been used and that women would be given priority followed by men, whether English or German, caused shock in the council and local press that there *were* any Germans living and working there.<sup>175</sup> A Stratford lad later recalled that he worked alongside a German dyer throughout the war.<sup>176</sup> Such stories suggest acceptance, at least on a small and localised scale, of the presence of German residents in areas outside the prohibited zone. These were a minority, but show the lingering importance of local connections over and above the kinship of nationality for some people.

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Negative popular attitudes towards the enemy are key to maintaining support for a major war; an evil enemy bent on destruction makes the image of an ‘life-and-death’, all-or-nothing struggle clearer. Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker overstate the case with their description of war culture as harbouring ‘a true drive to “exterminate” the enemy’,<sup>177</sup> but emotions certainly ran high. Heather Jones’ description of ‘a culture of fear-cum-hatred of the enemy figure’,<sup>178</sup> is closer to the mark in terms of attitudes in Essex, where reactions shown were largely in response to real, or vividly imagined and apparently feasible, threats to life and liberty in the county: air raids, potential invasion and a minority population of German origin (or sympathies) who might aid the enemy. Violence was present,

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<sup>174</sup> *WG*, 1/6/1917; Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>175</sup> *WG*, 17/9/1917.

<sup>176</sup> IWM Sound Archive, 9420, William Gillman.

<sup>177</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14–18. Understanding the Great War*, trans. Catherine Temerson (New York, 2002), p. 103.

<sup>178</sup> Jones, ‘Encountering the “enemy”’, pp. 134. Pennell uses similar language, ‘A Kingdom United’, pp. 131-32.

most notably in May 1915 but also, on a smaller scale, both before and after that peak. This violence and the campaign for reprisal air raids show the extent to which emotions provoked by war and the creation of a binary of us and them, of good versus evil, could spill over into actions and attitudes well beyond what was desired or useful to the government and local authorities. These actions and the most widespread suspicions show a breakdown of prewar societies on the basis of origin and sympathies, whether real or imagined; less frequent but certainly present were examples of existing friendships and trust continuing into wartime; meanwhile, existing animosities were given a new language by the binary attitudes of the Great War. With its large (but not comprehensive) prohibited zone, its large German-born population, and its location liable to both air raids and invasion, Essex was perhaps more prone to anti-German feelings than other areas of the country. On the other hand, so much of the animosity was provoked by national events, such as atrocities, bombardments, gas, and the sinking of the *Lusitania*, that it was more likely a matter of degree rather than a major contrast between the county and other areas.

### Chapter 3 – Volunteers, 1914-15

‘I love to dawdle in the street  
 And watch the giddy flappers’ feet.  
 [...]
   
 Let heroes fight to keep us free,  
 No madly rushing on for me,  
 At home I’ll stay and dawdle on  
 For if you’re killed your joy is gone.’<sup>1</sup>

The voluntary enlistment of 2.4 million British men from August 1914 to the end of 1915 was hailed at the time and subsequently as a great feat,<sup>2</sup> but a stunted one in that it did not prevent the need for conscription in 1916.<sup>3</sup> Volunteering for military service was the ‘paradigmatic sacrifice’ of wartime and its undertaking by so many men makes understanding their enlistment a vital part of investigating wartime mentalities.<sup>4</sup> This has been the subject of several major studies and many popular histories, particularly ‘Kitchener’s New Armies’, with their ready cultural reference-points such as ‘Pals’ battalions and Lord Kitchener’s call to arms.<sup>5</sup> The New Armies do not, of course, tell the whole story of the voluntary period, but neither does the study simply of why men enlisted; few historians have addressed

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The Shirker’s Soliloquy’ by An Indian Mutiny Veteran, *SWG*, 21/5/15.

<sup>2</sup> See Basil Williams, *Raising and Training the New Armies* (London, 1918)

<sup>3</sup> Denis Winter portrays the period of voluntary recruiting as a gradual response with ‘no great rush’, *Death’s Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London, 1978), p. 27; R.J.Q. Adams and Philip P. Poirer provide the best study of the shift to conscription in their *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900-18* (London, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Gregory, ‘Britain and Ireland’ in John Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I* (Oxford, 2010), p. 406.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army: the Raising of the New Armies 1914-1916* (Manchester, 1988). See also Pen & Sword ‘pals’ book series, including William Turner, *Accrington Pals*, (Barnsley, 1993), David Bilton, *Hull Pals* (Barnsley, 1999) and Graham Stewart and John Sheen, *Tyneside Scottish* (Barnsley, 1998). On the poster campaign: Nicholas Hiley, “‘Kitchener wants you’ and “Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?”: The Myth of British Recruiting Posters’, *Imperial War Museum Review*, 11 (1997), 40-58.

the subject of why the majority of men did not enlist in this period.<sup>6</sup> To get to the heart of acceptance or otherwise of this type of sacrifice we need to consider the decision as having the possible outcomes of both enlistment and non-enlistment, acknowledging that most men did not volunteer in 1914-15. Understanding the motivations behind both allows a greater insight into wartime understandings of the purpose of enlistment and the war more generally, and popular acceptance of the idea of sacrifice. The promotion of enlistment by local and national elites also shows us how their role evolved and the variations between elite cues and the actions of members of the public over time.

The sixteen-month voluntary period is best understood as having three distinct phases, beginning with the recruiting ‘boom’ or ‘rush to the colours’ of August and early September 1914. By the start of December, it was said that 20,000 men had enlisted in Essex as a whole county,<sup>7</sup> in addition to at least 6,000 prewar Territorial Force (TF) soldiers and perhaps 12,000 reservists and serving regulars.<sup>8</sup> This period encompasses the ‘rush to the colours’ and the start of the ‘rally’ period that followed it, with great local and national efforts being put into propaganda, meetings and canvassing for recruits. The second half of 1915 saw a period of ‘moral compulsion’, with the National Register and the Derby Scheme (in which men were asked to ‘attest’ their willingness to serve) bringing an increasingly

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<sup>6</sup> David Silbey, in *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914–1916* (London, 2005), treats enlistment as a decision rather than a foregone conclusion, while Adrian Gregory, raises the question of why men did not enlist (*The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 89-91).

<sup>7</sup> ERO, A9831, Box 12, Essex TF: General Purpose Committee, speech by H.A. Krohn at Quarterly meeting, 2/12/1914

<sup>8</sup> TF figure: *ibid*, strength of units, 30/6/1914. Others estimated from P.P. 1914 (Cd 7252) ‘The General Annual Report on the British Army for the year ending 30th September, 1913’.

aggressive and personalised effort to find recruits. In November 1915, a mother of military-aged men wrote: ‘We have as good as compulsion, no one can help themselves.’<sup>9</sup>

Table 3.1 Monthly army enlistment in Essex Recruiting District and Nationwide, August 1914-December 1915.<sup>10</sup>

	Essex Recruiting District	National enlistments
August	2,086	298,923
September	4,426	462,901
October	1,515	136,811
November	2,386	169,862
December	1,930	117,860
January	1,431	156,290
February	771	87,896
March	1,020	113,907
April	1,409	119,087
May	1,868	135,263
June	1,529	114,679
July	1,219	95,413
August	828	95,980
September	735	71,617
October	1,256	113,285
November	1,710	121,793
December	630	55,152
Total	26,749	2,466,719

Table 3.2 Army recruitment in voluntary and compulsory periods.<sup>11</sup>

	Essex	National		Essex	National
1914	12,343	1,186,357	1916	18,414	1,168,075
1915	14,406	1,280,362	1917	11,766	820,646
			1918	4,962	485,932
Total	26,749	2,466,719	Total	35,142	2,474,653
Percentage of wartime enlistments	43.22	49.92	Percentage of wartime enlistments	56.78	50.08

<sup>9</sup> Ruth Meldrum, *The McNarrys: circa 1750 to 1950* (privately published, Manitoba, 1995), p. 315, Lilla to Leon McNarry, 16/11/15. See similar comments in Preston, Lancashire: Harry Cartmell, *For Remembrance. An Accounts of Some Fateful Years* (Preston, 1919), p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> TNA, NATS 1/399, recruits raised (monthly).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Understanding the factors affecting millions of British and hundreds of thousands of Essex men's decision-making is complicated. As Peter Simkins notes, 'the factors which impelled so many to enlist were as diverse as the recruits themselves. Probably only a small number had a single overriding motive for enlistment, most recruits being driven to join by a combination of external pressures and personal desires and loyalties.'<sup>12</sup> Niall Ferguson has suggested five main motives: recruiting techniques, female pressure, peer group pressure, economic motives and 'impulse'.<sup>13</sup> In a more detailed study of working-class enlistment, David Silbey points out the clear impact of the sense of threat to Britain (which Ferguson seems to imply was incidental<sup>14</sup>) and suggests 'allegiance' as an important factor, stressing that it is not merely the nation to which people felt allegiance, but also their families and communities, and to the empire.<sup>15</sup> Each phase in turn saw the peak of importance of one of the main factors: the threat to Britain dominated the first months, followed by the recruiting campaign until mid-1915, after which more direct societal pressure took the lead in 'moral compulsion' to enlist. Each of these, plus economic factors and allegiance played a significant role throughout the period.

### **The recruiting boom: Britain under threat**

At the start of 1916, former Prime Minister Arthur Balfour remarked on the success of voluntary recruitment in Britain for 'a cause [...] which did not involve invasion,

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<sup>12</sup> Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, p. 185.

<sup>13</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London, 1999 [1996]), pp. 205-207.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 202.

<sup>15</sup> Silbey, *British Working Class*.

or even serious danger of invasion of our hearths and homes.<sup>16</sup> This was a great underestimation of the feelings that drove many men to enlist in the first years of the war, and particularly its earliest months: the threat to one's home, family, district and nation was one of the greatest driving forces in recruiting, and the future was very hard to predict in late August 1914.<sup>17</sup> Although recruitment rates through August were much higher than normal, the real boom emerged as a major facet of the 'Mons Effect' that we have seen the bolstering of support for the war and acceptance of an apocalyptic narrative in late August 1914, following *The Times's* (exaggerated) report of the retreat of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in Belgium with heavy losses.<sup>18</sup> Enlistment rates shot through the roof, with the first week in September seeing the greatest rate of enlistment in Essex as 2,145 enlisted in the Essex Recruiting District (outside this district, 514 enlisted in East Ham alone<sup>19</sup>) and 190,000 joined up nationwide (see Fig. 3.1). Figures for Rochford Hundred show a similar pattern, with over twice as many enlisting during 25-31 August compared to the preceding week.<sup>20</sup> From this peak, enlistments declined and the rush was effectively ended by a sudden increase in medical requirements on 11 September.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Roy Douglas 'Voluntary Enlistment in the First World War and the Work of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee', *Journal of Modern History*, 42/4 (1970), pp. 564-585, p. 564.

<sup>17</sup> See *EWN* columnist's words quoted at the start of Chapter 2.

<sup>18</sup> See pp. 64-68.

<sup>19</sup> *EHE*, 14/9/1914.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Rusiecki, *The Impact of Catastrophe: The People of Essex and the First World War* (Chelmsford, 2008), p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, p. 104.

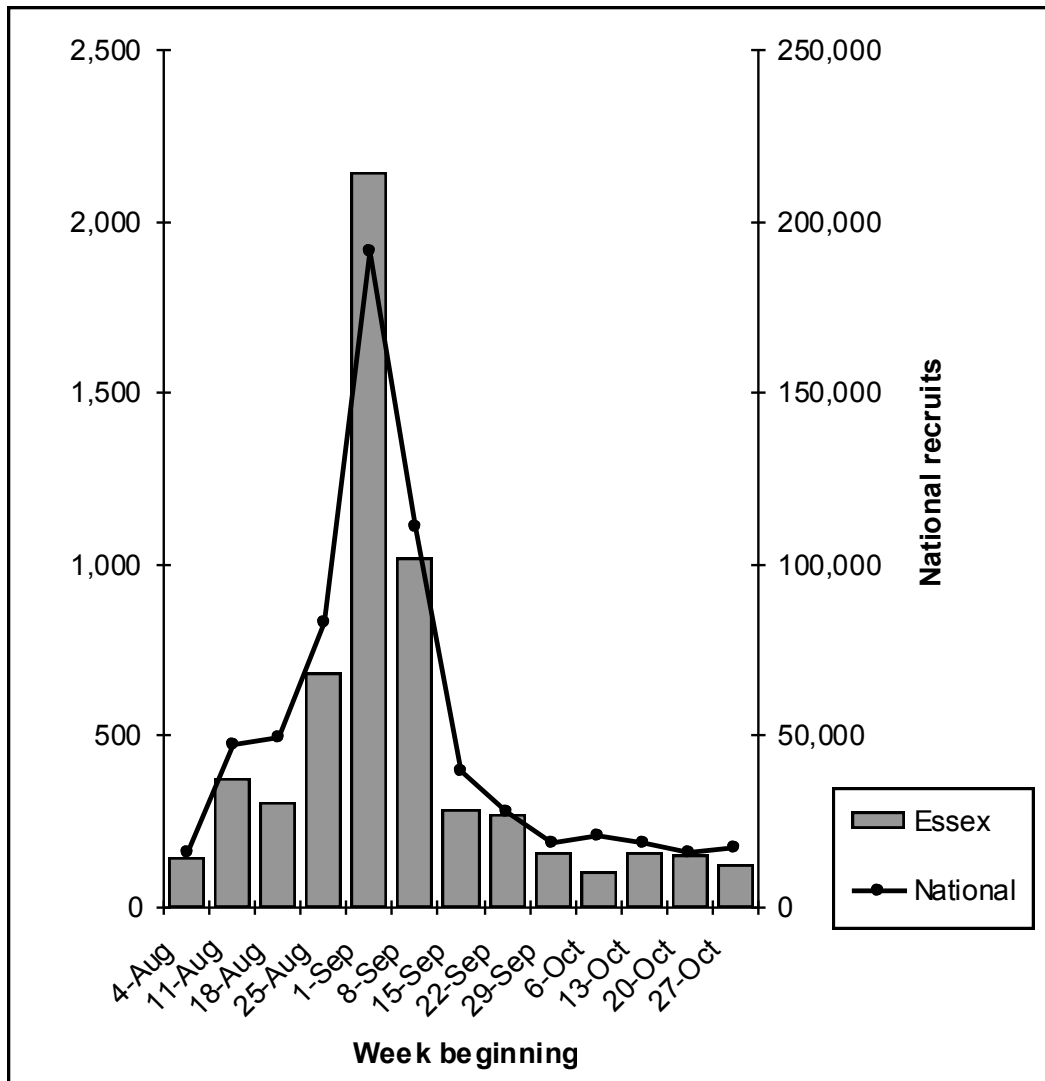


Figure 3.1 – The Recruiting boom, August-September 1914<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, the figures for local enlistment do not cover the whole county, as the Essex Recruiting District did not include the Metropolitan districts, from which men enlisted in the London district.<sup>23</sup> The chairman of the Essex TF Association lamented the large proportion of Essex men enlisting in Stratford and therefore being counted in London. The records of the Association show that 1,947 of the county's 2,600 recruits enlisted at Stratford in the five days up to 2 September, as

<sup>22</sup> TNA, NATS 1/398 recruits raised daily.

<sup>23</sup> *Recruiting: Lists of Commands, Military Districts and Regimental Areas* (London, 1914), p. 7.

did around 7,000 of around 12,000 recruits in the four weeks from 30 August to 26 September.<sup>24</sup> The proportions of Stratford enlistments reported were high, but declined from mid-August and mid-September, which suggests a localised version of David Silbey's ripple of the recruiting boom away from the capital.<sup>25</sup>

The timing of the boom and contemporary comments indicate that men did not enlist simply for adventure, ignorant of the risks, but rather, as Adrian Gregory puts it, 'exactly at the moment when the war turned serious. Men [...enlisted] in the expectation of a desperate fight for national defence'.<sup>26</sup> The effect was acknowledged as early as 2 September, and soon developed a local aspect as stories from the front and news of local soldiers and casualties were published in local newspapers.<sup>27</sup> While the reality of what the fighting was actually like might have been obscured in newspaper accounts and beyond civilians' imagination, the fact that it *was* horrific was not hidden for long and the seriousness and danger of the situation was highlighted at recruiting meetings, at least one speaker referring to the

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<sup>24</sup> ERO, A9831, Box 12, Essex TF: General Purpose Committee minutes 31/08/1914 and 7/10/1914, Quarterly meeting minutes 2/9/1914 and speech by H.A. Krohn at Quarterly meeting, 2/12/1914. These figures do not tally with those in TNA, NATS 1/399, recruits raised (monthly). Since Stratford recruiting centre (in Metropolitan Essex) also recruited from other East-London Boroughs, it is not clear whether the figures quoted by the TF Association for enlistment there were solely Essex men.

<sup>25</sup> Silbey, *British Working Class*, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Gregory, 'British "War Enthusiasm"', p. 80, emphasis in original; Grant Mansfield notes a similar trend in Australia, when news of the fighting at Gallipoli reached there ('"Unbounded Enthusiasm": Australian Historians and the Outbreak of the Great War', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 53/3, 2007, pp. 360-374, p. 368). Ziemann notes that the period after Mons also saw the greatest levels of support for the war in rural Bavaria, apparent success seeming to provoke a similar response to a costly retreat (Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany, 1914-23*, trans by Alex Skinner (Oxford, 2007), pp. 24-25).

<sup>27</sup> Douglas, 'Voluntary Enlistment', p. 569;

difficulty of sending loved ones to ‘go to this “hell”’.<sup>28</sup> Attorney general and Walthamstow MP Sir John Simon felt that better knowledge of what was really happening would assist recruitment,<sup>29</sup> while prominent local casualties were cited or even appeared at recruiting meetings. The idea that men enlisted because they thought the war would be ‘over by Christmas’ is not borne out by contemporary sources in Essex or elsewhere. The seriousness of the war was clear and recruiters stressed the need for a large army to be raised *and trained* before taking the field later in the war. Opinions about the length of the war varied widely and did not revolve around Christmas in 1914, indeed the expectation of a short war was used to criticise *non-enlistment*.<sup>30</sup>

Following the decline in recruiting from the national monthly peak of over 462,000 to around 115,000 in spring 1915 and corresponding fall in Essex, there were two further brief surges. The first of these came in April-May 1915, amid growing anger about the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania*, the German use of poison gas at Ypres, and the first deadly air raids on Britain. This period saw a great increase in popular anger and violence and official action against Germans and other foreigners in the UK.<sup>31</sup> The last surge in volunteers came at the point when compulsory service loomed, as the nature of the called-for sacrifices evolved away from voluntarism and men enlisted to avoid the supposed stigma of conscription.

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<sup>28</sup> *SE*, 12/12/1914.

<sup>29</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Simon 50, Simon to Archbishop of York, 10/11/1914

<sup>30</sup> See Stuart Hallifax, “‘Over by Christmas’: British popular opinion and the short war in 1914”, *First World War Studies*, 1/2, (2010), pp. 103-121.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 2.

The threat of defeat in late August 1914 was a great spur to enlistment, despite Balfour's later dismissal of it. This threat not only caused the great 'boom' peak in enlistment, but also underlay much of the feeling and rhetoric about enlistment throughout the voluntary period. This was fundamentally based on the acceptance of the apocalyptic narrative of the war following the British retreat and news of German atrocities, which also affected broader civilian attitudes. Although cited as evidence of latent British anti-German feeling,<sup>32</sup> the recruiting boom owed more to a sense of danger and the risk of defeat, revived by the 'frightful' methods of war used by the Germans in early 1915, particularly those aimed at British civilians. Mass enlistment was also a result of the acceptance by thousands of men (and presumably thousands of families) of the idea that the sacrifice of civilian status and potentially life itself was a legitimate one, a man's duty in the face of such an apocalyptic threat.

### **The 'Rally' Phase and the recruiting campaign**

There was no clear divide between the initial recruiting boom and the local and national recruiting campaign phase. As Figure 3.2 shows, many meetings were held before 12 September 1914; however, it was from this date that Basil Williams noted a shift into the 'rally' phase in recruiting,<sup>33</sup> with a major public campaign after attempts to slow recruiting by increasing medical requirements proved more successful than expected. It is common to stress the volume of propaganda produced by the cross-party Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC): 54 million

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<sup>32</sup> For example *SWG*, 11/6/1915. See also Williams, *Raising and Training*, p. 13; Panikos Panayi, *The Enemy in our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (Oxford, 1991), p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Williams, *Raising and Training*, pp. 10-11.

posters, leaflets and other printed material, 12,000 meetings and 20,000 speeches.<sup>34</sup> This actually underestimates the level of propaganda and its localised form: many posters and meetings were organised independently of the national PRC and often on a very local level, rooted in the voluntary effort of local communities, organisations and elites in an effort to spur enlistment. Local PRCs were formed in parliamentary constituencies; they and other bodies and individuals organised meetings in villages, town halls and in the open air. It is worth considering, though, that meetings and literature would not have been effective without an existing belief in the apocalyptic narrative of threat to Britain and the sense of duty that had produced the recruiting boom; the campaign stressed many elements of the pressures towards enlistment, especially feelings of danger, social pressure, and allegiance, as well as willingness to sacrifice.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16; Ferguson, *Pity of War*, p. 205.

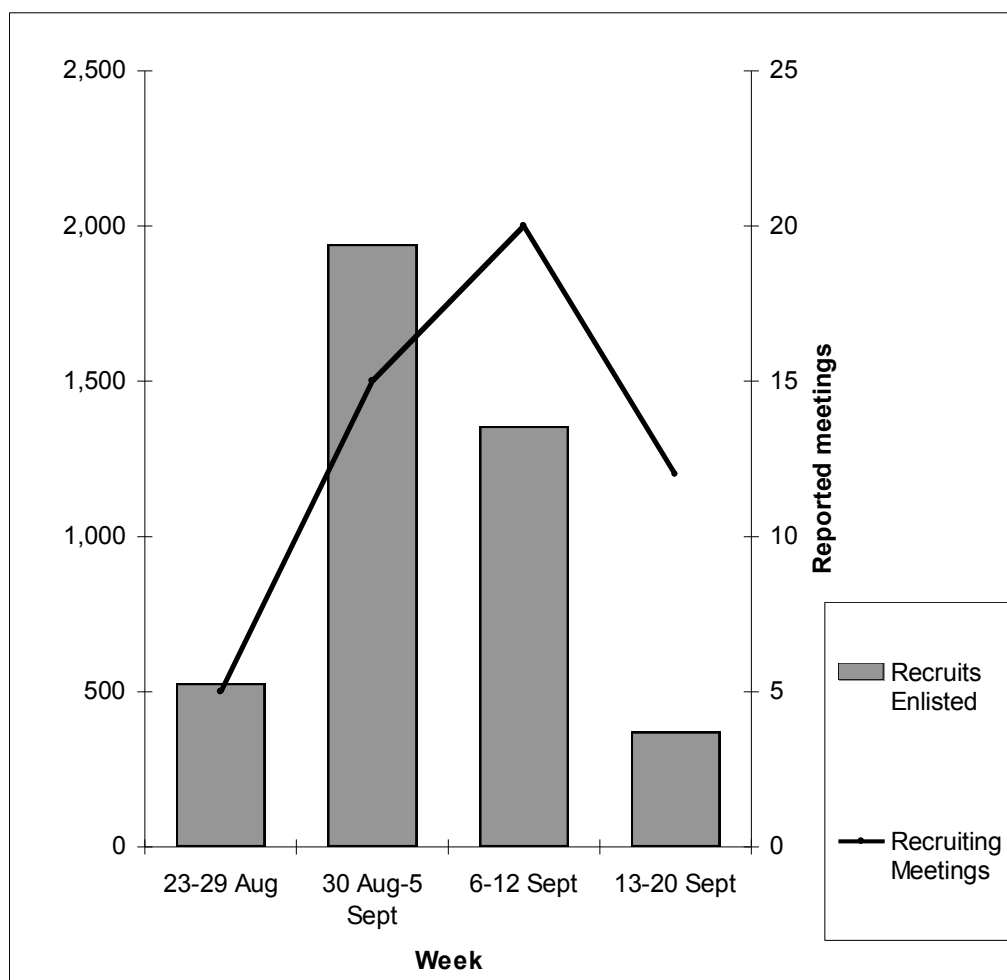


Figure 3.2 – Recruiting meetings and enlistment in Essex, August-September 1914.<sup>35</sup>

Roy Douglas describes recruiting meetings as ‘the backbone of the campaign,’ but admits that their ‘efficacy diminished rapidly as the war proceeded.’<sup>36</sup> It is clear from Figure 3.2, though, that the meetings did not cause the rush of enlistments at the end of August and early September 1914. If they had prompted the boom, one would expect a correlation or even a delay in recruiting as men heard the arguments, considered them and joined up. In fact, the meetings peaked after this point as efforts were made to rekindle the feeling of the boom days. Kit Good’s

<sup>35</sup> TNA, NATS 1/398, recruits raised daily. Meeting information drawn from Clark diaries, 31/8/1914; *ECS*, 29/8/1914, 5/9/1914, 12/9/1914, 19/9/1914; *BA*, 29/8/1914, 5/9/1914, 12/9/1914; *EADT*, 4/9/1914, 7/9/1914; *EHE*, 7/9/1914; *IR* 4/9/1914; *SWG* 26/9/1914; *SWWN*, 4/9/1914, 18/9/1914.

<sup>36</sup> Douglas ‘Voluntary Enlistment’, p. 570.

identification of recruiting meetings as a celebration of local unity and resolve sums up accurately a major part of their role aside from the declared aim of spurring recruitment.<sup>37</sup> There were a large number of meetings and many did produce recruits; it seems that a large meeting could hope to draw about 30 men to the Colours as in Brentwood and at a workplace meeting in Castle Heddingham; meanwhile the nine men enlisting from Birch and Layer Breton after a local meeting more than doubled those villages' numbers in the forces.<sup>38</sup> These meetings were usually addressed by local dignitaries of varying stature depending on the size of the settlement and the meeting. Mayors and MPs played a prominent role in larger meetings and local landowners in smaller settlements; politicians of differing party allegiances and local figures with differing views appeared together on stage to emphasise elite and communal unity.

Strangely, although there were several meetings in Chelmsford in August and early September, none were held in Colchester until 18 September and apparently none at all in Harwich in 1914. In general the earlier meetings occurred in smaller settlements (aside from Chelmsford, the county town), while the larger towns held their meetings later in September. The size of these later meetings does not seem to have affected the flow of recruits. Even in September, only seventeen joined out of a crowd of three thousand in Braintree and the nine at Birch and Layer Breton came from a crowd of 500. After the first meetings at Colchester and Mistley, no recruits were forthcoming, although recruitment in the former did increase in subsequent

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<sup>37</sup> Kit Good rightly characterises the meetings as feeding off the 'boom' feeling rather than the other way around, ('England goes to War, 1914-15', (University of Liverpool, Ph.D. Thesis, 2002), p. 170, and more generally Ch. 4).

<sup>38</sup> *ECS*, 19/9/1914.

days.<sup>39</sup> The latter phenomenon was to be expected as men went home to consider their options,<sup>40</sup> but it somewhat undermines any ‘impulse’ factor in enlistment and casts the meetings in a supporting role, keeping men alert to the need for recruits and their duty to enlist, rather than being the fundamental spur to their joining up.

As time went on, the campaign’s failure to spur to enlistment became apparent. The make-up of the crowds at public meetings was far from ideal for impressing upon ‘slackers’ their duty to enlist, as they simply would not attend; instead speakers found themselves preaching to ever-smaller crowds of the converted and the ineligible as the proportion of women and soldiers at meetings increased.<sup>41</sup> When Great Leighs men were given an extended lunch break to attend a recruiting meeting, most simply spent the time at home.<sup>42</sup> One solution was outdoor meetings, suggested by the national PRC in April 1915, but already undertaken locally with meetings in Maldon, Kelvedon and Braintree and on a larger scale in Chelmsford and Southend in September 1914.<sup>43</sup> The ineffectiveness of rallies and meetings was perfectly clear by late 1915 and worries were voiced over the potential cost and lack of success of a proposed rally in October. In the end, it took the form of a football match between soldiers and munitions workers, watched by a crowd of three to four thousand, of whom three-quarters were soldiers with the few civilian men of military age mainly war workers ‘badged’ as ineligible. Five recruits came forward

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<sup>39</sup> *ECS*, 19/9/1914; TNA, NATS 1/398, recruits raised daily.

<sup>40</sup> Coulson Kernahan, *Experiences of a Recruiting Officer* (London, 1915), pp. 71-72.

<sup>41</sup> Capt. Norman referred to the lack of eligible men at a meeting at Harwich and on the general low attendance in Colchester (*ECS*, 30/1/1915, 6/3/1915); see also Kernahan, *Experiences*, p. 71.

<sup>42</sup> Clark diaries, 16/5/1915.

<sup>43</sup> *ECS*, 5/9/1914, 12/9/1914, 19/9/1914 and 2/10/1914; *BA* 12/9/1914; the instruction from the PRC is quoted in Douglas, ‘Voluntary Enlistment’, p. 570.

during the event, only two of them fit for service.<sup>44</sup> In Great Leighs, Derby Scheme canvasser William Brown told Revd Andrew Clark of a proposed recruiting meeting in November 1915, but ‘scoffed at the idea of “7 or 8” attending. He [Brown] wasn’t going himself, and he did not know of anyone who would go.’<sup>45</sup> Even as sites of civic celebration, then, the indoor recruiting meeting had declined, at least in the countryside.

A major factor in meetings’ success or failure was the personality and style of the speakers. Along with the local squire, MP or other civic or military dignitary, semi-professional recruiting speakers often spoke; in Essex the most prominent were Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Taylor and Captain C.B. Norman. Continuing his prewar work promoting the local Territorials, Taylor spoke at 89 meetings from 21 August to early December 1914, including two every day in early September.<sup>46</sup> Captain Norman was a (dishonourably discharged) former Indian Army officer and military journalist who was sent on a speaking tour by the Imperial Maritime League in late 1914 and continued this work until July 1915, speaking at over 150 meetings.<sup>47</sup> Norman favoured descriptions or heavy suggestions of the threat of atrocities being meted out on Essex women,<sup>48</sup> while Taylor made appeals to men’s sense of duty and defence of their area and country; both were attempting, like the campaign in general, to revive the feelings of the post-Mons recruiting boom among

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<sup>44</sup> ERO, A9831, Box 12, Essex TF: General Purpose Committee, minutes 6/10/1915.

<sup>45</sup> Clark diaries, 11/11/1915.

<sup>46</sup> ERO, A9831, Box 12, Essex TF: Quarterly Meeting 2/12/1914. ‘Obituary of Lt Col Fred Taylor’, *Essex Review*, 1916, pp. 166-67; ‘Military Work Done by Lt Col Fred Taylor’, in TNA WO 374/67245, Officers Service Files: Taylor, Lt Col F W; Clark diaries 6/9/1914.

<sup>47</sup> ERO J/P 12/6, ‘Suspects’ register, #232. *EWN*, 27/11/1914; NAM, 1987-11-118-17, Capt. C.B. Norman papers, list of meetings addressed.

<sup>48</sup> See pp. 95-6.

both likely recruits and the ineligible attendees at meetings. Taylor was successful at first, but by May 1915 Clark was noting criticisms as well as success: ‘The general verdict is that he does more harm than good. He talks too much; puts things very roughly; and has not an atom of tact [...]’.<sup>49</sup> Recruiter Coulson Kernahan, writing at the same time, regarded tactlessness and threats of conscription as grave errors on the part of recruiters; Taylor used both.<sup>50</sup> Even more unpredictable and potentially even damaging were unpopular or untalented prominent local men who spoke at meetings. Finding only two men willing to enlist at a meeting in which he badgered individual tenants to enlist, Cecil Sebag-Montefiore declared that no eligible men would be employed on his estate; this served to further undermine his popularity as a landowner.<sup>51</sup>

As well as depicting an apocalyptic conflict, recruiting efforts helped to build up a particular image of the serving soldier and the fallen. Having fulfilled their duty to serve and defend their country, these men were heroes. The two themes of duty and heroism were closely linked and promoted as characteristics to aspire to. Examples of officially-recognised valour were widely utilised for recruiting purposes, especially where the man was local. As an Essex Victoria Cross (VC) winner, Driver J.H.C. Drain was a clear role model for potential recruits and he spoke at several local meetings, telling an audience in his native Barking: ‘I hope to win

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<sup>49</sup> Clark diaries, 9/5/1915.

<sup>50</sup> Kernahan, *Experiences*, pp. 51, 69-70; *ECS*, 12/9/1914.

<sup>51</sup> *ECS*, 5/9/1914; Bruce Ballard *The History of Stisted Hall* (Ingatestone, 1998), p. 22; *BDA* 5/9/1914; perhaps unsurprisingly it was reported two months later that there were no military-aged men in Sebag-Montefiore’s employ (Clark diaries 9/11/1914). See pp. 117-8 for more on Sebag-Montefiore.

another V.C. I simply did my duty for King and Country.'<sup>52</sup> Even more active was Lance-Corporal C.A. Jarvis, a Scottish soldier who had worked in Chelmsford and earned one of the first VCs of the war. In the second half of 1915, he visited towns including Ilford, Chelmsford (Ill. 3.1) and Walton-on-the-Naze, appearing at meetings and recruiting in the street.<sup>53</sup> Along with men with other honours,<sup>54</sup> these men's specific acts of heroism and the idea that these were an extension of every man's 'duty for King and Country' were used to promote enlistment as the honourable course of action for eligible men, and to emphasise the dishonour of those who had not enlisted. Local examples of the heroic fallen were available even where official recognition was not given: the selfless sacrifice of Lieutenant A.F.H. Round, the son of an influential local family, was emphasised at a meeting in Great Leighs. Round's refusal to seek medical attention until he had managed 'to carry on his back a wounded soldier to a place out of the enemy's fire' and resultant death was recalled as 'something to be proud of' and implicitly something to emulate.<sup>55</sup> These examples, and the public display of names in Rolls of Honour (Fig 3.5, p. 150) were reminders of men's duty and the fact that many men were still at home while others made sacrifices in their name, a point reinforced in letters from soldiers printed in the local press.<sup>56</sup> The linking of duty and heroism created an image of the serving soldier that could be extended by Rolls of Honour to all local men serving, contrasting them with the slackers who had not enlisted.

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<sup>52</sup> NAM, Lummis file, D59, J.H.C. Drain, cutting from *Lloyds' Weekly News* 28/4/1915; *IR*, 23/7/1915. Philip Bujak quotes a similar speech by a Norwich VC winner ('For Valour. Victoria Cross awards to men from Norfolk and Suffolk', in Gerald Gliddon (ed.), *Norfolk & Suffolk in the Great War* (Norwich, 1998), p. 93).

<sup>53</sup> *BA*, 28/8/1915 and 18/9/1915; *ECC*, 30/7/1915; *ECS*, 16/10/1915.

<sup>54</sup> For example, a Sergeant Cubitt, who was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal and appeared at a recruiting meeting at Barking, *BA*, 18/9/1915.

<sup>55</sup> Clark diaries, 9/5/1915. Local squire J.H. Tritton was related to the Rounds.

<sup>56</sup> For example, *SWG*, 18/6/1915.



Fig. 3.3 – Lance-Corporal Jarvis VC appeals for recruits in Chelmsford. Note the lack of civilian headwear among his audience.<sup>57</sup>

Meetings were not, of course, the sole facet of the recruiting campaign. Posters calling for recruits were seen across the county: in the large towns, where arrivals at Chelmsford railway station were pointed toward the local recruiting office; in the metropolitan boroughs, where posters in the windows of Stratford trams were regarded as dangerously reducing visibility; and in the villages, such as in Great Leighs where the destruction of posters attached to trees showed the resentment that some villagers felt at the incessant pressure to enlist.<sup>58</sup> As with the meetings, the content and chronology of recruiting posters casts them as attempts to revive the feeling of the ‘boom’ period rather than producing it in their repetition of the war’s narratives and the risk of invasion; indeed the most famous posters were actually created in 1915.<sup>59</sup> In their themes the posters also reflect the pressures towards

<sup>57</sup> © British Library Board, *Sunday Pictorial*, 25/7/1915.

<sup>58</sup> Clark diaries (Oxford visits), 20-21/11/1914; *SE* 28/11/1914; Clark diaries, 9/5/1915.

<sup>59</sup> Hiley, “Kitchener Wants You”.

enlistment, stressing the national threat ('Remember Belgium'), social pressure and local allegiance ('Hammer the Hun' in West Ham<sup>60</sup>).

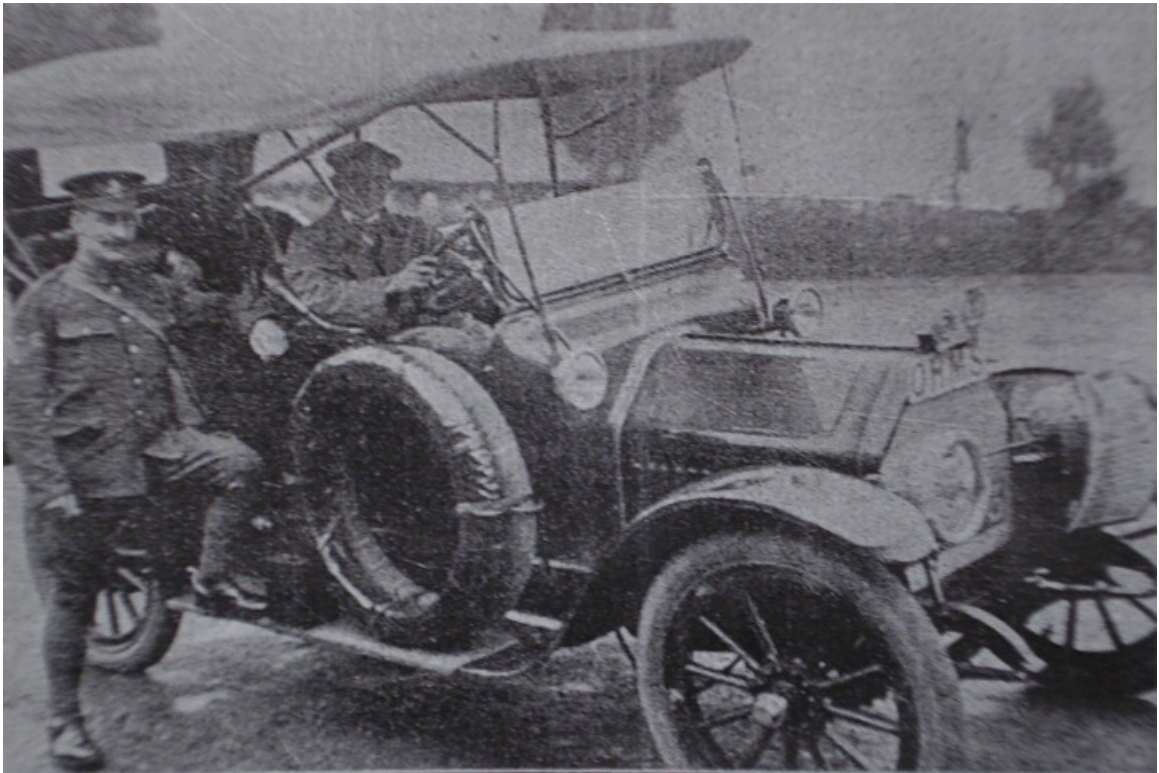


Fig. 3.4 – Mr De Forest Morehouse's car, in use for recruiting purposes.<sup>61</sup>

Other local efforts to promote recruitment included the opening of new recruiting offices in addition to those in Colchester, Warley (in Brentwood) and Stratford. Although it seems unlikely that the new office in Burnham was flooded with recruits in its limited opening hours, the offices at Southend Conservative Club, East Ham Town Hall, and a new one on Colchester High Street were certainly very busy in early September 1914.<sup>62</sup> Two recruiting offices opened in West Ham during the May-June 1915 surge in voluntary recruiting soon closed again though, after

<sup>60</sup> Mark Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual: Commemoration in the City and East London, 1916-1939* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 19.

<sup>61</sup> © British Library Board, *SWG*, 4/9/1914.

<sup>62</sup> *BDA* 12/9/1914; *SWG* 28/8/1914; *EHE* 4/9/1914; *ECS* 5/9/1914

only 105 men enlisted in five weeks.<sup>63</sup> Away from the towns, wealthy locals also assisted during the 1914 boom by helping to transport new recruits from the countryside to the recruiting offices (Fig. 3.4).<sup>64</sup> Another major facet of local organisation for recruiting was the creation and promotion of units based around towns or districts of the county. As well as involvement with the existing TF Association, local elites and councils could promote (and help to fund) recruiting by setting up their own units; in Essex this was done successfully in West Ham and East Ham.<sup>65</sup> Recruiting marches by the Essex Territorials promoted this kind of localised enlistment and were a relatively successful way of drawing in more recruits through 1915. In the first three weeks of May 1915, a company of the 2/5th Battalion visited one hundred settlements from major towns like Colchester and Chelmsford to villages like Henham and Chignal Smealey and ending up, curiously, in Bishop's Stortford in Hertfordshire.<sup>66</sup> The target of five hundred recruits to complete the originally foreign service (1/5th) and home service (2/5th) battalions was easily met as 849 men joined up.<sup>67</sup> The Essex Yeomanry carried out a similar tour in October 1915.<sup>68</sup>

House-to-house canvassing was another string to the recruiter's bow and could take their message to 'shirkers' to a much greater degree than meetings could. Although it reached its peak with the National Register and Derby scheme, a similar effort was begun as early as November 1914 with forms sent to villages to report the

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<sup>63</sup> ERO, A9831, Box 12, Essex TF: General Purpose Committee, minutes 7/7/1915.

<sup>64</sup> See the interview with Colchester's MP in *Times* 9/9/1914.

<sup>65</sup> ECS, 12/6/1915, regarding West Ham units.

<sup>66</sup> ECS, 15/5/1915; ECC 14/5/15; EWN 7/5/1915.

<sup>67</sup> ECS, 11/9/1915; TNA, NATS 1/399, recruits raised (monthly), and WO 114/44-45, TF returns Jan-Aug 1915.

<sup>68</sup> ECS, 9/10/1915.

numbers of eligible men.<sup>69</sup> With these kinds of actions needed it is clear that simple appeals through meetings and posters were not sufficiently effective. The growth of direct appeals and approaches to individuals saw the shift from the recruiting rally phase into that of moral compulsion, moving from abstract appeals for recruits to direct pressure on those who would not come forward.

### **Moral Compulsion and social pressure**

Peer pressure, ‘female pressure’, and the ‘honour’ factor suggested by Avner Offer,<sup>70</sup> were all parts of a wider societal pressure to enlist that existed from the start of the war. In September 1914, the chairman of the Essex TF Association declared that men who could join but refused ‘must receive the treatment accorded to a pariah dog.’<sup>71</sup> As the perceived threat of defeat and invasion diminished, social pressure grew in importance, becoming the main force in recruiting in late 1915. Honour is essentially part of peer or societal pressure as it only exerts influence because of one’s presence in (and consciousness of) a societal structure with expectations of personal behaviour: without peers to impress, or family to support and protect, honour is largely meaningless. The pressure for honourable behaviour existed in men’s public lives where they worked and socialised and in their private lives with their families. The need to establish, protect and provide for a family were key to masculine identity from the late 1800s;<sup>72</sup> from 1914 there was a very real threat against which to protect them for the first time in a century, so that

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<sup>69</sup> ERO, D/P 80/28/2, Records of Little Clacton in the Great War, letter from Harwich PRC, 4/11/1914; Clark diaries, 19/11/14; ERO D/P 336/30/1, Arlesford parish meeting minutes, Recruiting committee, 16/11/1914.

<sup>70</sup> Avner Offer, ‘Going to war, 1914: a matter of honor’, *Politics and Society*, 23, (1995) pp. 213-241, pp. 232-41.

<sup>71</sup> ERO, A9831, Box 12, Essex TF: Quarterly meeting minutes 2/9/1914.

<sup>72</sup> John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-class Home in Victorian England* (London, 1999).

honour became tied up with the needs of the nation and with sacrifice and duty. To a much greater extent and in a more observable sense than the recruiting campaign or the invasion threat, though, societal pressure could act as both a spur and a block to potential enlistment. The latter was most widely felt regarding what men felt to be undue direct pressure, particularly from social superiors and women,<sup>73</sup> but also the desire to continue providing for the family and the latter's reluctance to lose its breadwinner discouraged some from enlisting. Thus the gap between elite prompting and the actions of individuals became clearer. Social pressure also saw equality become a prominent characteristic of wartime sacrifice, as the efforts of the soldier and the shirker were repeatedly contrasted and lists of those serving were prominently displayed.

In its most straightforward sense, peer pressure could play a part as a positive or negative inducement to enlist. In a positive sense, local enlistment meant the possibility of serving with one's friends or at least men with similar backgrounds, as has been mentioned above. The most famous incarnations of this were the 'Pals' battalions in the New Armies, with names like the 'Sportsmen's Battalion', 'Salford Pals' or the 'East Ham Battalion' signifying their social or regional background. The proportion of new units with 'pals'-style names increased from 29% in 1914 to 50% in 1915 as social pressure and the need for such schemes to tempt men to enlist increased and other, more immediate, factors (such as perceived danger) receded.<sup>74</sup> The success of recruiting meetings held in workplaces probably owed much to the

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<sup>73</sup> Clark diaries, 29/8/1914 and 14/9/1915.

<sup>74</sup> Information compiled from 'The Long, Long Trail' [website] < <http://www.1914-1918.net> > accessed 16/4/2009.

idea of serving with friends or those with a similar background.<sup>75</sup> More broadly, the system of county-based regiments and recruitment meant that anyone enlisting in their local regiment was likely to serve with local men.<sup>76</sup> The main embodiment of this localisation was the Territorial Force: the Essex Regiment had a battalion in West Ham and one in Walthamstow; a battalion from south Essex and the other metropolitan boroughs; and a fourth covering the remainder of the county each had companies based in various towns.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> We have seen that a workplace in Castle Hedingham was as successful as a public one in the much larger town of Brentwood.

<sup>76</sup> For Essex, more than two-thirds of Territorial casualties each year up to 1917 had enlisted in the county, and more than half of those in Service battalions; in 1918, both fell below half (calculated from *Soldiers Died in the Great War*, Volume 48: The Essex Regiment, (London, 1920)). The TF figures are broadly similar to those recorded by Helen McCartney (*Citizen Soldiers: Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge, 2005), Table 4.2) and Ian F.W. Becket ('The Territorial Force' in Ian F.W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds) *A Nation In Arms: a social study of the British Army in the First World War*, (Manchester, 1985), Table 5.1).

<sup>77</sup> The countywide 8th (Cyclists) Battalion and Essex Yeomanry also had local sub-units.

Table 3.3 – Regular and TF enlistment in Essex, 1914-1915.<sup>78</sup>

Month	Regular	TF	Essex Total	Percent TF in Essex	<i>Percent TF in UK</i>
August-October	5,931	2,096	8,027	26.11	23.76
November-December	1,684	2,632	4,316	60.98	42.98
<b>1914 total</b>	<b>7,615</b>	<b>4,728</b>	<b>12,343</b>	<b>38.31</b>	<b>28.42</b>
January-March	1,913	1,309	3,222	40.63	23.45
April-June	2,616	2,190	4,806	45.57	36.92
July-September	1,217	1,565	2,782	56.25	25.63
October-December	2,351	1,238	3,589	34.49	24.79
<b>1915 total</b>	<b>8,097</b>	<b>6,302</b>	<b>14,399</b>	<b>43.77</b>	<b>30.35</b>
<b>1914-15 total</b>	<b>15,712</b>	<b>11,030</b>	<b>26,742</b>	<b>41.25</b>	<b>29.43</b>

The proportion of local men enlisting in local TF units (Table 3.3) gives some measure of the importance of the locality and service with peers; both locally and nationally, substantial minorities enlisted in the Territorials. We must be careful not to see local feeling as the only factor in enlistment in the Territorials: until March 1915 new enlistees could sign up for home service and by that point over four-fifths of new Essex TF recruits were doing so,<sup>79</sup> while New Army ‘Service’ battalions were specifically formed for overseas service; in addition the TF accepted men below the minimum age for overseas service.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, some men in these units were said to be reluctant to sign up for overseas service unless they could continue to serve together;<sup>81</sup> in addition, the proportion of territorial enlistments actually *increased* after the home service option was removed. Men in

<sup>78</sup> TNA, NATS 1/399, recruits raised (monthly); *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War. 1914-1920*, (London, 1922), pp. 363-4.

<sup>79</sup> Ian F.W. Beckett, ‘A nation in arms’, in Beckett and Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms*, p. 10; ERO, A9831, Box 12, Essex TF: General Purpose Committee, minutes February-April 1915.

<sup>80</sup> ERO, A9831, Box 12, Essex TF: General Purpose Committee, strength of Essex TF units 20/3/1915.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, minutes of a special meeting 14/4/1915.

smaller units could also be arranged into localised groups: Sargeant Barry of the 9th Essex, a New Army battalion, referred to his platoon as the Braintree platoon in 1915.<sup>82</sup> Serving with one's friends was not confined to the local regiment, though: the locally-raised East Ham battalion was officially the 32nd Royal Fusiliers, while a number of Leytonstone men served together in the Hackney battalion of the London Regiment and a group of men from Burnham wrote home from their shared tent in camp with the 12th Royal Fusiliers.<sup>83</sup>

The negative element pushing men to enlist came in unwonted societal pressure, both in person and in generalised actions and discussions. Sebag-Montefiore's economic sanctions against his workers were one form of this, and Clark notes local men's feelings against kind of this pressure.<sup>84</sup> As well as outright sanctions, pressure from employers and recruiters suggested that non-enlistment would diminish one's standing at work and locally. This pressure was reinforced as time went on with repeated printed appeals from those already serving for more men to enlist,<sup>85</sup> meanwhile a greater effort was made to track down the 'slackers', who were more easily identifiable as more men left and thanks to the 1915 registration and canvassing movements. At the end of 1915, the numbers of eligible men remaining in each village and town in the Harwich Division were published in the local newspaper.<sup>86</sup> The publication of these figures and their use at recruiting meetings also brought an element of civic pride (or shame) into the social pressure

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<sup>82</sup> In 1912-13, 62% of those enlisting in the Essex Recruiting district went into the local regiment (Cd. 7252, p. 46); *ECS*, 25/9/1915.

<sup>83</sup> Wendy Mott (ed.) *"In Dreadful Trouble" The Diary of Beatrice Helena Copping 1914-1916* (privately published, Hounslow, 1999); *BDA*, 26/9/1914.

<sup>84</sup> Clark diaries, 14/9/1914.

<sup>85</sup> *ECS*, 3/7/1915; *BDA*, 22/5/1915.

<sup>86</sup> *ECS*, 15/11/1915.

to enlist.<sup>87</sup> They also saw the idea of equal sacrifice becoming more prominent by showing which communities were ‘doing their bit’ and which were not.

The general social pressure also manifested itself in symbolic form, stressing the sacrifice of those who had already enlisted and recognising who legitimately could not. Lists of men serving their country were published in local newspapers and parish magazines and appeared in public halls and churches;<sup>88</sup> these served a dual purpose in honouring those who had volunteered and highlighting the non-enlistment of those who were not named.<sup>89</sup> Although the church lists were made for the purposes of offering prayers of intercession, they fulfilled a similar function, as did signs displayed in windows declaring that a man from the house was serving.<sup>90</sup> Rolls of Honour also served to increase the honour of organisations from which men had enlisted: such a list was included in the Essex County Cricket Club annual report for 1916 to promote the club.<sup>91</sup> The importance of these lists is shown by a syndicated newspaper advertisement pointedly asking the reader: ‘Is your name on a roll of honour?’ (Fig. 3.5); more bluntly, a poster carried on Walthamstow trams simply called out ‘What! Still here?’<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *IR*, 14/5/1915.

<sup>88</sup> *BDA*, 19/9/1914; *Clacton Times* 2/1/1915 (subsequently editions listed men from local villages).

<sup>89</sup> In Australia, where conscription was not used, many war memorials name all who served and thus highlight the fact that others did not, Ken Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne, 1998), pp. 181-85.

<sup>90</sup> *ERO*, D/P 246/28/32, St Mary’s-on-the-Wall Parish Magazine, September 1915. Andrew Clark inserted an intercessory prayer list in his diary (21/12/1914).

<sup>91</sup> *ERO*, D/Z 82/1/29/64, Essex County Cricket Club annual report, 1916.

<sup>92</sup> *LEI*, 12/9/1914, quoted in Ruseicki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 76.



Fig. 3.5 – ‘Is your name on a roll of honour?’<sup>93</sup>

Those who could no longer be called upon to enlist were given physical symbols of their status to help them avoid the stigma of non-enlistment. Essential war workers were ‘badged’ to show their importance in the war effort, while the Essex TF Association discussed providing badges for men who could prove that they had been rejected from military service on medical grounds,<sup>94</sup> an idea that was used nationally when men rejected under the Derby Scheme were entitled to wear the scheme’s armllets as well as those accepted. The considered importance of such

<sup>93</sup> © British Library Board, *ECS*, 26/12/1914.

<sup>94</sup> *ECS* 13/3/1915 and 3/4/1915. It is not clear whether they were actually distributed.

symbols is shown in an *Essex County Standard* columnist's anger against men who did not wear their armlets:<sup>95</sup>

It is quite obvious that every man who does not wear the brassard which he possesses is thereby himself a slacker [in not wearing it] and an encourager of slackers. And to encourage wilful slackness is to help the enemy.

Andrew Clark was initially sceptical of the armlets, but noted their presence around his village in December 1915. Later, an acquaintance of Mrs Bennett in Walthamstow 'has been attested and wears an armlet and thinks its [sic] fine sport', which perhaps suggests that he did not take his attestation as seriously as was intended.<sup>96</sup>

We have seen that the sacrifices of those serving or killed in action were unquestionable, even heroic; by contrast, the positions of munitions workers and men who volunteered only for home service were less clear and rhetoric about them was mixed. In October 1915, a county Alderman attacked the latter for having escaped both the perils of foreign service and, thanks to their khaki uniforms, the social pressure applied to other men, leaving them free to have 'the time of their lives'. An argument on the subject raged in a local paper's letters column for several weeks.<sup>97</sup> A Chelmsford judge was roundly condemned in the press for questioning the self-sacrifice of men joining locally-raised home-defence Volunteer units rather than the army, on the basis that they were undermining army recruitment;<sup>98</sup> the fact that one unit boasted that 60 percent of its original members had joined the army by

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<sup>95</sup> *ECS*, 1/1/1916.

<sup>96</sup> Clark diaries 25/12/1915; IWM, 96/3/1, letter from Edith Bennett to Edwin, 10/9/1916.

<sup>97</sup> *ECS*, 9/10/1915, 6/11/1915, 20/11/1915 and 27/11/1915.

<sup>98</sup> *EWN*, 2/10/1914.

April 1917 suggests that he had a point.<sup>99</sup> The position of munitions workers was unusual as they were actively courted by the government and employers who stressed that the work was essential to the war effort,<sup>100</sup> but they were not seen as making a sacrifice comparable with that of those joining the armed forces. This left them open to accusations of being ‘shirkers’; there was great anger about this disparity when conscription was introduced, although advertisements could still promote the work as important and patriotic.<sup>101</sup>

The status and honour of those not serving was very much in the eye of the beholder. While soldiers could criticise those at home and Lance-Corporal Jarvis could cast unenlisted men as fancy dandies,<sup>102</sup> different groups within the non-military population attacked one another, each feeling that other groups were shirking their duty.<sup>103</sup> A sense of unequal sacrifice ran through critiques of others’ efforts. Farm labourers criticised the landed classes and the headmaster of a grammar school saw the working-classes as slacking; meanwhile many working men ‘would not enlist, unless conscription ensured that “the slackers” who are hanging back would be made to enlist with them’.<sup>104</sup> Naturally, none considered *themselves* or those like them to be slackers despite their non-enlistment. In addition to this rather myopic view of one’s own position, pressure from the upper classes was often rejected in rural areas. We have already seen the lack of response to Sebag-Montefiore’s appeals; elsewhere Andrew Clark explicitly noted men’s

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<sup>99</sup> ECS, 14/4/1917.

<sup>100</sup> Clark diaries, 25/5/1915, referring to an advertisement.

<sup>101</sup> ECS, 1/9/1916.

<sup>102</sup> ECC, 30/7/1915.

<sup>103</sup> Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 111.

<sup>104</sup> Clark diaries 1/9/1914 and 13/5/1915; ERO, D/DBg 80/11, J.F. Hough to Mrs Bean, 30/12/1914.

objections to this overt pressure to enlist, and the failure on this front of unpopular local landowners like J.H. Tritton and Colonel H.N. Tufnell.<sup>105</sup>

### *Family and female pressure*

The degree and type of direct pressure within families is hard to establish. The reluctant parent was a common thread in recruiting rhetoric, as in the *Burnham Advertiser's* repeated railings against 'selfish and unpatriotic' mothers: in February 1915, it mockingly quoted a woman saying that her sons' enlistment would break her heart, while in September a local woman was said to have exclaimed her thankfulness that her sons had not enlisted in light of the heavy casualties at Gallipoli.<sup>106</sup> A small number of identifiable cases of familial pressure against enlistment show the kinds of effects family pressure could have, if not its extent. The Derby Scheme canvasser in Little Clacton recorded one 19-year-old's willingness to attest, but that his father would not allow it.<sup>107</sup> One Great Leighs woman regarded her husband's duty to his family as out-weighing that to the nation and was upset when he attested.<sup>108</sup> W.W. Lawrence, a hair-dresser from Colchester, later recalled that his wife begged him not to enlist unless conscripted, a fate he avoided totally by finding a job in munitions.<sup>109</sup> Lilla McNarry wrote from Romford to her son Leon in Canada at the end of 1915: 'Thank God you dear and Oss are out there and not compelled to join. I cannot tell you, I want my children'. 'Oss' did

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<sup>105</sup> Clark diaries, 28/9/1914, 9/5/1915 and 15/5/1915.

<sup>106</sup> *BDA*, 29/8/1914, 13/2/1915 and 18/9/1915. See also *SWG*, 3/12/1915.

<sup>107</sup> ERO, D/P 80/28/2, Records of Little Clacton in the Great War, hand-written Derby canvass records.

<sup>108</sup> Clark diaries, 4/11/1915 and 11/11/1915

<sup>109</sup> W.W. Lawrence, *W.W. Lawrence, 1888-1968* (unpublished memoir held at ERO), p. 44.

enlist in 1916 and constantly wrote to Leon not to do the same.<sup>110</sup> Even serving soldiers, then, might warn their relatives off service (technically a criminal offence): Syd Clover wrote to his family in Walthamstow about his brothers' enlistment in March 1916: 'I don't want them to. One is quite bad enough, let alone more.'<sup>111</sup> What the full extent of familial and specifically female discouragement was we can never know, but we can see from such examples that it was real.

Better known is the role of women in attempting to spur enlistment both by their actions and as a rhetorical device to highlight the threat of defeat and invasion. The 'white feather' campaign, which saw some young women distributing feathers to men who had not enlisted, has been studied in depth by Nicoletta Gullace.<sup>112</sup> The movement's power came from women being able to place themselves above unenlisted men in terms of honour and duty and thus being able to challenge men in these terms and question their manliness. Among Gullace's examples of recipients of the feathers are several from Metropolitan Essex;<sup>113</sup> although contemporary sources do not suggest a spread beyond these districts, knowledge of the campaign was certainly widespread.<sup>114</sup> Speaking in Great Leighs, a Major Herbert adopted the campaign's symbolism, asking whether the feather of British manhood was now to be a white one where their ancestors had been brave.<sup>115</sup> The idea of the white

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<sup>110</sup> ERO, D/P 80/28/2, Records of Little Clacton in the Great War, hand-written Derby canvass records; Meldrum, *McNarrys*, Lilla to Leon 16/11/1915 (p. 315) and Oss to Leon 26/3/1917 (p. 333).

<sup>111</sup> Donald Pohl, 'The Clover Family Great War Correspondence', unpublished lecture, 1985, held at WFA; quoted by permission of Dr Pohl.

<sup>112</sup> Nicoletta F. Gullace *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (New York, 2002), Ch. 4.

<sup>113</sup> Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, pp. 80, 78.

<sup>114</sup> *SWG*, 4/9/1914; *EWN*, 9/10/1914.

<sup>115</sup> Clark diaries, 6/9/1914.

feather allowed unenlisted men to be challenged for not fulfilling the ideal of man as protector; even where feathers were not actually being handed out, the shame of not doing one's duty could be brought to bear. In rural Danbury, local men's masculinity was directly challenged at a recruiting meeting in September when 'men willing to serve were urged to stand forward. The only response came from a young woman who said, "Will you take me? I am ready to fight for England."<sup>116</sup>

The role of women was most overt symbolically, in the speeches and recruiting efforts of men, who could challenge eligible men's masculinity by stressing women's sacrifices or simply attacking men for not defending their womenfolk from invasion and violation by the Germans. Two of the most popular PRC recruiting posters featured women who needed defending from German 'frightfulness': a woman and child fleeing a burning Belgian town, and an allegorical female figure imploring men to 'Take Up The Sword Of Justice' in response to the sinking of the *Lusitania*.<sup>117</sup> Recruiting speakers made use of the threat to British women in the event of invasion.<sup>118</sup> In this way, women were major symbols of what men should be serving to protect, especially in light of the stories of rape and mutilation perpetrated by the Germans.<sup>119</sup> They formed a link between the threat of defeat and allegiance to one's locality at the most personal level – in the home.

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<sup>116</sup> Quoted in ERO, T/Z 13/163, Helen Platts, 'The Effects of the First World War on the Rural Communities of Danbury and Little Baddow' unpublished essay (1980), p. 22.

<sup>117</sup> TNA, WO 106/367, report on the PRC, p. 7-8. The most popular poster showed Kitchener and a statement calling for men to do their duty; this was not the famous 'Wants You' poster (see Hiley, "Kitchener Wants You").

<sup>118</sup> See pp. 95-6.

<sup>119</sup> See Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, Chs. 1 and 2.

## The Derby Scheme

The final great effort of the moral compulsion phase was the so-called Derby Scheme (named after the director-general of recruiting, Lord Derby), in which a canvass was undertaken of all men felt to be available to serve, based on the results of the August 1915 National Register, which had enumerated all citizens aged 16 to 65.<sup>120</sup> Derby Scheme canvassers asked men to enlist, ‘attest’ their willingness to serve if called, or give a good reason for not doing so; details of the local results have been integrated into the relevant remaining sections of this chapter, but it is worth looking briefly at its operation and general results. Regarded from the start as the last effort at voluntary enlistment (although it was rather a case of ‘voluntary conscription’<sup>121</sup>), the scheme was indeed a great voluntary effort involving local recruiters, volunteer canvassers and teachers, who compiled the results.<sup>122</sup> These volunteers were largely the same people who gave their time to the recruiting and charitable efforts already undertaken across the county, including the National Register, but one gets the sense that this job was not as popular as some others. William Brown, in Great Leighs, was reluctantly involved and told Andrew Clark that it was “the most unpleasant job he ever took on, to recruit your neighbours’ sons, your neighbours’ men, your own men, but no one else would touch it.”<sup>123</sup> Posters in Chelmsford advertising for Derby canvassers suggest that townspeople were also reluctant to undertake the role.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 167-69.

<sup>121</sup> *EHE*, 27/12/1915, quoting the *East Ham Collegian* magazine.

<sup>122</sup> ERO D/P 80/28/8, Records of Little Clacton during the Great War, recruiting committee minutes, 27/10/1915; Clark diaries, 27/10/1915.

<sup>123</sup> Clark diaries, 7/12/1915.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 3/11/1915.

Once staff were found, though, men were canvassed and their responses processed on a large scale: 3,334 cards were sent to men not in protected (or ‘starred’) jobs in Colchester, 3,450 in Saffron Waldon constituency and 10,000 in Walthamstow. In all, a third of those canvassed in Colchester (1,058 men) attested, enlisted or promised to enlist and another few hundred enlisted outside the system. At Saffron Walden, 11.6 percent enlisted or promised to do so and another 28.8 percent attested, making a total of 40.4 percent. Between a quarter and a third of those canvassed in each area refused to attest or enlist.<sup>125</sup> The national result was similar, with 1.4 million unstarred men attesting and 215,431 men enlisting by 20 December; these men made up 28.4 and 6.3 percent respectively (or just over a third) of the men felt to be available to serve.<sup>126</sup>

Queues appeared outside recruiting offices in the last days of the scheme; these were reported as another recruiting boom,<sup>127</sup> but in reality there were significant differences in motives for voluntary enlistment and attestation. For many, the reasons for not attesting were closely linked to those for not enlisting, ranging from indispensability to general unwillingness to serve. Promoters of the scheme urged men to put aside their reservations and trust the authorities, in the form of local tribunals (of which we will see much more in Chapter 5) to establish who was available for service and who was not:

[E]very man, employer or employee, who is of military age, should enlist [in the scheme, i.e. attest]. He may consider that the business upon which he is engaged renders him indispensable. That, however, is a point which is not for him to decide.

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<sup>125</sup> *ECS*, 15/1/1916; *ECC*, 16/1/1916

<sup>126</sup> Figures from *ECS*, 8/1/1916, and P.P. 1914-16 (Cd. 8149) ‘Report on Recruiting by the Earl of Derby, K.G., director-general of recruiting’, p. 5.

<sup>127</sup> *ECS*, 30/10/1915 and 11/12/1915.

This urging of men to attest and submit to tribunal decisions ‘regardless of his position or the responsibilities of his Home or Vocation’,<sup>128</sup> is important. It marked a significant shift along the road from local elites seeking to promote voluntary sacrifice in enlistment into their new role in ensuring equality of sacrifice. The scheme embodied both of these roles, but the idea of equality now brought into wider consideration the civilian position of a potential recruit.

Many men who attested did so either because they did not expect to be called, they intended to appeal, or they were pressured to attest by force or by misleading statements from employers, newspapers, and politicians. In mid-December, Great Leighs farmer Charles Rayner ‘did not know what to do with his men under Lord Derby’s scheme. So he bundled them all, married and unmarried, into a waggon [sic], and sent them into Chelmsford to be “attested.”’ Other local farmers did the same; one man referred to such actions by employers as ‘amounting to compulsion’.<sup>129</sup> In front of a tribunal, one man claimed that his employer, the Port of London Authority, had forced all of its men to attest.<sup>130</sup>

Many attested under the impression that they would otherwise be unable to appeal, or be less successful in doing so. Accusations were made that employers and recruiters had misled the public over the rights of unattested men, particularly the right to appeal against being called up. One man told Barking Tribunal ‘that it was publicly stated that all had to attest if of military age or they would have no chance to appeal. He had three children and it was the hardship at home he feared more

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<sup>128</sup> *SWG*, 10/12/1915.

<sup>129</sup> Clark diaries, 13/11/1915, 11/12/1915 and 18/12/1915.

<sup>130</sup> *EHE*, 2/3/1917.

than the Germans.’<sup>131</sup> Another appellant, asked whether he had expected to have to serve when he attested, replied ‘No, sir, I did not. I thought I should have a better chance of appealing.’<sup>132</sup> Starred men also attested in large numbers despite the fact that they were exempt from military service and explicitly stated their intention to appeal,<sup>133</sup> as did men who knew that they were unfit to serve.<sup>134</sup> At the same time, others, like two horsemen who later appealed at Lexden and Winstree, did not attest because they were doing their bit at home.<sup>135</sup> The fact that around two thirds of both attested and unattested men appealed against their call-up in early 1916 suggests that neither group was particularly keen on serving even when called for.<sup>136</sup>

Most famously, married men attested under the impression that single men would be called up first, following a pledge to that end from the prime minister.<sup>137</sup> The Little Clacton Derby canvasser was specifically instructed to use the ‘single men first’ argument to married men who were reluctant to attest,<sup>138</sup> while the *East Ham Collegian* magazine satirically defined the attestee’s armband as ‘A badge worn by married men [...] to show their sympathy with the principle of “Single Men First”.’<sup>139</sup> That married men were being called up and that attested men had no

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<sup>131</sup> *BA*, 25/3/1916.

<sup>132</sup> *ECS*, 22/4/1916.

<sup>133</sup> *ECC*, 17/12/1915.

<sup>134</sup> TNA, WO 106/367, Papers of the PRC, ‘Report of the Householders’ Canvass and later schemes’, p. 35.

<sup>135</sup> *ECS*, 4/3/1916.

<sup>136</sup> See pp. 230-1.

<sup>137</sup> See Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, pp. 168-69.

<sup>138</sup> ERO D/P 80/28/2, Records of Little Clacton during the Great War, recruiting committee minutes, 11/11/1915.

<sup>139</sup> Quoted in *EHE*, 29/12/1915.

advantage over the unattested caused alarm and anger in early 1916.<sup>140</sup> As early as February there were suggestions that ‘civil war’ would ensue ‘if the married men are taken out before the young ones’.<sup>141</sup> It is clear that, for all the rhetoric of volunteering, attestation did not represent acceptance of the need for a voluntary sacrifice; in fact it tipped the balance into local management of equality of sacrifice and confirmed that many were not willing to sacrifice their civilian status.

### **Underlying factors**

#### *Economic*

If societal pressures can be seen as both encouraging and discouraging recruitment, then the same is true to an even greater degree of economics. Historians have stressed the varied influence of economic factors and David Silbey in particular has put forward the idea of economic factors as part of decision-making over enlistment.<sup>142</sup> This is useful as it encourages us to think of enlistment as decision with multiple possible outcomes; a decision influenced, in the case of economic factors, by the removal of disincentives and the weighing up of options.

Unemployment, wages and separation allowances were the main economic influences on enlistment.

Unemployment prompted enlistment for some, such as a group of ‘sturdy young fishermen’ thrown out of work by the war,<sup>143</sup> but its role was complex. What slowdown there was in industry was broadly counterbalanced by enlistment and it is

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<sup>140</sup> British Library, Add MS 54192A, PRC: minutes of the Joint Recruiting Committee, 10/4/1916; Liddle Collection, CO 021, Papers of William Cooper, diary 17/3/1916.

<sup>141</sup> Clark diaries, 20/2/1916.

<sup>142</sup> Ferguson *Pity of War*, p. 206; Silbey, *British Working Class*, Ch. 6.

<sup>143</sup> *EADT*, 8/9/1914.

unclear whether this was unemployed men enlisting, or employees leaving and other people filling their positions.<sup>144</sup> It is worth noting that two hundred men were registered unemployed in Southend in October, up from thirty before the war, but only twenty-five of them had enlisted. This is a small proportion of unemployed, but an even smaller proportion of the 800 men who had enlisted locally.<sup>145</sup> By contrast, recruiting meetings in workplaces could be very successful.

It could well be that the prospect of steady and relatively good pay was a factor in the enlistment of farm labourers and casual dock labourers, especially as unemployment rose in the docks. However, as industry recovered, new war industries grew, and both prices and wages rose, there were viable alternatives to both casual labour and enlistment. Many faced with wage-based decisions simply changed jobs, such as former hairdresser W.W. Lawrence or three men leaving the employ of J.H. Tritton in Great Leighs in 1915.<sup>146</sup> Jay Winter has shown that men in industries with steady incomes were more likely to join up than those with unstable employment.<sup>147</sup> Wage increases could be complicated within jobs, as on farms in mid-Essex where at least one farmer offered a wage increase only if some of the men enlisted, a cynical move that faced men with an awkward decision.<sup>148</sup> With 42 percent of men in rural Essex employed in agriculture, the harvest and its attendant annual bonus was a major part of the economic calendar, and in 1914 it ended just

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<sup>144</sup> See P.E. Dewey 'Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force During the First World War' *Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), pp. 199-223, and P.P. 1914-16, (Cd 7703), 'State of Employment in the United Kingdom in October 1914.'

<sup>145</sup> *SWG*, 2/10/1914.

<sup>146</sup> Clark diaries, 1/5/1915; Lawrence, *Lawrence*, p. 43-45.

<sup>147</sup> J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke, 2nd edn. 2003 [1985]), p. 35.

<sup>148</sup> Clark diaries, 26/1/1915.

as the news from Mons arrived.<sup>149</sup> This timing helped recruiting in the countryside: Tritton convened a recruiting meeting ‘now that the harvest is over’ and others noted that more farm labourers were enlisting across North Essex.<sup>150</sup> Labourers from St Osyth and Little Clacton were able to enlist and stay at home until after the harvest as an incentive to join up in mid-1915.<sup>151</sup>

Recruiters were keen to overcome other financial disincentives to enlistment, Taylor observed that those earning over 30s per week might not want to make the economic sacrifice, but that they must in order to “keep the flag flying”. This statement suggests that those on lower wages were felt to be more likely to enlist, but that the disincentive of low army pay was also present.<sup>152</sup> In many places, a bounty was offered to men who enlisted.<sup>153</sup> Prominent Tiptree jam-makers Wilkin & Sons offered a £1 gift to employees enlisting, support for their dependents, and the promise to keep jobs open for them; similar provision was made by other employers, notably councils.<sup>154</sup> Both employers and recruiters laid considerable stress on separation allowances after failures and inadequacies of the system having caused major worries in 1914.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> *Census*, 1911; *ECS*, 29/8/1914 reported the end of the harvest in North Essex.

<sup>150</sup> Clark diaries, Tritton to Clark, 28/8/1914; *ECS*, 5/9/1915; *BA*, 5/9/1914.

<sup>151</sup> *ECS*, 14/8/1915.

<sup>152</sup> *SWWN*, 4/9/1914; Michael Neiberg makes the point that most workers earned much more than private soldiers in his review of Silbey’s book, *Journal of Social History*, 39/2, (2005), pp. 547-48.

<sup>153</sup> *ECS*, 27/3/1915, cited in Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 76.

<sup>154</sup> *ECS*, 5/9/1914; *ECS*, 9/10/1915; Clark reports (entirely spurious) reports of the opposite being practiced at Cadbury’s factories, where men were said to have to swear *not* to enlist (Clark diaries, 22/9/1915).

<sup>155</sup> Clark diaries, 29/9/1914 and 16/5/1915.

Economic factors were not simply a pull factor for the army, but where disincentives could be overcome they enabled men to join up content that their families would not suffer, showing the importance of home to the potential soldiers of the Great War.<sup>156</sup> The decision over enlistment included an assessment of sacrifices the family would be making if a man left, as against dishonourable shirkedom or the risk of invasion. It would be strange for breadwinners to consciously leave their family suffering when enlisting to defend them, although Winter comments that many did join up before separation allowance problems were resolved.<sup>157</sup> When the Derby canvass required men to state whether they were willing to serve when called, the importance of domestic and economic factors was clear. In Colchester some explicitly stated their employers' refusal to allow attestation.<sup>158</sup> It is hard to tell the overall level of refusal on economic grounds as specific reasons were not reported by local recruiting committees, although management of his mother's farm was given as a reason by one Little Clacton man and single-handed running of a business by another.<sup>159</sup>

The grounds upon which both attested and unattested men appealed against being called up suggests that domestic and business economic reasons could lie behind both attestation and refusal. Some men did not attest because their home situation meant that they were genuinely unable to leave it and fight, while others attested on the basis that they would later be exempted on the grounds of economic indispensability. One major facet of volunteering, non-enlistment and attestation

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<sup>156</sup> Silbey, *British Working Class*, p. 104.

<sup>157</sup> Winter, *Great War and the British people*, p. 35.

<sup>158</sup> ECS, 15/1/1916; Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>159</sup> ERO, D/P 80/28/2, Records of Little Clacton during the Great War, hand-written Derby canvass records.

was deciding whether one's family would suffer unduly in one's absence. If they would not, then a man could enlist with fewer worries, otherwise he was more likely to stay at home. A man's position as a son or father (or, more importantly, whether he was the main breadwinner or not) affected this decision, fathers having more of a role as provider for the family, while sons and single men were generally more easily spared from their homes and more readily cast as protectors. The emphasis on single men as shirkers in recruiting meeting rhetoric and in the promises made to married men in the Derby scheme were a reflection of this.<sup>160</sup>

#### *Allegiance and the local community*

A common thread in much of this discussion has been the importance of men's allegiances, ranging from the nation to their own families. Allegiance to nation, local area or family, each layer less abstract than the previous one, was interwoven into the fabric of national life, for instance where regional and national news was reported in local newspapers. David Silbey's distinction between national patriotism and allegiance to other levels of society is very useful for understanding men's actions in the Great War.<sup>161</sup> We have seen that local social and economic factors had a mixed influence on enlistment, from creating an atmosphere in which men felt that they could or should enlist to fostering a rejection of enlistment on the grounds of economic ties, objection to unwonted social pressure, or familial pressure not to enlist. David Fitzpatrick has written of communal attitudes in Ireland affecting recruitment rates,<sup>162</sup> an idea that has some utility beyond the major divisions on that island: communities or families in England could also hold a

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<sup>160</sup> *ECC*, 30/7/1915.

<sup>161</sup> Silbey, *British Working-Class*, Ch. 7.

<sup>162</sup> David Fitzpatrick, 'The Logic of Collective Sacrifice: Ireland and the British Army, 1914-1918', *The Historical Journal*, 38/4 (1995), pp. 1017-1030.

collective opposition to military service even in war time,<sup>163</sup> perhaps exacerbated by unpopular or tactless recruiters.

The ability to serve alongside those who shared not only one's nationality but also similar regional, local or employment backgrounds no doubt aided some men's decision to join up, combining the national war effort with maintaining an element of one's civilian identity. The proportion of men joining the Territorial Force in Essex was around ten percentage points higher than the national figure (See Table 3.3), although it should be noted that there were more TF units than Service battalions in the Essex Regiment, and the London Regiment (which many men joined from Metropolitan Essex) was entirely Territorial. We should not regard TF and other local-unit enlistment as simply an embodiment of local allegiance as there were other reasons to join them, and not all of their recruits were from their designated area.<sup>164</sup> Nonetheless, these units appear to have benefited in recruiting success from the local ties they represented.

Local and national allegiance can be seen as a fundamental aspect of the peaks of enlistment in 1914 and May 1915, when Britain appeared to be at greatest risk from first invasion and then 'frightful' German methods of war. Men would not have enlisted to defend something to which they did not feel a connection and affection, be it something as abstract as nation and empire, or as real as hearth and home.

Vitality, the link between the two, as Silbey notes, was established in people's

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<sup>163</sup> Clark notes the anger of one attestee's anti-army family (diaries, 11/11/1915).

<sup>164</sup> R.A. Banks and T.M. Chell, *With the 10th Essex in France* (London, 1921), p. 5; ERO, A9831, Box 12, Essex TF: General Purpose Committee, Essex TF Association, minutes 12/5/1915.

thinking at the time;<sup>165</sup> in Southend, Canon F.D. Pierce expressed this after the 1915 recruiting surge, when the town had suffered two air raids:

There is such a thing as local Patriotism as well as Imperial Patriotism. Indeed, we come to a full expression and understanding of the patriotism of the Empire most easily through our patriotism to our Borough.<sup>166</sup>

This combination of the local and national war effort was seen from the start of the war with the creation of hospitals and collections for both local and national war distress funds. For some, local and familial ties easily outstripped national feeling, as Revd Reeve in Stondon Massey noted of one local conscript:

[He] is stated to have said that he felt he owed a greater duty to his mother at home than to King George: for his mother had done much for him, whereas the King, so far as he knew, had not rendered him any service!<sup>167</sup>

For some men, not only those in local units, the feeling of allegiance was strongest when they thought of their hometowns.<sup>168</sup> As with their families and homes, men who felt that the nation, town, district, village or street to which they felt affection and allegiance was under threat fought to protect it.

### *Rejection*

Some men were not serving by the end of 1915 because they had been rejected, either outright on medical grounds, from a particular branch of service, or at a particular time. Clearly, these men had actually come forward to volunteer, but their case is still worth considering as they remained civilians. Records were not kept of the numbers of men who were rejected by recruiting officers on medical

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<sup>165</sup> Silbey, *British Working Class*, Ch. 7.

<sup>166</sup> *SWG*, 11/6/1915.

<sup>167</sup> ERO T/P 188/3, Stondon Massey, Notes for a History of the Parish, 25/3/1916.

<sup>168</sup> See Frederic Hillersdon Keeling, *Keeling Letters and Recollections*, edited by E.T. (London, 1918), p. 288, letter dated 1/6/1916.

grounds. What figures we do have for late 1914 suggest around a quarter of Essex volunteers being rejected as unfit. Similarly, thirty percent of recruits from Clacton were rejected as unfit in May-July 1915.<sup>169</sup> Once in the army at least 5.5 percent of early recruits were rejected as 'not likely to become an efficient soldier'.<sup>170</sup> This rate was probably increased by the lax medical inspections given to men on enlistment, which have been amply documented,<sup>171</sup> and the administrative mess that left one third of Eastern Command's 1914 volunteers (including Essex enlistees) without official enlistment papers and potentially requiring re-examination.<sup>172</sup> There was a large pool of civilians who had been rejected at the recruiting office or in their units.<sup>173</sup>

When the Derby canvass results were reported, figures were given for medical unfitness among the remaining eligible male population. Nationally, slightly under one fifth of all those canvassed were found to be unfit including a quarter of single men.<sup>174</sup> Figures for Colchester give roughly the same proportions and in Walthamstow 21 percent of single men were medically rejected; in Saffron Walden 32 percent were found or stated to be unfit.<sup>175</sup> Ilana Bet-El contends that before

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<sup>169</sup> For Essex, 27% unfit in August; for Barking 28% unfit by mid-September; calculated from figures quoted in Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 72; ECS editions from 15/5/1915 to 31/7/1915.

<sup>170</sup> By May 1915, over 100,000 men had been discharged on these grounds, of 1.8 million recruits to date P.P. 1921 (Cmd 1193) 'General Annual Reports on the British Army for the period from 1st October, 1913, to 30th September, 1919'.

<sup>171</sup> Winter, *Great War and British people*, p. 50; Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, pp.178-80.

<sup>172</sup> P.P. 1922 (Cmd 1734) 'Report of the Committee of Inquiry into "Shell-Shock"', p. 175, evidence of Lt Col Clay.

<sup>173</sup> See Silbey, *British Working Class*, pp. 43-47.

<sup>174</sup> Roy Douglas points out that this rather undermines the idea that single men refused to attest ('Voluntary Enlistment', pp. 582-83).

<sup>175</sup> ECS, 15/1/1916, WG, 14/1/1916, quoted in Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p 86; ECC, 14/1/1916.

conscription 'men who were clearly unfit' did not usually undergo examination;<sup>176</sup> this may be true but, as in the Derby Scheme, knowingly unfit men might have undergone medical inspection so as to remove the stigma of non-enlistment, the failed enlistee holding a more honourable position than the non-enlistee, especially when a badge or other proof of rejection could be shown to any enquirer.

Another group of rejected men were those who were rejected from their chosen branch of service or simply when medical requirements were at their most restrictive. Early in the war, W.W. Lawrence attempted to join the Essex Yeomanry but was turned away and never again tried to join up.<sup>177</sup> Other men rejected from a particular unit, or on grounds of age or medical condition, went on to join up elsewhere,<sup>178</sup> but many felt that they were no longer needed. Increased medical requirements from 11 September 1914 helped to prompt a rapid and irrecoverable decline in recruiting and efforts were made to stress that men *were* still needed. Meanwhile, there were examples of men being repeatedly rejected for work for which they appeared qualified.<sup>179</sup> Rejection, like other factors, prompted a range of responses.

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<sup>176</sup> Ilana R. Bet-El, *Conscripts: Forgotten Men of the Great War* (Stroud, 1999), p. 36.

<sup>177</sup> Lawrence, *Lawrence*, p. 44. Quite why a hairdresser felt this urgent desire to work with horses is not clear. Kernahan notes the problem of men refused service in the cavalry not returning to enlist for other branches (*Experiences*, pp. 37-38). See also Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, p. 176.

<sup>178</sup> For example a man with an injured hand who enlisted at the third attempt in October 1914 (*BDA*, 31/10/1914).

<sup>179</sup> See Clark diaries, 27/4/1915.

*Unwillingness to serve*

Less tangible are the group who simply did not wish to fight or to serve. In addition to those who rejected war or military service on grounds of conscience, there were those who simply did not want to join up, but evidence about them is difficult to find. These men overlap with those who did not join for domestic or economic reasons, since some might simply have given these as excuses for not enlisting. The category of refusal or declining to enlist in the Derby returns does not help to unpick men's reasons as this could include those with domestic commitments and, equally, men might have attested on the basis of likely exemption. Around 30 percent of canvassed men 'refused' to attest.<sup>180</sup> In Walthamstow, 1,795 married men reportedly gave no 'adequate' reason for not enlisting, compared to 1,287 who said they would enlist if their circumstances were different (20.8 and 14.9 percent of all those canvassed respectively), which gives some indication of the divide between unwillingness and other commitments.<sup>181</sup>

The Derby canvass did not include starved men as a matter of course (although many did attest), and it may be wondered how many of those who did not wish to fight took up protected work, either because it was there and well-paid or in order to avoid the pressure and later compulsion to enlist. Equally, not all of those whose domestic or business precluded enlistment would necessarily have enlisted given the chance. Added to which, as more men enlisted, those who might have been dispensable in August 1914 became less so as the pool of surplus labour shrank and then all but dried up. The supply of eligible men was said to be, 'to a great extent,

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<sup>180</sup> Douglas, 'Voluntary Enlistment', p. 582, the figure was similar in Saffron Walden and Colchester.

<sup>181</sup> *WG*, 14/1/1916, quoted in Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p 86

exhausted' in rural areas by February 1915 and in West Ham three months later, according to the local TF Association.<sup>182</sup>

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There can be no easy conclusions about why men enlisted during the voluntary period; everyone's situation was different and every man faced a slightly different mixture of pressures, threats and inducements, and responded according to his own situation and feelings. Nonetheless, some broad themes can be located: primarily the importance of the threat to men's homes, districts and nation, at its peak in late-August and early-September 1914, as the most clear-cut spur to enlistment. At this point, the apocalyptic narrative and sense of defensive duty were at their most powerful in people's understandings of the war. This defensive factor remained but its power declined; greater pressure was exerted on individuals as time went on, beginning with appeals at meetings and through posters and culminating in moral compulsion as communities, organisations and elites sought to encourage local enlistment; the failure of these efforts led to conscription.<sup>183</sup>

The voluntary recruiting period saw a growing division between the leadership and rhetoric offered by elites and the willingness of ordinary people to make the sacrifices called for. Men's decision-making was affected throughout by an assessment of economic incentives factors and elements of local allegiance, be they relating to defence or service with likeminded men. On the flip-side, the financial sacrifices families faced and men's feelings of duty to prevent them could persuade them to remain at home. Where they felt that the male protector role should be filled

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<sup>182</sup> ERO, A9831, Box 12, Essex TF: General Purpose Committee, minutes 27/2/1915 and 12/5/1915.

<sup>183</sup> Britain rather than the UK, since Irishmen were not conscripted.

by others, particularly where they themselves were occupied with being a family's provider, men were less likely to join up. Enlistment was central to ideas of wartime sacrifice and was the first major area in which elite roles progressed from encouraging willing sacrifice to attempting to ensure equality of sacrifice as conscription and tribunals arrived at the start of 1916.

## Chapter 4 – Endurance, 1916-17

In the Great War [...the] limit of endurance was far greater than anyone had supposed. But there was a limit somewhere.<sup>1</sup>

The middle years of the war dominate British memory of the Great War. In 1916 and 1917, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) fought on the Somme and inched its way up to Passchendaele ridge in battles that sum up for many the static and apparently futile nature of fighting on the western front.<sup>2</sup> These two years continued the drain on manpower, in both enlistment and deaths: in the Essex recruiting district, more men joined the army in 1916-1917 than during the voluntary enlistment period that preceded it;<sup>3</sup> local fatalities climbed year on year to a peak in 1917 (see Table 4.1).

Understanding that the British offensive of 1916 would see a great increase in casualties, BEF commander General Sir Douglas Haig wrote that:

Together with patience, the nation must be taught to bear losses. No amount of skill on the part of the higher commanders, no training, however good, on the part of officers and men, no superiority, however great, of arms and ammunition, will enable victories to be won without the sacrifice of men's lives. [...] 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 such a cause.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (London, 1997 [1922]), p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> These battles attract much scholarly attention, for example, Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson's *The Somme* (New Haven, 2005) and *Passchendaele: the Untold Story* (London, 1996), and William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: the Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> 30,180 enlisted in the Essex district in 1916-1917, compared to 26,742 before that; Eastern Command figures show a similar trend, which is not repeated for national enlistment figures or in London (TNA, NATS 1/399, recruits raised (monthly)).

<sup>4</sup> TNA, WO 256/10, diary of Sir Douglas Haig, May-June 1916, 'Memorandum on Policy for the Press', 24/5/1916.

This could be read as the callous statement of an unfeeling commander, but it expresses a genuine concern that, shielded so far from the massive losses the French and Germans had already suffered,<sup>5</sup> the British public were not prepared for the level of sacrifice that major offensives and winning the war on the battlefield would entail. Alongside battlefield losses, the effects of the war at home increased from 1915 to 1916, with increased taxes, air raids and price rises.<sup>6</sup> As Haig understood, hardships, anxiety and loss had to be mediated, as William Philpott puts it, ‘through a narrative of purpose and worthy sacrifice, of nobility and bravery amid the tragedy of battle.’<sup>7</sup> Just as political scientists have identified in the twenty-first century, an understandable and acceptable narrative is essential to maintaining support for war in the face of casualties; in 1916 and 1917, anxieties and hardships on the home front extended this need and made it more acute.

The middle years of the war also saw an accumulation of roles for local authorities, whose roles shifted from encouraging voluntary sacrifice to managing equality of sacrifice; more subtle but equally important were the changes to the discourse of sacrifice and narrative of the war’s course.

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<sup>5</sup> In the first five months of war alone the French had lost 300,000 killed, of 900,000 casualties of all sorts; the Germans suffered around 750,000 casualties by 1916 (Alistair Horne, *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916* (London, 1993 [1962]), p. 19); British losses reached such figures during 1916.

<sup>6</sup> Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 389.

<sup>7</sup> Philpott, *Bloody Victory*, Ch 8, quotation from p. 296. Cf. Mark Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual: Commemoration in the City and East London, 1916-1939* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 29.

Table 4.1 – War deaths recorded for a selection of Essex towns (years as a percentage of town’s total war deaths).<sup>8</sup>

	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919 and later	<i>Total deaths</i>
Braintree	3.04	18.25	23.19	30.42	19.39	5.7	263
Brentwood	4.03	15.75	23.08	23.81	28.21	5.13	273
Chelmsford	6.47	15.59	15.9	30.88	26.76	5.00	340
Colchester	4.40	12.85	21.38	27.85	28.12	5.39	1,113
Grays Thurrock	3.61	15.90	17.11	32.77	27.23	3.37	415
Leyton	3.37	14.59	18.65	31.98	28.05	3.37	713
Plaistow	4.30	11.98	22.27	29.95	28.52	2.99	768
Romford	3.50	10.51	19.39	34.81	27.10	4.67	428
Southend	3.22	14.00	21.78	31.11	27.67	2.22	1,800

Before the end of January 1916, a major plank of voluntary sacrifice was already lost as the Military Service Act (MSA) ended the voluntary recruiting period. This also brought first and largest of a series of shifts in the role of local authorities and other elites in 1916 and 1917 away from encouraging willing sacrifice to a role of managing (in)equality of sacrifice, with local tribunals adjudicating appeals against military service; local powers extended over pensions and the production and distribution of food. Challenges to voluntary sacrifice spread into other areas, notably charity and leisure as the level of sacrifice was negotiated locally and nationally.

Some of the war’s narratives were also changing in the face of the realities of war at home and on the battlefields. Although press coverage of battles was almost relentlessly positive, it became clear by the end of the summer of 1916 that the desired breakthrough on the Western Front had not come. Increasingly, as the

<sup>8</sup> Calculated from *Soldiers Died in the Great War*, v.2.0 [CD-ROM] except for Southend (*Roll of Men from Southend-on-Sea and District who Fell in the Great War, 1914-1919* (Southend, 1925)) and Chelmsford (*Chelmsford War Memorial* [website] <<http://www.chelmsfordwarmemorial.co.uk/>> accessed 23/7/2010), which are thus probably more complete records.

citizen army grew and fought its colossal battles in 1916 and 1917, civilians were aware of conditions at the front and the level of casualties sustained locally and nationally, and desired an end to the conflict. To cater for these developments, the cycle of hopes raised by coming offensives was altered and an emphasis on gradual wearing-out of the enemy was introduced. The narrative of the war's purpose was not radically changed, although the language used varied depending on the status of the speaker. The purpose and course of the war had accumulated new aspects, but were not changed radically.

### **Knowledge of the war's costs and conditions**

The impression that home front morale was maintained by ignorance of casualty levels and conditions in the 'real war' has exaggerated the gap between home and war fronts.<sup>9</sup> Although there was inherently an experiential divide between the war experiences of civilians and those serving at the front,<sup>10</sup> this should not be thought of as blocking information from the war front from those at home. Letters, newspapers, and servicemen at home wounded or on leave were complementary sources of information for civilians on the costs and conditions of the war being fought in their name, and helped to shape ideas of its likely course. Jessica Meyer and Michael Roper have shown how letters' purpose and audience affected their content, often limiting their depictions of horrors and of the writers' unheroic attitudes and actions; but these letters could be (and still are) useful sources of

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<sup>9</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, pp. 239-40; Cate Haste, *Home Fires Burning: Propaganda in the First World War* (London, 1977), pp. 66-68. There were similar comments during the war (Clark diaries, 29/6/1915).

<sup>10</sup> Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 133.

information.<sup>11</sup> The importance of links with home for soldiers has been stressed by recent historians as well as by contemporaries;<sup>12</sup> while there is not room here to fully examine the reciprocal importance of this contact to civilians, it is worth taking a brief look at the how information was received at home and what impression it was possible to have of the real conflict.<sup>13</sup>

Information about the cost of the war in dead and wounded was widely available: casualty lists were printed in many local newspapers, which often carried weekly lists of Essex Regiment and other Essex casualties, or more localised lists; these were often accompanied by brief biographical details for many local men (some with photos). At the end of 1915, both the *Essex County Chronicle* and *Burnham Advertiser* carried full lists of the local war dead.<sup>14</sup> During 1916, the weekly lists became very long and complete lists were rarely published; however, borough Rolls of Honour were compiled in the last years of the war and some local papers published full lists of the local war dead immediately after the armistice.<sup>15</sup> The *Chronicle* published national statistics of the numbers killed, wounded and missing up to January 1916, and afterwards printed monthly War Office statistics of

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<sup>11</sup> Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2009); Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester, 2009), especially Ch. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Helen McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge, 2005); Keith Grieves, ““There are times when we would all prefer the factory life”: letters from the trenches to the Shippam works in Chichester during the First World War”, *Family & Community History*, 6/1 (2003), pp. 59-70. Contemporary censors’ reports in IWM 84/46/1, Papers of Capt. M. Hardie.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Schneider’s thesis deals in much more depth with information passed back by soldiers and the Red Cross: Eric F. Schneider, ‘What Britons were told about the war in the trenches, 1914-1918’ (University of Oxford, D.Phil thesis, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> *ECC*, 3/12/1915; *BDA*, 1/1/16.

<sup>15</sup> See *WG*, 1/3/1918, 26/4/1918 and 17/5/1918; ERO, L/P 3/93, Material relating to war trophies, enclosure from *Halstead and Colne Valley Gazette*, 15/11/1918.

casualties, which were broadly accurate.<sup>16</sup> Notification of specific deaths was transmitted to the next of kin by the War Office or in letters from men's officers. Often, though, news was slow or inconclusive, particularly when men's deaths or disappearances took place during major battles; in these cases relatives frequently sought more information through letters to comrades and personal visits to wounded men who were in the same unit; they could also find information from the Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau.<sup>17</sup>

Correspondence about a missing relative could also be frustrating: one Leyton woman heard grim details of one soldier's wounds that left her hoping it was her brother's namesake in his battalion; the Bentall family were divided over whether 'Elda', a London Regiment private, was alive a year after he was reported missing; Revd and Mrs Sadgrove in Fairstead received conflicting reports about their son's likely fate.<sup>18</sup> Fear that a son, husband, or brother had been killed or wounded was a persistent presence in the lives of those with loved ones at the front, brought into sharp focus by lapses in communications. On average, 7.5 million letters per week were received by British soldiers in 1916 and five million sent home, the former figure rising to ten million by the end of the year; this suggests that these men

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<sup>16</sup> Although monthly statistics varied in accuracy, the totals for five- or six-month periods were roughly equal to those published after the war (See *ECC*, first edition of each month 1916-18; *Statistics of the Military Effort*, pp. 256-72).

<sup>17</sup> Clark records numerous letters and enquiries about missing men, such as Reggie Smith (diaries, 30/12/1917). On the Red Cross bureau, see Eric F. Schneider, 'The British Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau: A Case of Truth-Telling in the Great War', in *War in History* Vol. 4 (1997), pp. 296-315.

<sup>18</sup> Wendy Mott (ed.), *"In Dreadful Trouble" The Diary of Beatrice Helena Copping 1914-1916* (Hounslow, 1999), especially 25/2/1916 entry; ERO, D/DS 509/14, letter from 'Beek' to Isabella Bentall, 21/8/1917; Clark diaries, letter from Mrs Sadgrove to Mary Clark, 11/4/1918 (unlike the other men, Kenneth Sadgrove survived the war as a prisoner).

received on average 5.7 letters and sent 4.8 each *every week*.<sup>19</sup> These could range from the humble field service postcard with its delete-as-appropriate printed messages, or similarly detail-light hand-written messages,<sup>20</sup> to lengthy letters like those written by Jack Sweeney to Ivy Williams in Walthamstow;<sup>21</sup> contact itself was perhaps the most important aspect, rather than content.<sup>22</sup> Andrew Clark repeatedly noted local families' concerns when men had not been in contact for some time; at times he recorded with almost ritualistic regularity that each serviceman writing home was 'well when he wrote', as if not wishing to jinx the man's well-being.<sup>23</sup>

Specific details of men's deaths were usually sanitised and most were said to have remained unconscious from the moment of injury.<sup>24</sup> More detailed and gruesome accounts could be told, though, when known individuals were not the casualties; the *Essex County Standard* printed a sergeant's stirring letter after fighting at Loos that

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<sup>19</sup> *Times*, 4/7/1916; P.P. 1916 (Cd 8424) 'Report of the Postmaster General on the Post Office, 1915-16'. Figures from P.P. 1921 (Cmd 1193) 'General Annual Reports on the British Army for the period from 1st October, 1913, to 30th September, 1919' and *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914-1920* (London, 1922). This figure assumes that sent letters also increased by a third alongside those received.

<sup>20</sup> NAM, 2006-07-8, letters of A. Dennison.

<sup>21</sup> IWM, Con Shelf, letters of D.J. Sweeney. Most of these letters run to several pages.

<sup>22</sup> Roper, *Secret Battle*, p. 87. Paul Fussell unfairly mocks the field service card, many men's letters contained little more detail than these pro-forma postcards (*The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1977 [1975]), pp. 184-6). Clark referred to his gardener's brief letters as 'very typical of a village lad's letter in its emptiness' (diaries, 4/11/1917).

<sup>23</sup> For example: Clark diaries, 19/5/1917, 21/5/1917, 23/5/1917, 27/8/1917, 10/9/1917, 23/9/1917, 12/1/1918, 11/4/1918, 21/5/1918, 25/5/1918, 26/5/1918, 25/6/1918 and 27/6/1918. Soldiers used similar language of each other at times, see ERO, D/P 98/28/18, letter from Gnr. H. Rose to Revd Reeve, 31/5/1918.

<sup>24</sup> For example: ERO, T/P 188/3, Stondon Massey, Materials for a history of the Parish (hereafter ERO Stondon diary), letter from Mrs Pigot to Revd Reeve including news of her sons last hours, 22/5/1915; on descriptions of men in condolence letters, see Meyer, *Men of War*, Ch. 3.

included this passage: ‘A section of our lads, just in front of me (10 yards), were blown to pieces by a shell and arms and legs went flying in the air, but I still puffed my cigarette and urged the lads on, as our beloved officers were nearly all out of action.’<sup>25</sup> Flying limbs and comrades’ deaths also appear in an officer’s account of the action told to Revd Reeve around the same time,<sup>26</sup> while the phrase ‘blown up’ was widely employed in describing men’s fate (real or feared).<sup>27</sup> Arnold Bennett, then resident in the county, described what it meant when civilians read of ten thousand wounded: ‘hogsheads of blood, lacerated limbs, smashed bones, glazing eyes, screams of pain’.<sup>28</sup> Relatives of those whose bodies had been torn apart were not generally told of these details, but the sense that such a fate was possible was widely known and referred to.

Broader information about conditions could also be ascertained in person from men home on leave or wounded. Clark was sceptical about the horror stories told by men returning to the village in 1916 but still recorded impressions of the war at the front passed on to him first or second hand.<sup>29</sup> Wounded men had considerable contact with the civilian populations where they were recovering, through the nurses in their hospitals and convalescent homes,<sup>30</sup> organised days out (see Fig. 4.1) and concerts, or simply in the street. Non-posed photos of street crowds are rare, but

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<sup>25</sup> *ECS*, 9/10/1915; see also F.B. Bicknell’s accounts (e.g. *ECS*, 9/10/1915)

<sup>26</sup> ERO Stondon diary, undated entry (c. 20/10/1915).

<sup>27</sup> See Clark diaries, 5/7/1915, 18/8/1916, 19/5/1917, 13/6/1917 and 16/6/1918 for this or similar phrases.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in *BDA*, 3/4/1915. The image of horrendous wounds was apparently strong, since a New Benfleet minister serving as a medic wrote to the *SWG* (11/8/1916) stressing the generally slight and temporary nature of most battlefield wounds.

<sup>29</sup> Clark diaries, scepticism: 27/3/1916; accounts recorded by Clark: 23/12/1916 and 2/2/1918.

<sup>30</sup> See Clark diaries, 30/3/1916, for examples of contact between men and nurses.

photos of Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Taylor's funeral procession in Chelmsford show a considerable number of soldiers among the onlookers, in both khaki and hospital blue (Fig. 4.2). While the level of information exchanged in these contacts, especially temporary meetings, might have been low, there are examples of chance meetings on trains yielding information to enquirers.<sup>31</sup> It is difficult to judge the content or impact of these encounters and of contact with men on leave; although leave visits were remarked upon and some details given by diarists, little is recorded about what soldiers talked about. It is useful to consider, though, the numbers of men making this direct contact with those they had left behind. In the last six months of 1917 the number of soldiers on leave at any given time from France and Flanders increased from 50,000 to 80,000, or from 2.5 to 4 percent of the strength of the BEF, before falling again to 2.2 percent the following August. By the end of 1917 virtually every serviceman in France and Flanders had been home at some point that year, many (as one paper put it in 1916) arriving 'straight from the trenches with the mud and stains of rough war service conspicuously apparent on their clothes.'<sup>32</sup> Put another way, 900 soldiers visited Walthamstow on leave in the fortnight from 25 February 1918, roughly seven percent of the number serving from the town in 1918;<sup>33</sup> this gives some indication of the scale of potential contact and communication of information from the front.

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<sup>31</sup> See James Caldwell's report of meeting a wounded officer (Clark diaries, 19/4/1918) and Reeve's meeting with a soldier on a train (ERO Stondon diary, 28/1/1915).

<sup>32</sup> Cyril Falls, *Military Operations: France and Belgium: 1917*, vol. i, (London, 1940), p39; J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1990), p. 72; *Welcome*, 14/8/1918, p. 231; *EWN*, 29/12/1916.

<sup>33</sup> *WG*, 8/3/1918; P.P. 1918 (138) 'Return showing, with regard to each Parliamentary Constituency in the United Kingdom, the Total Number, and, as far as possible, Number in each Class of Electors on the Register for the year 1918'.



Fig. 4.1 – Wounded men on a day trip to Little Baddow, September 1915.<sup>34</sup>



Fig. 4.2 – The funeral procession of Lieutenant Colonel F. Taylor in Chelmsford, 1916.<sup>35</sup>

It is hard to know exactly what impression civilians had of the war on the Western Front or elsewhere; a lot depended on the eloquence, willingness to tell, and, of course, experiences of servicemen they knew. Nonetheless, that conditions were

<sup>34</sup> © British Library Board, *SWG*, 17/9/1915.

<sup>35</sup> Detail from ERO, T/Z 441/3, reproduced by courtesy of Essex Record Office. Although the event was military, the audience were not compelled to watch; indeed the wounded Scotsmen on the right of this image can be seen moving along the back of the crowd seeking a vantage-point in the sequence of photos from which this image is taken.

appalling was widely recognised and worried about, the mud and danger of the front were repeated refrains in speeches and journalism stressing the sacrifices of those in the firing line as an important distinction between sacrifices there and at home.<sup>36</sup>

One aspect of communications that was of great importance was a soldier's location, whether in terms of geography or proximity to the front lines.

Geographical locations were classed as military intelligence and banned from soldiers' letters, but civilians often had a surprisingly good idea of where their loved ones were, whether passed on in the text of letters, by code, or told while on leave.<sup>37</sup> The knowledge that their husbands' battalion was not in the firing line was a source of relief to the wives of soldiers of the 2nd Rifle Brigade in 1915, just as the (out of date) assurance that her husband in Mesopotamia was safely away from the battles there was later to Edith Bennett.<sup>38</sup> When men were in battle, loved ones sought regular reassurance that they were safe, particularly in the great retreat of spring 1918.<sup>39</sup>

It cannot be said that civilians did not know about the level of casualties and the hardships of front line service. While they could not see or experience the latter for themselves and what was told by soldiers varied depending on experience and willingness to tell, the awareness of heavy casualties and the image of the front as a dangerous and muddy 'hell' were widespread. Furthermore, many Essex people could hear the guns in France (at least outside the Metropolitan area of the county):

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<sup>36</sup> For example, *WG*, 29/3/1918; *IR*, 24/3/1916; *WHSEM*, 20/2/1917.

<sup>37</sup> ERO, T/B 245/3-4 microfilm of Robert Taylor Bull's diary (hereafter Bull diary), 25/3/1918; Clark diaries, 15/4/1917 and 28/3/1918.

<sup>38</sup> NAM, 1989-02-201-1330, letter from Mrs Midlane to Mrs Stephens, 6/3/1915 and -1334, letter from Mrs Brown to Mrs Stephens, n.d. (1915); IWM, 96/3/1, letters from Mrs Bennett to Edwin, 24/1/1918, 7/2/1918, 26/8/1918.

<sup>39</sup> See pp. 334-5.

Chignal St James resident and meteorologist Miller Christy calculated that in 1915, 1916 and 1918 the guns had been audible in mid-Essex for between fifteen and seventeen weeks from May-August, while in 1917 the period was longer (due to atmospheric conditions) and lasted over nineteen weeks from April to September.<sup>40</sup> On 20 August 1917, Christy noted that firing had ‘now been audible continuously, both day and night, especially in the evenings, for considerably over a month.’<sup>41</sup> Revd Reeve’s observations at Stondon Massey and the reports of villagers to the rather deaf Andrew Clark in Great Leighs back up this impression.<sup>42</sup> The war was a constant feature in people’s lives, the accusation that local people ‘did not realise there was a war on’ was a rhetorical device rather than an accurate description.<sup>43</sup> Sacrifices and losses were known and acknowledged, but, as Haig understood, they could be borne so long as they were set in a narrative of purpose and progress towards victory.

### **Knowledge of the course of the war, 1914-17**

There were three facets to contemporary understandings of the course of the war: the end result (victory, defeat or negotiated peace), expectations of the route to that result (and the time it would take), and impressions of how the war was going so

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<sup>40</sup> Miller Christy, ‘The Gunfire on the continent during 1918: its audibility at Chignal St James, near Chelmsford’, *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society*, 45 (1919), pp. 141-46, p. 143

<sup>41</sup> Miller Christy, ‘Audibility of the Gun-firing on the continent at Chignal, near Chelmsford, during 1917’, *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society*, 44 (1918), pp. 281-84, p. 282.

<sup>42</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 1/7/1916, 5/5/1917, 5/6/1917, 26/7/1917, 16/8/1917. Clark often noted the sound of guns in Flanders being reported by villagers, as well as a wounded soldier’s scepticism that that *was* what they could hear (diaries 2/8/1916); he also noted the almost daily sound of artillery testing at Shoeburyness and slightly less frequent rifle-fire at Boreham.

<sup>43</sup> For example, *IR*, 18/2/1916 and *SWG*, 20/4/1917.

far. Between the halting of the German advance in 1914 and the Third Battle of Ypres in 1917, the end result was not seriously debated in Essex: Germany would be defeated, it was merely a matter of how victory would come, what sacrifices were necessary along the way, and how long it would take. As Revd Reeve wrote after the crises of early 1918: ‘We trust that many of our lads may be spared to return, and to take part in the *deferred* Peace Celebrations.’<sup>44</sup> As we shall see in a later chapter, even the crises of 1917-18 did not completely undermine confidence in eventual victory.<sup>45</sup> The great battles of 1915-1917 were viewed as the bringers of imminent or eventual peace and were reported as great victories. Personal impressions of the future course of the war fluctuated and were too varied for anything more than broad impressions to be drawn; the views given here are derived from a small sample of contemporary personal papers and newspapers but appear to show broad trends.

The idea of general opinion predicting that the war would end by Christmas in 1914 is deeply misleading; the prediction existed but was far from dominant. Indeed, Andrew Clark recorded predictions of peace on this timescale more frequently later in the war than in 1914; on the whole predictions tended to vary between a few months and a year.<sup>46</sup> Jean-Jacques Becker notes a similar pattern in France, with

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<sup>44</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 8/6/1918 (emphasis added), this comment came after news of a new German attack.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>46</sup> Stuart Hallifax, “‘Over by Christmas’: British popular opinion and the short war in 1914”, *First World War Studies*, 1/2 (2010), pp. 103-21. See also *BDA*, 20/3/1915, and Clark diaries, 10/11/1916. P.J. Flood found that residents of Isère (sp?) thought in terms of victory in six months time (*France 1914-18: Public Opinion and the War Effort* (Basingstoke, 1990), pp. 116-7).

victory expected within about six to nine months.<sup>47</sup> Each Christmas, Easter and August 4th, hopes were expressed that the next would be held in a new age of peace, but this was not necessarily actually expected.<sup>48</sup> Through 1915 and 1916, a great deal of hope was placed in Allied offensives, especially the British attacks at Loos in September 1915 and on the Somme from July 1916. Initial reporting from Loos was of good news and victories;<sup>49</sup> Mrs Courtauld noted in her diary that it was the ‘best news we have had from our front this year and the beginning[,] we trust, of great things, the long expected advance in the West.’<sup>50</sup> By the end of the year, the failure of the attack was generally known;<sup>51</sup> one diarist wrote gloomily on 31 December: ‘God only knows what lies ahead in the future for us’.<sup>52</sup>

The build-up and initial reaction to the 1916 Battle of the Somme was similarly linked to the beginning of the end of the war.<sup>53</sup> Mrs Courtauld was one of those who were fully aware of the ‘Big Push’ about to begin in France: she noted a ‘hush of expectancy’ in the last days of June.<sup>54</sup> Braintree Red Cross Hospital was told to keep beds free and expect a large influx of wounded.<sup>55</sup> Soldiers were anything but secretive about the coming offensive and their expectations of it: one reported ‘that

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<sup>47</sup> Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (Oxford, Leamington Spa, 1985), pp. 105-111.

<sup>48</sup> NAM, 1984-06-135, diary of Mrs E.A. Courtauld (hereafter NAM Courtauld diary), 31/12/1916 and 25/12/1917; Clark diaries, 23/3/1916.

<sup>49</sup> ERO Robert Bull diary, 27/9/1915; ERO Stondon diary, 29/9/1915.

<sup>50</sup> NAM Courtauld diary, 27/9/1915.

<sup>51</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 20/10/1915 and 26/11/1915.

<sup>52</sup> ERO Bull diary, 31/12/1915.

<sup>53</sup> Gary Sheffield notes the sense of optimism among British troops before the battle in G.D. Sheffield, ‘The Morale of the British Army on the Western Front, 1914-18. A Case Study in the Importance of the “Human Factor” in Twentieth-Century Total War’, in Geoffrey Jensen and Andrew Wiest (eds.), *War in the Age of Technology: Myriad Faces of Modern Armed Conflict* (New York, 2001), pp. 115-7.

<sup>54</sup> NAM Courtauld diary, 24/6/1916 and 27/6/1916.

<sup>55</sup> Clark diaries, 17/6/1916.

the soldiers' belief was that, once the Campaign began, the war would not last long,<sup>56</sup> and even the normally-sceptical Frederic Keeling felt the war might end by Christmas.<sup>57</sup> Civilians were similarly hopeful.<sup>58</sup> Diarists noted great advances but also great casualties in the first months of the campaign,<sup>59</sup> Revd Reeve recording that:

During August considerable progress has been made by the Allies and the good news from all Fronts since the commencement of the Great Advance on 1st July has been practically continuous. The critical point of the War has been reached and passed, it seems now to be generally agreed.<sup>60</sup>

It was not only the British who felt that the battle was going their way at first: during July German troops on the Somme were shocked by the scale of the attack and repeatedly felt wrong-footed by British actions.<sup>61</sup> Reeve's optimism lasted until November, when he came to realise that the war would not end in 1916, some villagers predicting it lasting into 1918, as had Marion Todd a month earlier.<sup>62</sup> There was some variation in when people realised that the war would outlast this great battle and the year, but for most it seems to have come in August or September, confirming Trevor Wilson's dating of changing opinions of the battle.<sup>63</sup> The *Essex County Standard* suggested as early as mid-August that victory would come gradually and not before the end of the year, as did Jack Sweeney writing

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 15/5/1916.

<sup>57</sup> Frederic Hillersdon Keeling, *Keeling Letters and Recollections*, edited by E.T. (London, 1918), p. 289 (letter dated 1/6/1916), see p. 258 (letter dated 23/12/1915) for his earlier scepticism.

<sup>58</sup> Clark diaries, 3/1/1916 and 19/3/1916.

<sup>59</sup> NAM Courtauld diary, 11/7/1916; ERO Bull diary, 8/7/1916 and 17/7/1916 and 4/8/1916; ERO Stondon diary, 13/7/1916.

<sup>60</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 30/8/1916.

<sup>61</sup> Christopher Duffy, *Through German Eyes: the British & the Somme 1916* (London, 2006), pp. 172-73.

<sup>62</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 29/9/1916 and 21/11/1916; ERO, D/DGd C44, letter from Marion Todd to Revd Dixon, 28/10/1918.

<sup>63</sup> Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, p. 396.

from the front.<sup>64</sup> Arthur Bentall wrote home that ‘it seems pretty evident that victory is on the horizon’ in late September, but Robert Bull’s comment that month that ‘Optimists’ saw the war ending ‘before Xmas’ makes it quite clear that he did not agree.<sup>65</sup>

Over the winter of 1916-1917, newspapers were partly distracted from predictions of peace by the ‘German peace note’ of late 1916, which all derided as a sham.<sup>66</sup> Edith Courtauld’s belief that this offer was the beginning of the end of the war was later scored through in her diary, presumably because it was so quickly dismissed.<sup>67</sup> The *Standard* opined that, if the war lasted beyond three years (i.e. August 1917), ‘there may at least be signs of the end clear and unmistakeable’; early in the new year, they repeated that ‘1917 may not be the year of victory but it will be the year of decision.’<sup>68</sup> Other newspapers were similarly cautious of predictions but confident of victory: ‘It may be this year, it may not be for yet another, but the end must be victory to the Allies, victory complete and absolute out and out – earth, air, and sea.’<sup>69</sup> As we shall see later, this caution about the imminence of peace was maintained, alongside records of battlefield victories, in the reporting of the fighting at Ypres in the second half of the year.<sup>70</sup> This did not, however, stop renewed speculation about the likelihood of peace coming sooner: the significant naming of

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<sup>64</sup> *ECS*, 19/8/1916; IWM, Con Shelf, letter from Jack Sweeney to Ivy Williams, 20/8/1916.

<sup>65</sup> ERO, D/DS 509/10, letter from Arthur Bentall to Isabella, 23/9/1916; ERO Bull diary, 8/9/1916.

<sup>66</sup> *ECS*, 16/12/1916; *EWN*, 22/12/1916.

<sup>67</sup> NAM Courtauld diary, 13/12/1916; curiously it was included in the typed version of the diary and then scored through, although whether this was in editing the typescript or to replicate the original is not clear.

<sup>68</sup> *ECS*, 30/12/1916 and 6/1/1917.

<sup>69</sup> *WHSEM*, 5/1/1917.

<sup>70</sup> See pp. 324-5.

the ‘Victory Loan’ was discussed in January, while Walthamstow Council saw fit to pronounce Councillor Watkins their ‘Victory Year Chairman’ in April.<sup>71</sup> In early 1917, the directors of the East London cemetery company confidently erected a permanent memorial ‘To the memory of the sons of the British Empire, who gave their lives in the cause of righteousness, freedom, and honour in the War of 1914-17’.<sup>72</sup> Confidence was similarly stated by soldiers and was reinforced by successes in the first half of the year, such as at Arras and Messines.<sup>73</sup>

A pattern developed in expectations about victory in 1915-1917: during the build-up before an offensive there was confidence about success and imminent victory; during the battles, reports came back of great victories but also of great losses, leading to a gradual decline from optimism to pessimism about its success; the realisation that victory was still far off followed and, over the winter of 1916-17, the expectation of how it would be achieved was altered. Instead of a breakthrough, predictions at the start of 1917 and reports from the fighting at Ypres that summer stressed the gradual wearing down of the Germans. US entry into the war was greeted as a good, if belated, development – making up for Russia’s ‘slackness’ according to one opinionated Essex man<sup>74</sup> – but it would not change the fortunes of the summer campaign. At the close of 1917, as we shall see in Chapter 6, this

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<sup>71</sup> *ECS*, 13/1/1917; *WG*, 20/4/1917.

<sup>72</sup> *WHSEM*, 2/3/1917. The monument was later altered, ‘1917’ being removed at some point and being replaced later with ‘1918’.

<sup>73</sup> Soldiers confidence: ERO Stondon diary, 2/2/1917; ERO D/P 98/28/18 letter from Willie Hawkins to Revd Reeve, 15/1/1917; IWM, Con Shelf, letter from Jack Sweeney to Ivy Williams predicting a 50-mile advance in July, 11/7/1917. Recording of advances: Basil Harrison diary, 25 and 30/3/1917; ERO Robert Bull diary, 19/3, 25/4 and 15/5/1917, Bull also records the heavy casualties suffered. James Caldwell dismissed ideas of victory before the next big advance and expected peace in summer 1918 (Clark diaries, 5/5/1917).

<sup>74</sup> Clark diaries, 2/7/1917, recording Caldwell’s views.

revised narrative was itself badly shaken and a reshaping more dramatic than that of 1916-17 was needed.

### **War aims and purpose, 1916-18**

As the level of casualties, anxiety and home front hardships increased in 1916 and early 1917, there came increasing calls for a clear statement of what the war was being fought for. A patriotic meeting in Clacton in October 1916 stated the need for a clear national policy on war aims, while General Sir Francis Lloyd told an East Ham audience in May 1917 that ‘it was necessary to recall both the ideals with which we entered this war and what had been done during the past two and half years.’<sup>75</sup> Nationally, this need was identified in government reports on the ‘Labour situation’, the first of which (in March 1917) noted that ‘the essential aims and causes of the war have tended to become obscured and forgotten’ and called for ‘a better education of the working-classes as to the actual military situation and needs, the aims of the Allies so far as it is possible to define them, and the results that would inevitably follow from an inconclusive peace.’<sup>76</sup> These concerns in Whitehall led to the creation of the National War Aims Committee (NWAC), under whose auspices local committees were formed and meetings held.<sup>77</sup> While in May 1917, the director of the Department of Information, John Buchan, observed an ‘almost complete cessation of public speaking’, the remaining months of the war saw meetings ranging from NWAC gatherings to recruiting for the ‘Volunteers’, from memorial unveilings to political addresses, at which the meaning and aims of the

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<sup>75</sup> *ECS*, 21/10/16; *WHSEM*, 25/5/1917.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in David Monger, ‘The National War Aims Committee and British patriotism during the First World War’ (King’s College, London, Ph.D. Thesis, 2009) (hereafter ‘NWAC’), p. 37.

<sup>77</sup> See Monger, ‘NWAC’.

war were articulated. As we shall see in a later chapter, NWAC meetings were restricted to the West Ham, Southend and, initially, Harwich constituencies and their reports were largely of responses rather than content. Considering these limits and the feeding of NWAC information to local newspapers, we should consider this range of meetings and other reported expressions of the war's meaning together, rather than attempting to identify specific influences.<sup>78</sup>

The ideas of the war publicly articulated in Essex in its last two years were, as those advocating greater clarity and education suggested, broadly similar to those of its first months. Romford MP Sir John Bethell's September 1914 declaration that Britons 'were fighting for justice and right, for international liberty, [and] to save the freedom of the democracies of Europe' would not have sounded anachronistic to listeners four years later.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, those unveiling a memorial YMCA hut in Walthamstow in October 1918 spoke in very similar terms, explicitly citing the efforts of the troops who 'stood so that mercy, generosity, freedom and justice should not be abolished from the earth, and so that those who lived in the big and little homes of England could dwell there in peace and continued security. [...These] were the only things which made life worth living.'<sup>80</sup> A poem published in the *Walthamstow Guardian* to mark the third anniversary of the declaration of war was significantly entitled 'The Same Ideal'.<sup>81</sup> Throughout the war, the central themes of right (or righteousness), freedom, liberty, democracy and lasting peace were repeatedly stressed.

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<sup>78</sup> See pp. 300-303. Monger cites the *Essex Herald* as a recipient of NWAC propaganda ('NWAC', p. 38).

<sup>79</sup> *IR*, 25/9/1914.

<sup>80</sup> *WG*, 11/10/1918.

<sup>81</sup> *WG*, 3/8/1917. See similar comments in *ST*, 3/8/1918.

The counterpoints of Britain's aims, the things against which the nation strove, were militarism and the idea that 'might is right', which were combined in the horror of German 'frightfulness'. We have seen the reactions people had to 1914 atrocities, mistreatment of British prisoners of war, air raids and the threat of invasion, and the stressed laid on these threats by recruiters and anti-German campaigners.<sup>82</sup>

Descriptions of brutality were not confined to reactions to specific events nor to extremist rhetoric; in early 1917, the *Walthamstow Guardian* referred to German actions as the worst crimes imaginable, while Bethell told the Hornchurch Liberal Association that he felt that Britain should soon 'defeat the barbarous army in France and Flanders'.<sup>83</sup> The following year, one speaker in Colchester gave a talk about German evil deeds under the title 'On the trail of the beast' and another told of the terrible fate awaiting a defeated Britain.<sup>84</sup> A priest speaking at the town's ceremony marking the start of the war's fifth year struck a balance of positive aims and negative fears when he recounted German crimes but stated his assurance that the day of democracy would come.<sup>85</sup>

One observable difference in rhetoric is the use of barbarism or militarism as the defining characteristic of the enemy, which perhaps suggests differences between Britain's declared aims being political in overcoming a militarist order or racial in attempting to defeat a barbarous nation. The two terms were the two sides of the same demonic character attributed to the 'Hun', but militarism was more often the target of speeches by national figures such as ministers or the chairman of the

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<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>83</sup> *WG*, 20/4/1917; *WHSEM*, 23/3/1917.

<sup>84</sup> *ECS*, 6/4/1918 and 13/4/1918.

<sup>85</sup> *ECS*, 10/8/1918.

National War Savings Committee, or in the NWAC campaign.<sup>86</sup> Local speakers often tended more towards descriptions of enemy barbarity and frightfulness;<sup>87</sup> the midpoint was often taken by local MPs like Sir L. Worthington-Evans and Sir J. Fortescue-Flannery, such as the latter's emphasis on the victory of democracy over tyranny and militarism in March 1918.<sup>88</sup> These descriptions of militarism and barbarism were complementary, but perhaps rooted in the national and personal sense of threat: where militarism threatened British values, barbarism threatened hearth and home. Meetings with a multiple speakers often incorporated both types of language.<sup>89</sup>

Comments about the meaning of the war in personal records are rare, the shock and horror at German actions being more noteworthy for their writers than abstract terms like democracy and liberty. Some did occasionally make specific mentions though, such as Robert Bull's comment that his soldier son would 'soon be on French soil, and actually fighting for liberty' and Marion Todd's comments in 1918 about the glory of a death given for 'right'.<sup>90</sup> Todd had also previously speculated about the redemptive nature of the war, possibly leading to 'quite a different order of things' with the restoration of the Jews and the end of the 'times of the gentiles'.<sup>91</sup> Such biblically apocalyptic readings of the war were aired in the press

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<sup>86</sup> *ECS*, 15/6/1918, 17/8/1918 and 1/9/1917. Note that it was the term used by Haig in 1916.

<sup>87</sup> See pp. 95-99.

<sup>88</sup> *ECS* 30/3/1918; for Evans' speech see *ECS*, 20/10/1918.

<sup>89</sup> *EH*, 20/3/1917; *WG*, 10/8/1917.

<sup>90</sup> ERO Bull diary, 28/4/1917; ERO, D/DGd C44, letter from Marion Todd to Revd Dixon, October 1918.

<sup>91</sup> ERO, D/DGd C44, letters from Marion Todd to Revd Dixon, 6/4/1917 and 31/12/1917.

and at public meetings,<sup>92</sup> but they were not as widely expressed as the broader themes noted above. One change in the latter part of the war was shift from a generalised hope and determination that this war would be the last to the specific idea of international peace maintained by the League of Nations.<sup>93</sup>

The content of public rhetoric and debate on the war's aims and purpose remained remarkably consistent throughout the war, showing the strength of the initial narrative. Buchan's comments about the cessation of public speaking in early 1917 probably reflected the decline in war-related meetings following the demise of voluntary recruiting campaigns in 1915. Meetings never quite ceased though, and from the start of 1917 they increased and speakers restated the war's purpose and reinforced the narrative of a good war, fought for ideals like freedom and democracy and against tyranny, barbarism and militarism personified in the form of the Germans. The tone of speeches could vary according to speakers and audience, and with the increase in specific ideas like the League of Nations, but generally the themes were consistent as these were developments rather than outright changes.<sup>94</sup>

David Monger correctly identifies the NWAC campaign as picking up existing ideas of British identity and patriotism, which the war was fought to defend:

'British identity was held to repose in several values – liberty, democracy, justice and honour – which, while keys to "civilisation" and shared by Britain's allies, were also claimed as "British" creations.'<sup>95</sup> This identification of good things with one's

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<sup>92</sup> *ECS*, 3/6/1916; *ECS*, 1/6/1918.

<sup>93</sup> *ECS*, 12/10/1918; *ECC*, 29/3/1918; TNA, T 102/23, Speaker's report: West Ham, 20/9/1918. For earlier similar comments, see *ECS*, 27/3/1915 and *WG*, 21/11/1917.

<sup>94</sup> Hew Strachan notes the adoption of much of the existing British narrative into the later Wilsonian approach (*The First World War*, vol. i: *To Arms* (Oxford, 2001), p. 1139).

<sup>95</sup> Monger, 'NWAC', p. 19.

own nation and cause and bad things with the enemy,<sup>96</sup> reinforced by German actions, made it hard to see Britain's war aims as at fault; instead opposition sought to argue that the war was not the way to achieve these aims. Such criticisms were voiced, but were not prominent;<sup>97</sup> their relative absence in Essex suggests that the narrative of fighting for freedom, democracy, peace and the avoidance of a German invasion was largely successful.

### **Wartime commemoration and sacrifice, 1916-18**

With increased loss of life at the front and the introduction of conscription at home, the image of the soldier changed along with shifting ideas of sacrifice. Collective efforts to mark men's absence on military service and to remind civilians of soldiers' and sailors' sacrifices grew in scale and formal display. As casualties mounted, individual commemoration of servicemen shifted from duty to heroic sacrifice in battlefield death and increasingly an image of the dead soldier as a civilian, a loss to family or community life; once again, the change was an accumulation rather than a replacement.

#### *Individual commemoration*

The public outpouring of grief and admiration for John Travers Cornwell, a Boy First Class from Manor Park who earned the Victoria Cross (VC) at Jutland, was the most high-profile example of the use of one serviceman's memory to encapsulate

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<sup>96</sup> Annette Becker 'Faith, Ideologies, and the "Cultures of War"', trans. John Horne, in John Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I* (Oxford, 2010), and Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Techniques in World War I* (London, 1971 [1927]), Chs. 3-4.

<sup>97</sup> Those voicing protest were rare at NWAC and other patriotic meetings and were quickly shouted down or ejected (See TNA, T 102/25, Speaker's report: Southend, 25/9/1917; *WG*, 9/3/1917). A pacifist meeting at Walthamstow was broken up in early 1917, but few others were reported (*ECS*, 13/1/1917; *WHSEM*, 12/1/1917).

and lead broader national feelings about the war. Mary Conley has shown how the example of Cornwell was utilised to ‘redefine manliness for total war and encourage further wartime sacrifice by the wider British public.’<sup>98</sup> The ‘confluence of his humble origins, his youth and the sacrificial nature of his death’ added to his appeal, as well as serving this move towards an democratised image of heroism, allowing him to be compared to Lord Kitchener, who had died a month earlier: the Field Marshal and the former grocer’s boy were celebrated together in death.<sup>99</sup>

The very fact of his death, as well as the manner of it, assisted Cornwell’s elevation to national hero. Press indignation at his burial in a pauper’s grave helped to kick-start the campaign but, importantly, he was not around to undermine his own image,<sup>100</sup> unlike Lance-Corporal Jarvis who seems to have fallen out with the military over his sudden discharge in early 1917.<sup>101</sup> There was, of course, more power in the sacrifice of one’s life than in simply risking it, but death itself also put Jack Cornwell’s life and actions in the public domain, no longer his own property but that of the nation and of the various organisations who used it for their own ends and the country’s in promoting values of duty and sacrifice. At just the point at which military service was no longer a matter of free choice and mass death was anticipated and beginning to come home to Britons, heroic sacrificial death like Cornwell’s replaced examples of living VC-winners who stressed that they were

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<sup>98</sup> Mary Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918* (Manchester, 2009), Ch. 9, quotation from p. 166.

<sup>99</sup> Conley, *From Jack Tar*, p. 167. Boy First Class was Cornwell’s rank, but served to emphasise his youth.

<sup>100</sup> Conley, *From Jack Tar*, p. 160; Ian G. Robertson, ‘Drewry and Cornwell: Two Essex Naval V.Cs.’ in Kenneth Neale (ed.), *Essex ‘full of profitable things’: Essays Presented to Sir John Ruggles-Brise as a Tribute to his Life and Service to the People and County of Essex* (Oxford, 1996), p. 343.

<sup>101</sup> Gerald Gliddon, *VCs of the First World War: 1914* (Stroud, 1994), pp. 18-19.

simply doing their duty: heroic sacrificial death overtook this simple message of duty associated with earlier heroes.<sup>102</sup> Just as organisations could utilise his memory,<sup>103</sup> so too could ordinary people, who could think of their loved ones in the armed forces or killed in the war as potentially just as heroic, as ‘unknown heroes – but heroes just the same.’<sup>104</sup>

Following the German Spring Offensive in 1918, another Essex ‘boy’<sup>105</sup> was celebrated for his heroic, sacrificial death, staying at his post but sending away comrades with the words ‘I’ll carry on.’<sup>106</sup> H.G. Columbine, the son of a Walton-on-the-Naze woman and briefly a prewar resident of the town, was awarded a posthumous VC; a local committee immediately sought to honour his memory with a campaign that shows both continuation and evolution from 1916. Like Cornwell, this example of bravery was framed as going beyond the local: the title of an appeal leaflet was rephrased from ‘The Deathless Story of Walton’s V.C.’ to ‘The Deathless Story of an Essex V.C.’, while an accompanying letter stressed his example to the nation as a whole. More prominent in this appeal than in Cornwell’s (although it became an important issue there as well<sup>107</sup>) was his role as a good son:

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<sup>102</sup> There were exceptions to this, most notably the airmen VCs, both living and dead. William Leefe Robinson was feted locally and nationally after destroying the first Zeppelin brought down over Britain (see Charles T. Perfect, *Hornchurch during the Great War* (Colchester, 1920), pp. 131-32).

<sup>103</sup> Conley, *From Jack Tar*, p. 164.

<sup>104</sup> Quotation from Anon [J.E. Hodder-Williams], *Jack Cornwell, the story of John Travers Cornwell, V.C. Boy – 1st Class*, (London, c. 1918), pp. 77-78. Similarly, later, the Unknown Warrior ‘could at least be imagined to be the real body of the lost son or husband’ (Adrian Gregory, *Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford, 1994), p. 27).

<sup>105</sup> The term was used repeatedly, although Columbine was 24 years old when he died and was a professional soldier.

<sup>106</sup> Paul Rusiecki, *The Impact of Catastrophe: The People of Essex and the First World War* (Chelmsford, 2008), p. 396.

<sup>107</sup> Conley, *From Jack Tar*, Ch. 9.

[I]t is only fitting that his passing – and the manner of it – should be commemorated in a permanent form and at the same time steps taken to ensure the future of his widowed Mother, who would have been *his first consideration and care* had he not so freely given his life for his Country.<sup>108</sup>

Like Cornwell two years earlier, Columbine's selfless heroism was stressed, but his civilian traits were also emphasised despite his status as a prewar regular soldier.

The appeal explicitly commended him as an honourable man who would naturally have cared for his mother had he survived, as responses to the appeal noted. One Colchester donor affirmed that 'Not only Walton on Naze but all Essex should feel intense pride in the undying achievements of our Gallant V.C.' J.S.D. Duthoit wrote from East Finchley, 'I trust that Mrs Columbine will be well provided for, as she indeed deserves. [And] all mothers of such splendid sons.'<sup>109</sup>

This honouring of the civilian-in-khaki extended beyond those whose deaths were celebrated as heroic in themselves. Canon G.T. Brunwin-Hales, the rural dean of Colchester, lost both of his sons in the war; when the second died in 1917, he wrote:

Had my son lived I believe he would have been at least "a useful man" in this district and county. [...] May we the fathers of the borough, be worthy of our children who have reversed the ordinary course of life and become our teachers.<sup>110</sup>

As with the later in the idea of a 'lost generation', the attributes that dead men would have brought to civilian life were highlighted.<sup>111</sup> The emphasis on self-sacrifice was not absent, but it was modified with ideas about the future of the

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<sup>108</sup> ERO, D/UWn 3/3, Columbine V.C. Memorial Fund (emphasis added).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*: £300 was raised for Mrs Columbine and the monument. Postwar figures suggest that only half this amount was raised for the town's collective war memorial (ERO, D/UWn 3/2, Walton 'Outdoor Memorial' Fund, minutes, 17/8/1921).

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 397.

<sup>111</sup> See Jay Winter's discussion of the 'lost generation', *Broadcasting House* (BBC Radio 4, 26/7/2009) [radio interview].

nation, family or locality after the war; the dead men's potential virtues in civil life explicitly served as a waypoint for those who survived.

Ideas of the dead as lost good citizens did not completely displace more traditional heroic language. A few months after Brunwin-Hales's comments, Councillor Lyne and his wife placed a memorial notice in the *Walthamstow Guardian* speaking of their fallen son's 'blood, mingling with others of his comrades upon those glorious fields of Flanders' in the fight for 'a larger freedom and a higher civilisation.'<sup>112</sup>

Similarly, the earlier use of living local heroes was repeated, with a new emphasis on civilian involvement. In May 1917, Corporal S.G. Reeves was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal in a ceremony in his home town of East Ham, where the mayor contrasted his acts with the apparent civilian disengagement and war-weariness in the town.<sup>113</sup> The purpose was to inspire civilians to work towards victory rather than for men to enlist, but a battlefield hero could still set an example.

We must be careful not to assume that war deaths alone prompted memorial fundraising and commemoration. The funereal practices of Victorian Britain are well documented,<sup>114</sup> and were not cast aside because of the war.<sup>115</sup> Memorial services were held and plaques erected in memory of local worthies throughout the war. This was repeated when the sons of well-off local residents died in the war, so that men whose bodies could not be returned from France, Belgium or battlefields

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<sup>112</sup> *WG*, 12/10/1917. Second Lieutenant Lyne was missing in action from late 1916.

<sup>113</sup> *WHSEM*, 25/5/1917.

<sup>114</sup> For example, Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford, 1996).

<sup>115</sup> Luc Capdevila and Danièle Voldman stress that commemorative traditions were revitalised by the atmosphere of war, *War dead: western societies and the casualties of war*, trans. Richard Veasey, (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 114.

further away were honoured in their places of worship.<sup>116</sup> As in peacetime, memorial funds were raised in honour of local dignitaries, the most prominent Essex example being James Round, former MP for Colchester, and his brother Douglass, who both died as elderly men in 1916; the memorial fund raised over £1700 in 1918 for a church and local scholarships.<sup>117</sup> This fundraising intended, like some postwar war memorials, to do good in the local area in memory of those whose lives were thought to be worthy of emulation. In this way, commemorative efforts in the name of a Cornwell or Columbine, or local war dead collectively, showed the young men to be worthy of emulation in the same way as those of the highest levels of county citizenry. This 'the canonisation of common people'<sup>118</sup> is summed up in an inscription on Cornwell's grave:

IT IS NOT WEALTH OR ANCESTRY  
BUT HONOURABLE CONDUCT AND A NOBLE  
DISPOSITION THAT MAKES MAN GREAT<sup>119</sup>

#### *Collective commemoration*

Alongside this shift towards celebrating heroic sacrifice came new developments in the collective honouring of living servicemen. Through the summer of 1916, shrines were improvised in some London streets to honour local men that had gone to war and by August a commercial design was available for purchase. Following the Queen's visit to a shrine in Hackney, the trend for these 'war shrines' spread rapidly

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<sup>116</sup> For example, the plaque commemorating Captain A.G. Tritton (who died in December 1914) was in place in May 1915 (Clark diaries, 9/5/1915).

<sup>117</sup> *ECS*, 3/8/1918 and 16/11/1918. The two men were related to Lieutenant Round, whose memory was used in recruiting (pp. 140-41).

<sup>118</sup> The phrase is Alex King's, (*Memorials of the Great War in Britain: the Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford, 1998), Ch. 7). See also Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male* (London, 1999 [1996]), p. 248, and Catherine Moriarty, 'Private Grief and Public Remembrance: British First World War Memorials', in Martin Evans and Ken Lunn (eds), *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1997), p. 137.

<sup>119</sup> Mark Quinlan, *British War Memorials* (Hertford, 2005), p. 292.

across the capital and beyond (see Fig. 4.3).<sup>120</sup> Alex King identifies London war shrines as church-led efforts, while Mark Connelly's study of East London and Metropolitan Essex stresses their popular aspects. There are many examples of both and Connelly shows examples of local residents taking the lead in estates in East Ham and Romford, while in poorer districts they were purchased by local churches.<sup>121</sup> Their popularity and appeal can be seen in the laying of fresh flowers on shrines in areas of East Ham even after the war.<sup>122</sup>



Fig. 4.3 – War Shrine at Little Leighs.<sup>123</sup>

Alex King describes those behind the shrines as having ‘explicitly intended them to promote patriotic enthusiasm and [they] may have thought of them as an antidote to

<sup>120</sup> King, *Memorials of the Great War*, p. 47-52.

<sup>121</sup> Connelly, *Great War*, p. 26.

<sup>122</sup> *WHSEM*, 4/5/1917; Connelly, *Great War*, p. 33.

<sup>123</sup> Clark diaries, 9/11/1917.

war-weariness amongst the working population.’<sup>124</sup> As well as continuing the function of intercessory lists in giving civilians the ability ‘to do something to help the loved ones in danger’,<sup>125</sup> the shrines were a constant reminder that the sacrifices of servicemen were greater than those borne at home. One newspaper noted that, by the start of 1917, growing losses at the front and hardship at home ‘are causing men and women to realise as never before the meaning of war.’<sup>126</sup> As noted above, comments that people ‘didn’t seem to realise there was a war on’ were simply rhetorical calls to remember servicemen’s sacrifices; war shrines reminded civilians on a daily basis of sacrifices being borne elsewhere.

War shrines also served to create an image of collective endeavour and collective sacrifice of those they listed, the latter in both service and death. Rather than a hierarchy of honour accorded to men depending on the circumstances of their deaths, as Joanna Bourke claims,<sup>127</sup> these shrines – replacing the 1914 Rolls of Honour – put across a message that all these men were contributing and making sacrifices. This fed what Ilana Bet-El has called the ‘myth of the volunteer’, since the manner of enlistment and fact of compulsion were ignored,<sup>128</sup> instead, the fact of a man’s service was recorded and equal sacrifice suggested. The nature of his enlistment and the manner of his death in the war did not alter a serviceman’s right to be remembered as a hero.

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<sup>124</sup> King, *Memorials of the Great War*, pp. 47-55, quotation from p. 54.

<sup>125</sup> Connelly, *Great War*, pp. 28-30, quotation from p. 28.

<sup>126</sup> *WHSEM*, 5/1/1917.

<sup>127</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, pp. 248-9.

<sup>128</sup> Ilana R. Bet-El, ‘Men and Soldiers: British Conscripts, Concepts of Masculinity, and the Great War’ in Billie Melman (ed.), *Borderlines: genders and identities in war and peace, 1870-1930* (London, 1998).

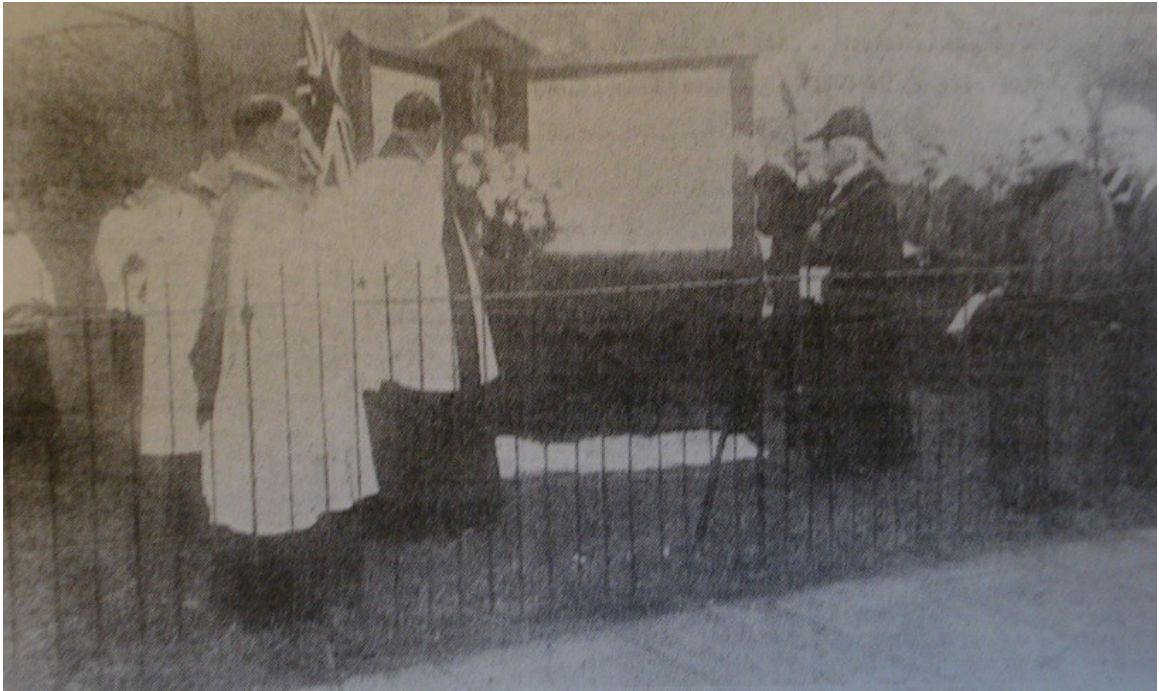


Fig. 4.4 – The mayor of Southend unveiling the war shrine at St Mary’s, Prittlewell.<sup>129</sup>

King’s and Connelly’s studies of war shrines focus on those created in London and the areas of Essex that shared many of the capital’s characteristics, making it easy to underestimate just how widespread they were. Shrines were constructed first in the Metropolitan districts and others strongly connected with London, such as Prittlewell (in Southend, see Fig. 4.4), or with the military, such as Warley (in Brentwood) and Colchester. During 1917 they spread to towns like Barking, where several streets shared a new shrine in August, and villages like West Mersea, Ardleigh and Lexden. In the months between the German Spring Offensive of 1918 and the end of the war more shrines were erected in smaller villages such as Castle Hedingham, Sible Hedingham, and Henham.<sup>130</sup> Just as in the metropolitan areas and in much postwar countryside commemoration, local donors, including bereaved

<sup>129</sup> © British Library Board, *SWG*, 17/11/1916.

<sup>130</sup> Dates from various issues of *BA* and *ECS*, 1916-18. Little Leighs was ahead of its time for a small village with its shrine erected in 1917 (Fig. 4.3).

families, paid for many rural shrines.<sup>131</sup> The desire to record and honour the names of those serving and dying grew as the war went on, and these shrines and lists often played a major part in wartime Remembrance services; elsewhere the names of the dead were recited.<sup>132</sup> Another sign of communities' close attention to their absent men is the ability of several small towns (and most villages) to state precisely the numbers of men serving, killed and decorated for gallantry, immediately after the war.<sup>133</sup>

Alongside the spread of war shrines came discussions of permanent war memorials. Newspaper debates and public meetings were held in Barking, Ilford and Romford in the latter part of 1916 and the Bishop of Chelmsford brought the subject up in his diocesan newspaper,<sup>134</sup> elsewhere meetings were held and plans made in 1917 and 1918.<sup>135</sup> Wartime discussions of practical war memorials were usually put on hold after some discussion, winning the war being the overriding necessity of the day. Some schemes did continue to raise money, such as the £13 raised at St Osyth on Remembrance Day 1918,<sup>136</sup> and a small number of memorials were created. The largest such scheme was a YMCA hut in Walthamstow,<sup>137</sup> but most were monuments similar to those erected across the county and nation after 1918. Some were seemingly permanent versions of war shrines recording the serving and the dead, such as a granite monument at Bradwell-on-Sea, while others commemorated

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<sup>131</sup> ERO, T/P 181/6/20, Cuttle cuttings: Henham, 12/4/1918, and T/P 181/6/18, Cuttle cuttings: Sible Hedingham, 23/4/1918; Clark recorded controversy over who the Little Leighs shrine (Fig. 4.3) should commemorate (diaries, 11/12/1916, 26/1/1917, 2/3/1917, 20/4/1917).

<sup>132</sup> ERO, T/P 181/12/6, Cuttle cuttings: Saffron Walden, 9/8/1918.

<sup>133</sup> ERO, L/P 3/93, Material relating to war trophies.

<sup>134</sup> Connelly, *Great War*, pp. 48-52, 112, 126; *BA*, 23/12/1916; *EWN*, 3/10/1916.

<sup>135</sup> For example, at Brightlingsea, Walton, Clacton and Lexden.

<sup>136</sup> *ECS*, 12/8/1918.

<sup>137</sup> *WG*, 7/9/1917, 30/11/1917 and 7/12/1917.

only the war dead, including a ‘Roll of Heroes’ at Earls Colne in late 1916, a cross erected at West Mersea in late 1917 and memorials erected a few months later at Feering and jointly for Great Easton and Tilty.<sup>138</sup>

These early war memorials sought to honour and cope with increasing local losses, just as war shrines dealt with men’s departure and potential loss. Discussions during and immediately after the war often sought a locally-useful memorial, but those erected prior to the armistice were generally small monuments to local ‘heroes’. Where unexpectedly high losses were sustained, memorials appeared earlier in the war: a plaque was erected at St Katherine’s Church in early 1915 commemorating ‘four Canvey heroes’ killed in the war in 1914, three of whom were killed on one day that September (Figs. 4.5 and 4.6). It was certainly, as a newspaper stated, ‘the first memorial of the kind to be placed in an Essex Church.’<sup>139</sup> In fact it was probably one of the first war memorials of the Great War in the country, in the modern sense of commemorating local men (not simply one man or family) and only those who had died.<sup>140</sup> Remarkably, enough room was left on this early monument to carry the names of the 15 other war dead of the parish.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> ERO T/P 181/2/22A, Cuttle cuttings: Bradwell-on-Sea, 9/7/1918; *EWN*, 22/12/1916; *ECS*, 6/10/1917, 12/1/1918 and 23/3/1918.

<sup>139</sup> Both quotations from *SWG*, 16/4/1915.

<sup>140</sup> It predates the war’s first memorial in the City of London by well over a year. (Connelly, *Great War*, p. 30)

<sup>141</sup> Since the bottom of the plaque is slightly crowded, it is possible that the plaque was intended for around 16 names rather than the 19 it carries today.

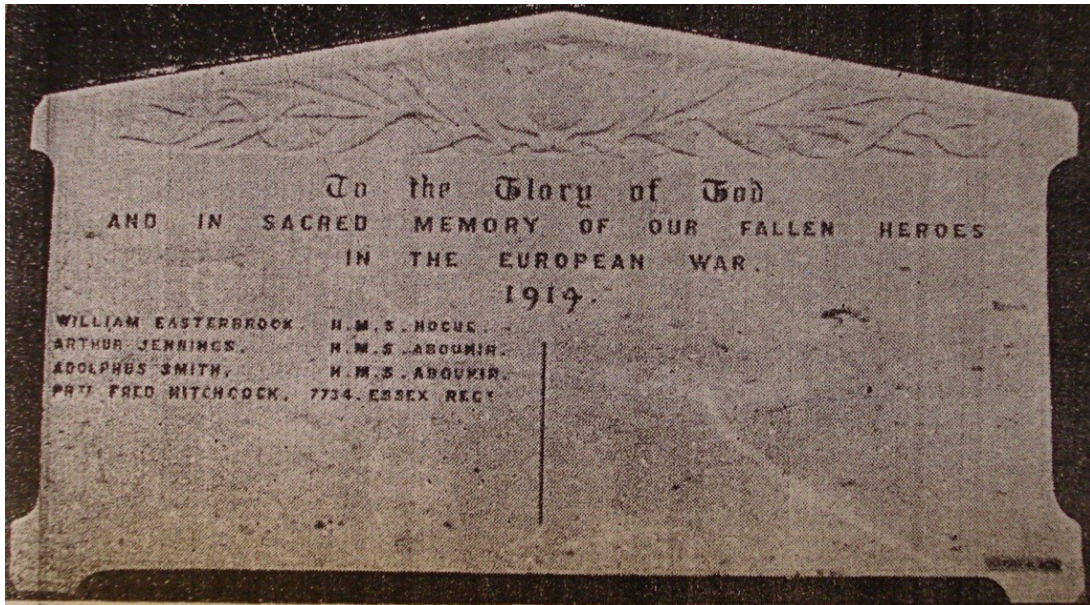


Fig. 4.5 – War memorial at St Katherine’s, Canvey Island, after unveiling in 1915.<sup>142</sup>



Fig. 4.6 – War memorial at St Katherine’s, Canvey Island.<sup>143</sup>

These wartime efforts to remember those serving and killed kept those men’s memories in people’s minds, whether in grief or in hope for their safe return. The war shrines maintained an image of a voluntary army fighting for ‘God, king and country’ against tyranny and militarism, while the celebration of individuals like

<sup>142</sup> © British Library Board, *SWG*, 16/4/1915.

<sup>143</sup> Used by permission of Janet Penn.

Jack Cornwall stressed that every man killed in action might be a real ‘unknown hero’, a brave citizen-in-arms willing to sacrifice all. The absence, temporary or permanent, of members of the community was a constant reminder of the sacrifices made for civilians by those in khaki and blue; against this sacrifice, those called for from civilians could be compared and minimised, justifying more stoic endurance at home.

### **Local leadership and voluntary sacrifice**

Alongside changes in the messages of sacrifice and narratives already described, there were changes in the level and type of the role played by local authorities and other organisations in the war effort. Having been advocates and organisers of willing voluntary sacrifice in the first years of the war, local council bodies increasingly took on roles that shifted their focus to managing equality of sacrifice and attempting to mitigate inequality. At the same time, a shift away from voluntary sacrifice also came in organised calls for people’s money as investment overtook donation as the primary vehicle for monetary expressions of support for the war.

#### *Local bodies and the management of sacrifice*

As noted above, the start of 1916 saw the categorical end of a major plank of British voluntarism with compulsory military service; the route to conscription also brought into being the local military service tribunals (formed in late 1915 but functioning as decision-makers from January 1916). These were the first of many local public committees that sought to balance the war effort and local life and to maintain equality of sacrifice, and through these to maintain local consent for the war. Along

with the War Pensions Committees (WPCs), the work of these tribunals was hailed in Barking as ‘a revolution [in ...] the work of public affairs owing to the war’ in December 1916.<sup>144</sup> They were joined during 1917 by locally-controlled powers over food production and distribution wielded by the local Agricultural Committees, a countywide War Agricultural Executive Committee (WAEC) and local Food Control Committees (FCCs). At the end of the year, the *Walthamstow Guardian* marvelled at the great increase in local authority work over the previous twelve months.<sup>145</sup> These bodies formed a strange hybrid of voluntary and compulsory sacrifice: they themselves were run on an almost entirely voluntary basis (although the Agricultural Committees and FCCs employed Executive Officers and some office workers) but their work enabled them to force citizens into a course of action that was not voluntary, whether that was military service, different cultivation of land, or buying or selling goods within a restricted rationing system.

The tribunals were the first and, with the possible exception of the FCCs in early 1918, the most important new bodies governing aspects of people’s lives.<sup>146</sup> Staffed largely by local councillors, with additional labour and agricultural representatives in industrial and rural areas respectively, they were the bodies that decided whether a man who appealed against being called for military service could remain a civilian and for how long. Around 60 percent of men liable to be called appealed to these bodies, which granted exemptions of various types to around two-thirds of all appellants. Tribunal appeals and decisions were based primarily on business and personal grounds, with fitness and conscientious objection arising in fewer cases;

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<sup>144</sup> *BA*, 2/12/1916. See also the cartoon depicting busy local councillors in *SWG*, 15/12/1916.

<sup>145</sup> *WG*, 28/12/1917.

<sup>146</sup> For more on tribunals see Chapter 5.

the tribunals had to consider whether each man's departure would bring undue hardship to their families, businesses or local communities. As well as attempting to ensure fair treatment for all, as many professed their role, some chairmen sought to extend their role into actively reorganising local life and business into a more efficient use of manpower, most notably in East Ham. The tribunals' role was, fundamentally, to ensure some semblance of equality of sacrifice in the most obvious arena in which sacrifices were called for: military service.

Similar concerns about equality of sacrifice and hardship governed the roles of other local bodies. Most prominent were the pensions, agricultural and food committees. The importance of the latter in particular will become clear in Chapter 6, but it is worth noting that FCCs and the WAEC also had considerable powers to affect equal sacrifice and effort. Both attempted to encourage and facilitate voluntary efforts, for example in food economy and allotments; however, the WAEC also had responsibility for decisions over the release or exemption of farm workers from military service and could enforce changes in cultivation where farm land was not being used efficiently. From the start of 1917, they met regularly to discuss manpower and cultivation, adjudicating appeals made for the release of men from military service for land work, and considering over 400 cases where cultivation of specific plots of land was thought to be inefficient.<sup>147</sup> From mid-1917, they also sought to open up more land to cultivation through the breaking up of 85,000 acres of grassland, although by the end of the year only around 15 percent

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<sup>147</sup> ERO, D/Z 45/19, War Agricultural Executive Committee (WAEC) minutes, 2/7/1918.

had been broken up.<sup>148</sup> The FCCs' powers really came to the fore with the ability first to requisition and later to ration foodstuffs that were in short supply locally.

Local War Pensions Committees were formed at the same time that conscription was being extended to include all military-aged men. WPCs often covered larger areas than tribunals since there were only 330 of them in the UK by March 1919; in Essex, the county committee permitted Colchester, Chelmsford and Barking to have committees in 1916, despite their populations being below the official lower limit of 50,000.<sup>149</sup> The matter caused concern in Chingford, where it was estimated that a quarter of the town's 2,000 servicemen would eventually require war pensions but the town was denied the right to have its own WPC.<sup>150</sup> The local and county committees were staffed by councillors, representatives of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association (some of whose responsibilities the WPCs inherited), ex-servicemen, representatives of labour and often people involved in local education or hospitals.<sup>151</sup> Unlike the MSTs, the pensions committees regularly included female members: in Colchester the appointment of Lady Petre was contested on the basis that she was an officer's widow and therefore not eligible to WPC support and thus unrepresentative.<sup>152</sup> The committees were certainly busy: in 1916, Barking's WPC dealt with 1,200 cases and Southend's 1,150 by mid-1917.<sup>153</sup> At Clacton, 176 cases were dealt with in six months in 1918, but even this level of provision could

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<sup>148</sup> ERO, D/Z 45/16-18, WAEC Minutes, 7/5/1917, 18/12/1917, 28/12/1917, 2/1/1918.

<sup>149</sup> *EWN*, 7/4/1916, p. 5; PP 1919 (Cmd 14), 'First Annual Report of the Minister of Pensions', pp. 5-6, from 1917 WPCs were allowed in towns with over 20,000 residents.

<sup>150</sup> *WG*, 5/1/1917.

<sup>151</sup> See *BA*, 17/6/1916 and *ECS*, 27/4/1918.

<sup>152</sup> *ECS*, 27/4/1918, 25/5/1918.

<sup>153</sup> P.P. 1917-18 (Cd 8750), 'Report to His Majesty the King of the War Pensions, &c., Statutory Committee for the year 1916', p. 83; *SWG*, 6/7/1917.

be time consuming as only sixteen cases were heard in a meeting lasting more than five hours in East Ham in March 1918.<sup>154</sup> The latter's WPC was criticised for its overly-generous decisions in the press and by the Ministry of Pensions;<sup>155</sup> Barking WPC was hailed for its fairness and sympathy.<sup>156</sup>

### *Charity*

Charitable fundraising was a major facet of the voluntary sacrifice demanded of those on the home front, raising money to support the war effort, to relieve distress and discomfort, and to aid refugees. As noted above, the National Relief Fund raised a vast amount of money in 1914, but soon declined both nationally and locally.<sup>157</sup> Through 1915 and 1916, successful collections continued for other charities, whether local (such as comforts for Essex Regiment soldiers), national (such as St Dunstan's or the Red Cross) or international, the latter in the form of nationally-themed flag days to support Britain's allies, such as the Belgian Relief Fund in Barking, which raised £363 by August 1915 and another £255 in the following eleven months.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> *ECS*, 2/11/1918; *WHSEM*, 22/3/1918.

<sup>155</sup> *WHSEM*, 8/3/1918 regarding comments in *John Bull*; Alfred Stokes, *East Ham: From Village to County Borough* (Stratford, 1933), pp. 152-3.

<sup>156</sup> *BA*, 22/7/1916.

<sup>157</sup> See pp. 71-4.

<sup>158</sup> *BA*, 7/8/15 and 8/7/1916.



Fig. 4.7 – Essex Regiment paper flag, of the 1d. type sold on flag days.

Many collections took forms that predated the war, with church collections and newspaper appeals.<sup>159</sup> The most high-profile and publicly-visible method, though, was the ‘flag day’, a collecting method that came into its own during the war whereby collectors (usual girls and women) sold paper flags in town centres or went from house to house in villages (Fig. 4.7);<sup>160</sup> public and private comment on their ubiquity was common by late 1915 and 1916, along with concerns that the public were becoming weary of them.<sup>161</sup> Press comment on flag days was particularly widespread in the summer of 1916 when local and national newspaper reports revolved around the number of appeals and the public’s apparent reluctance to part with their money, often with the inevitable pun about whether flag days were

<sup>159</sup> Andrew Thompson, ‘Publicity, Philanthropy and Commemoration: British Society and the War’, in David Omissi and Andrew S. Thompson (eds), *The Impact of the South African War* (Basingstoke, 2002).

<sup>160</sup> See Simon Fowler, ‘The Origins of Flag Days’, Voluntary History Society Seminar Paper, c. 2005.

<sup>161</sup> *ECS*, 17/7/1915 and 1/4/1916; *IR*, 2/6/1916; Clark and his daughter also criticised the short notice of this appeal for help for the collection on the 19th (Clark diaries, 17/11/15).

‘flagging’.<sup>162</sup> Newspapers were generally critical of this uncharitable weariness, one columnist in the *Barking Advertiser* was adamant that

‘Flag days are not flagging. They seem, in fact, to increase in number in our midst, and scarcely a week goes by without the observance of some special “day”. [...] There are many who contend that we have had enough of “flag days”; in their own language they are “fed up,” and they reward the would-be seller with a frown rather than a penny. [...] But they] will doubtless be continued until another popular idea is advanced.’<sup>163</sup>

It is difficult to tell whether flag days did decline in 1916; statistics quoted in the press suggest that appeals that year were as successful as they had previously been.<sup>164</sup>

At the start of 1917, flag days seem to have suffered somewhat from their frequency, though, as in both West Ham and Walthamstow where the coincidence of the Welsh flag day with one for women war workers undermined the success of the women’s appeal. That summer, one paper suggesting that, as well as weariness, new rules banning collecting activities by those below eighteen years of age had had an impact.<sup>165</sup> Adrian Gregory quotes a local paper in London placing the blame for declining success on a lack of patriotism among local women, while one local organiser similarly feared apathy when calling for women to do their duty in a YMCA appeal.<sup>166</sup> On the other hand, the persistence of flag days can be judged at

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<sup>162</sup> Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 232-33; verse in *IR*, 12/6/1916 and cartoon in *SWG*, 1/9/1916.

<sup>163</sup> *BA* 8/7/1916.

<sup>164</sup> *IR*, 7/4/1916 and 15/9/1916; *ECS*, 1/4/1916; *BA*, 29/7/1916.

<sup>165</sup> *WG* 9/3/1917, 16/3/1917 and 11/5/1917; *WHSEM* 16/3/1917 and 27/4/1917.

<sup>166</sup> Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 232-33; Clark diaries, Miss Caldwell to Mary Clark, 23/10/1917.

least in part from the continued complaints (or reports of complaints) about their frequency in 1917 and 1918.<sup>167</sup>

Adrian Gregory remarks on the apparent decline in charitable activity over the winter of 1917-18, suggesting that collectors lacked confidence that their appeals would yield respectable contributions.<sup>168</sup> This impression is reinforced in Essex, with fewer reports of collections and comments about their relative failure at the end of 1917, but it is contradicted by Peter Grant's study of wartime charitable giving.<sup>169</sup> Grant shows that the amount raised through street collections (normally flag days) in the metropolitan police district, including metropolitan Essex, actually increased through the last years of the war, as did contributions to the *Times Fund* nationally. The Essex Red Cross reported donations in 1916 and 1917 that came to roughly £4,600 when adjusted to 1915 prices, compared to £5,123 that year. This suggests some decline, but only around 10%, followed by a stable period through 1916-17.<sup>170</sup>

The disparity between the reality of increasing contributions and the impression of decline could be linked, Grant suggests, to the tendency for records to overvalue the role of the upper classes at the expense of working-class charitable activity; the latter appears to have increased as sections of the working classes saw their incomes

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<sup>167</sup> For example, *WG*, 28/11/1917 and *ECS*, 23/3/1918.

<sup>168</sup> Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 233

<sup>169</sup> See *WG*, 26/10/1917 and 28/12/1917; *ECS*, 23/3/1918; Peter Grant, 'An Infinity of Personal Sacrifice: The scale and nature of charitable work in Britain during the First World War', *War and Society*, 27/2 (2008), pp. 67-88.

<sup>170</sup> *EH*, 26/2/1918.

rise throughout the war.<sup>171</sup> Gregory's and Grant's conclusions are not necessarily incompatible if we see a decline in the public role taken by elites and the middle classes in charitable work and an increase in working-class donation. We can glean two conclusions from their insights. First, that charitable donations did not necessarily diminish as the war went on, but instead perhaps changed in character and origin with more of the money coming from donations by working class citizens or through works subscriptions; second, that the apparent decline was more one of the public profile of charitable work than of contributions. On the first front, we do not have reliable statistics on charitable donations across the period in Essex (other than supposition that the metropolitan districts behaved consistently with the general London figures). On the second, we can see a shift away from the rhetoric of willing sacrifice from the end of 1916 in favour of investment.

The rhetoric of sacrifice involved in charitable donations and the public, elite-led effort to support the practice died down during 1917, largely replaced by War Savings. The apparent gap in charitable appeals over the winter of 1917-18 coincided with biggest push so far for investment in War Savings, with substantial input from 'small investors': the winter months saw a peak in 5% War Bonds in December followed by peaks in the sales of War Savings certificates in January and March, the latter including the high-profile 'Business Men's Week'.<sup>172</sup> We will look at the success of the War Savings that winter in more detail in Chapter 6, but it is worth noting two features that would have affected charitable efforts. The first is the involvement of local elites: national statistics show that town councillors,

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<sup>171</sup> The increase in donations as both in gross term and when adjusted for inflation: Grant, 'Personal Sacrifice', pp. 71-73, 81-88.

<sup>172</sup> P.P. 1919, (Cmd 194), 'Third Annual Report of the National War Savings Committee', p. 6.

mayors, teachers and religious leaders took a leading role in War Savings campaigns, the latter two categories particularly in the large numbers of school and church-based savings associations, while all were amongst those who led wartime charitable efforts.<sup>173</sup> The second is the changed rhetoric of contribution, with a clear shift away from willing selfless sacrifice to self-interest combined with support for the war, with the promise of a return on one's investment rather than simply aiding the war effort or those affected by the conflict. This was directly referred to in advertising for the campaign, as in one 1917 advert that answered the question of why one should become a 'War-loaner' in terms of money 'feeding' the armies and the fact that 'no monetary sacrifice is asked of you'.<sup>174</sup> This aspect was highlighted in the first edition of the national *War Savings* journal.<sup>175</sup> Accounts of War Savings in 1918 and later stressed the altruistic sacrifice that investors made by putting their money into the scheme rather than spending it on temporary gains and non-essential goods;<sup>176</sup> however, this sacrifice was virtually absent from publicity for War Savings during the war, which emphasised the personal gain and patriotic nature of investment (see Fig. 4.8). While other areas of public life moved from voluntary sacrifice to the management of equality, public calls for money shifted from donations to investment, with a dual purpose of personal gain and patriotic support for the war effort.

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<sup>173</sup> P.P. 1917 (Cd 8516), 'First Annual Report of the National War Savings Committee', p. 15.

<sup>174</sup> *WG* 26/1/1917.

<sup>175</sup> *War Savings*, 1 (September 1916), p. 3.

<sup>176</sup> See Dwight W. Morrow, 'The Meaning of the War Savings Movement' in *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York*, 7/4 (1918), pp. 55-58, pp. 56-57, and William Schooling, 'National Saving in the United Kingdom' in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 87 (1920), pp. 197-204, p. 202.

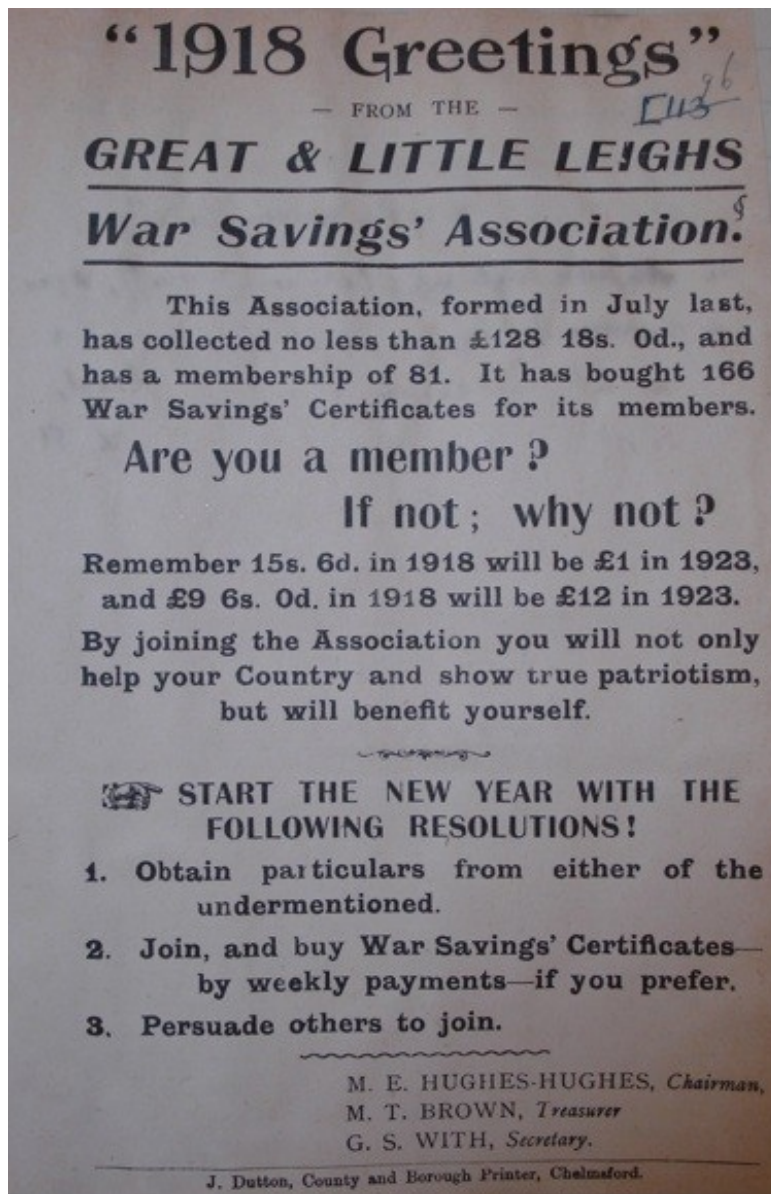


Fig. 4.8 – War Savings leaflet, Great Leighs.<sup>177</sup>

### Leisure and the limits of sacrifice, 1916-18

While local authorities were concentrating their efforts on equality of sacrifice in the community, the extent to which people were willing to sacrifice their leisure time to the war effort was challenged. We have seen the decline of professional sport in 1914-15; during 1916, there were important new developments in wartime leisure as attempts were made to use both the cinema and bank holidays in the war

<sup>177</sup> Clark diaries, 22/1/1918.

effort. Each development was short-lived and showed the limits of the sacrifice of leisure and the need for escapism.

### *Cinema*

During the war, cinema flourished as Britons sought an escape from the war; ticket sales rose to twenty million per week in 1917, helping to make the industry profitable for the first time.<sup>178</sup> The cinema had a complicated position in the creation wartime narratives and in the discourse of sacrifice. On the one hand, films were seen as having a negative influence on the minds and behaviour of young people as attempts were made to account for the growth in juvenile crime.<sup>179</sup> At the same time, the cinema was used to show people the big events of the war, both in through newsreel footage and, in 1916-17, in major war films.

The most famous and successful single film of the war was the 1916 feature-length *The Battle of the Somme*, which sold at least 19 million tickets in its first six weeks.<sup>180</sup> Although on a week-by-week basis it was perhaps not the best attended

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<sup>178</sup> Nicholas Hiley, “‘Nothing More than a Craze’: Cinema Building in Britain from 1909 to 1914’ in Andrew Higson (ed.) *Young and Innocent?: The Cinema In Britain 1896-1930* (Exeter, 2002). Statistic from National Council of Public Morals, *The Cinema: its Present Position and Future Possibilities* (London, 1917), p. xxi, which was published in July and so presumably refers to 1916 or a twelve-month period in 1916-17.

<sup>179</sup> For example, see ERO, D/BC 1/7/5/3, Southend Chief Constable’s Orders: Annual Report, 1916, p. 4.

<sup>180</sup> Nicholas Reeves, ‘Cinema, Spectatorship and Propaganda: “Battle of the Somme” (1916) and its Contemporary Audience’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 17/1, pp. 5-28, p. 8. In proportion to the population, the film is still one of the most successful British movies of all time.

production,<sup>181</sup> the fact that it was shown to packed houses for many weeks in some places<sup>182</sup> was unusual and increased ticket sales; it also had an audience beyond the cinema's usual working-class market, attracting 'many middle-class patrons for whom moving pictures were still a novelty.'<sup>183</sup> This is reflected in the appearance of the film in diaries of the period,<sup>184</sup> although some diarists went to the pictures more frequently.<sup>185</sup> The hey-day of feature-length official war films was short-lived (ending with the *Battle of the Ancre* in January 1917), as had been an earlier fashion for war pictures in 1914-15. Although war news continued to be shown, with the 'War Office Official Topic Budget' incorporating footage from the front from mid-1917,<sup>186</sup> 'sensational', 'moral problem', and serialised films were much more popular than war films, while the most successful movies of the war were the comedies of Charlie Chaplin.<sup>187</sup> Most films listed in the Essex press were, likewise, escapist dramas, westerns and comedies rather than war films.<sup>188</sup> A trade magazine wrote in July 1918 that:

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<sup>181</sup> Ten million viewers *per week* were said to be watching one film serial (Rachael Low, *The History of British Film, 1914-1918*, History of British Film, 3 (London, 1997), p. 28).

<sup>182</sup> This does not seem to have occurred in Colchester, where it was shown for one week (*ECS*, 16/9/1916), or Southend, where it does not appear in the *SWG* listings for late 1916.

<sup>183</sup> Nicholas Hiley, "'At the Picture Palace": The British Cinema Audience, 1895-1920', John Fullerton (ed.), *Celebrating 1895: the Centenary of Cinema* (London, 1998), p. 99.

<sup>184</sup> ERO, D/DGa F2/2/41, transcript of Margaret Gardner's diaries, entries for 1/9/1916 and 13/9/1916; Basil Harrison diary, 21/9/1916.

<sup>185</sup> Basil Harrison often commented on how busy the cinemas in Chelmsford were (diary 30/9/1915 and 3/1/1916); Mott (ed.) "*In Dreadful Trouble*", 28/12/1915 and 31/4/1916.

<sup>186</sup> Low, *History of British Film*, pp. 29-30; Nicholas Hiley, 'Introduction' in Geoffrey H. Malins, *How I Filmed the War* (London, 1993 [1920]).

<sup>187</sup> Low, *History of British Film*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>188</sup> See *ECS* and *SWG* issues for 1916 and 1917. Some local war stories also made it only the silver screen, notably relating to the fate of Zeppelins destroyed over Essex (*ECS*, 7/10/1916).

People go to the pictures to get away from the war, not because their patriotism is open to doubt, but because there is a limit to human endurance, and he who is condemned to carry a daily burden must of needs for a moment lay it aside and rest.<sup>189</sup>

As the war dragged on, people sought to escape it in their leisure activities.

Attempts to capture a popular leisure space for war messages were only temporarily successful; people needed a break. The cinema provided a space for escape, and by the end of the war such an escape was seen as necessary rather than evidence of unpatriotic slacking.

### *Holidays and tourism*

The importance of a break from the war was also important in holidaymaking, where it came up even more visibly against the wartime discourse of shared sacrifice. As Fig. 4.8 shows, there was a distinct decline in tourists arriving in the Essex resorts over the August Bank Holidays from 1914-18. War conditions hampered Essex holidaymaking in 1915;<sup>190</sup> the county's coastal resorts did not lose their air of vulnerability thereafter. Mrs Courtauld observed military defences still in place at Frinton in July 1916 and new ones constructed by the following Spring.<sup>191</sup> During the Whitsun holiday of 1917, visitors and residents in Southend were alarmed by an unannounced practice of the town's anti-aircraft defences,

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<sup>189</sup> Quoted in Michael Hammond, *The Big Show: British Cinema Culture in the Great War 1914-1918* (Exeter, 2006), p. 219.

<sup>190</sup> See pp. 82-4.

<sup>191</sup> NAM Courtauld diary, 10/7/1916 and 3/4/1917; Paul Rusiecki, 'NE Essex Seaside Resorts in World War One: The Resort Economy', *Essex Victoria County History, Works in Progress*, p. 3,

<[http://www.englandspastforeveryone.org.uk/resources/assets/R/Resorts\\_in\\_WW1\\_Economy\\_2\\_5968.pdf](http://www.englandspastforeveryone.org.uk/resources/assets/R/Resorts_in_WW1_Economy_2_5968.pdf)> accessed 1/9/2009.

including guns and aeroplanes, causing outrage amongst businesses and in the local press, and rumours in London that the resort had been bombed.<sup>192</sup>

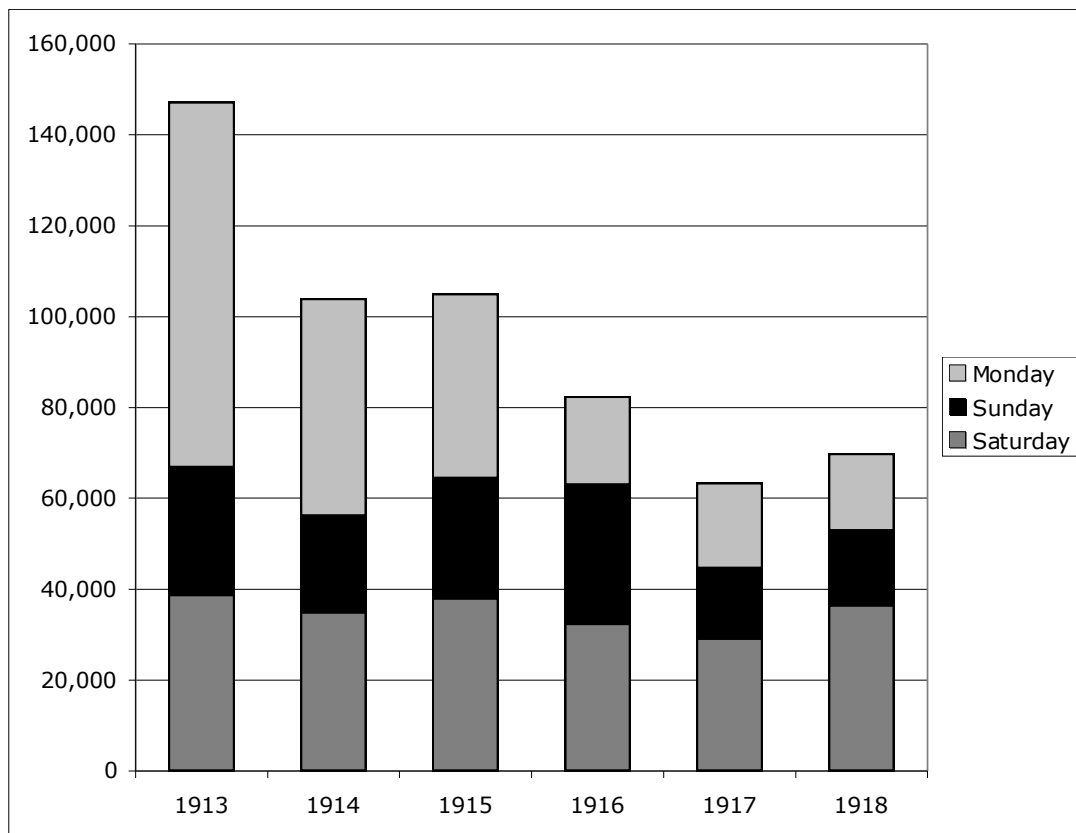


Fig. 4.8 – August Bank Holiday visitors to Southend by train, 1913-18.<sup>193</sup>

In 1916, the holiday industry received another major blow: the effective cancellation of the summer bank holidays.<sup>194</sup> Soldiers' leave from France had been cancelled for eight days over Easter 1916 to avoid their transports clashing with holiday traffic, much to the chagrin of the men's new commander, Sir Douglas Haig.<sup>195</sup> On 1 June the tables turned with the cancellation of the Whitsun Bank

<sup>192</sup> *SWG*, 1/6/1917.

<sup>193</sup> *BA*, 8/8/1914, *EWN*, 11/8/1916 and *SO*, 7/8/1918.

<sup>194</sup> The postponement of bank holidays was repeated during the Second World War (Alice Russell, *Bank Holidays: a Victorian Invention and a Modern Institution* (London, 2000), pp. 228-31).

<sup>195</sup> In his diary, Haig wrote 'I wonder what the future historian will write about Great Britain, whose inhabitants in a period of crisis, insist that these holiday makers should be given preference in travelling to soldiers for the seat of war.'

Holiday, to be replaced by an extra holiday on 8 August.<sup>196</sup> The cancellation had a major impact on the Monday's trade at Southend, with 4,600 visitors as opposed to 17,600 the previous year, although the Saturday and Sunday saw over 19,000 visitors in both years. Compared with an *increase* in visitors at Easter, though, this drop shows the great impact of the cancelled holiday –aided by inclement weather.<sup>197</sup> When the August Bank Holiday and a Whitsun replacement were also cancelled,<sup>198</sup> a similar pattern emerged with an overall one-fifth reduction in rail visitors largely reflecting the collapse of Monday travel, while Sunday arrivals actually increased, one paper commenting that the largest crowds were to be seen at noon on the Sunday, whereas more than half of all arrivals in 1913 had come on the Monday.<sup>199</sup>

Even outside the tourist trade, many resented the denial of a public holiday; a debate opened up in Colchester after a letter in the press suggested that two days' holiday might be granted in late September. The newspaper's columnists decried even the raising of the issue locally, contrasting the loss of a holiday with the sacrifices being made by soldiers. Undeterred, the Chamber of Commerce, Shop Assistants' Union and local tradesmen all favoured a holiday; the latter group voting unanimously to close their shops on 2 and 3 October to coincide with a holiday granted to local munitions workers.<sup>200</sup> People appear to have been willing to sacrifice their holiday,

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Robert Blake (ed.), *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919* (London, 1952), p. 140, entry for 17/4/1916.

<sup>196</sup> *Times*, 1/6/1916; *ECS*, 3/6/1916.

<sup>197</sup> *EWN*, 28/4/1916 and 16/6/1916. Clacton was said to have doubled its Monday visitor figures from 1915 to 1916, but since even this reflects barely a quarter of the 1914 figure it was hardly a great success (*Times*, 25/4/1916).

<sup>198</sup> *Times*, 29/7/1916.

<sup>199</sup> *EWN*, 11/8/1916; *BA*, 12/8/1916.

<sup>200</sup> *ECS*, 9/9/1916; 23/9/1916; 30/9/1916.

but only if the sacrifice was temporary and a further holiday given in return. While this was a matter of economic necessity for the tourist trade, it was not their concern alone and other citizens also resented the sacrifice. Through the summer and autumn of 1916, there was a clear difference between the public rhetoric of shared sacrifice and the private desire for a break. In 1917, the normal public holidays were reinstated; the unpopularity of their cancellation perhaps having shown the limits of acceptable sacrifice when it came to leisure.

After 1916, there was no further attempt to cancel or postpone the bank holidays. Easter 1918 brought a ‘considerable number of visitors’ to Clacton, resulting in ‘moderately good takings’ at boarding-houses, although this may have been a positive gloss on the holiday.<sup>201</sup> The August Bank Holidays are hard to assess since the observations and visitor statistics are contradictory. In terms of railway receipts, the last two ‘St Lubbock’s Day’<sup>202</sup> weekends were Southend’s least successful of the war, indeed the poorest in at least a decade, with fewer than 70,000 visitors arriving by train in either year. This is certainly not the impression given by contemporary observations: one columnist who felt in 1917 that ‘it was a really good holiday, and the crowds must have been as large as some of those in the piping times of peace’, was equally effusive the following summer.<sup>203</sup> Positive impressions were reinforced by ticket sales on municipal resources used by holidaymakers, such as Southend pier (Fig 4.9),<sup>204</sup> and the exhaustion of important holiday resources such as accommodation and alcohol.<sup>205</sup> This contradiction puzzled commentators,<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> *EEA*, 6/4/1918.

<sup>202</sup> As the holiday was sometimes known, after Sir John Lubbock.

<sup>203</sup> *ST*, 11/8/1917 and 10/8/1918.

<sup>204</sup> *ST*, 10/8/1918.

<sup>205</sup> *ECS*, 11/8/1917; *EEA*, 10/8/1918; *SO*, 7/8/1918.

but is in part explained by the increase in local holidaymaking, with people travelling shorter distances (many by bicycle) rather than taking expensive longer train journeys.<sup>207</sup> Patterns of holidaymaking also changed with fewer day-trippers arriving in Southend on the Monday, an increasing proportion of visitors arrived on Saturday or even before the start of the weekend and took a longer holiday. Another major factor in the appearance of success was the reduced level of provision, as was noted in Blackpool;<sup>208</sup> this meant that smaller numbers of visitors used up more of the limited accommodation and consumable supplies, possibly also using Southend pier in the absence of other attractions.<sup>209</sup> The image of success is further undermined by the granting of further support to East Coast resorts by the National Relief Fund over the summer of 1918.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> *ST*, 11/8/1917.

<sup>207</sup> *ST*, 10/8/1918; *EEA*, 25/5/1918. 'Holidays at Home' were promoted in the Second World War as the authorities attempted once again to reduce the use of Britain's infrastructure for leisure (Chris Sladen, 'Holidays at Home in the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 371 (2002), pp. 67-89).

<sup>208</sup> *Blackpool Times*, 7/8/1918. John K. Walton sees Blackpool as having had a successful war as a resort, but the lack of statistics of arrivals and use of facilities restricts his study to observational sources ('Leisure Towns in Wartime: The Impact of the First World War in Blackpool and San Sebastian', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31/4 (1996), pp. 603-618).

<sup>209</sup> J.A.B. Hamilton notes this phenomenon in the case of rail travel on bank holidays (*Britain's Railways in World War I* (London, 1967), p. 155).

<sup>210</sup> P.P. 1919, (Cmd 16), 'Report on the administration of the National Relief Fund up to the 30th September, 1918', p. 10.

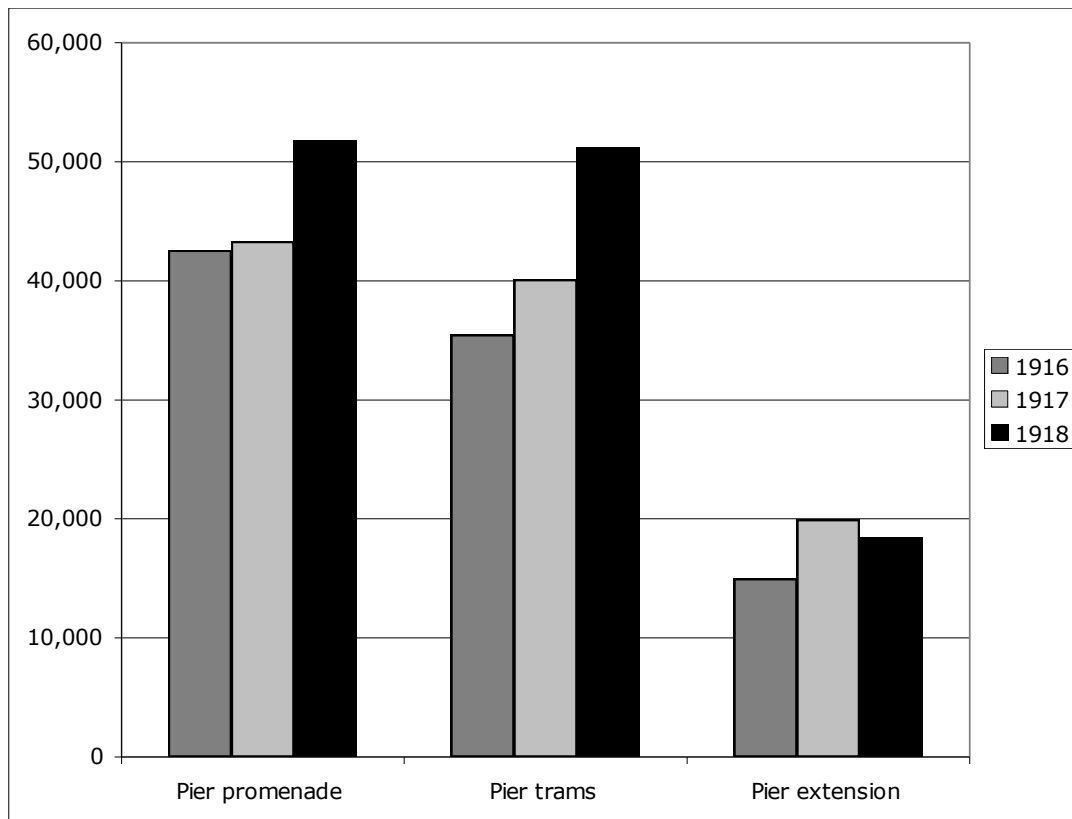


Fig 4.2 – Use of Southend pier facilities, August Bank Holidays 1916-18.<sup>211</sup>

However they compared statistically with prewar holidays, the 1918 August Bank Holiday weekend and season were seen as relatively successful and happy. Traders in Walton delayed further action on a campaign to honour local hero H.G. Columbine until after the holiday season,<sup>212</sup> while the National War Aims Committee targeted tourists at Southend, with speakers addressing crowds on the promenade.<sup>213</sup> The *Essex County Standard* contrasted the mood of that August bank holiday favourably with those of the previous three years and especially 1914. Their report from Walton recognised the war-weariness of people wanting a holiday, claiming that many people who had so far foregone their holidays during the war, but who did not work in war industries, had realised that

<sup>211</sup> *SO*, 7/8/1918.

<sup>212</sup> ERO, D/UWn 3/3, Columbine V.C. Memorial Fund.

<sup>213</sup> See pp. 300-303.

[S]uch a change [i.e. a holiday] was necessary because of the worries of the war and because they realised that, holiday or no holiday, the war would go on without feeling to an appreciable extent their leaving and return to work.<sup>214</sup>

Thus it was now acceptable to take this holiday and public rhetoric did not equate it with slacking or undervaluing the sacrifice of servicemen. People were willing to make sacrifices and defer their leisure time with a clear need for collective effort and sacrifice, but not to lose their time off completely.

The need for a break had been felt throughout the war, but the right to one was contested in 1916. It became clear that people would not give up the chance to get away from the work and anxiety that the war brought for a few days of relaxation or an evening in the cinema. The government and others attempted to bring the war into these leisure activities, but a limit to sacrifice was being reached in terms of leisure. By 1918 it was understood and accepted that such breaks were necessary and not evidence of slacking.

\* \* \*

As the losses and hardships of war mounted in 1916 and 1917, the ideas that supported it evolved. The narratives of the war's course and purpose accumulated new features but remained largely intact: the war was still being fought to defend freedom, democracy, liberty and 'right' against an aggressive militarist enemy, who would be defeated through big battles on the Western Front; by late 1917, though, the victory would come through wearing-down the enemy rather than a single breakthrough and would bring international institutions to ensure a lasting peace.

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<sup>214</sup> *EEA*, 10/8/1918. The former point was earlier identified by Andrew Clark (diaries, 12/8/1916) and the latter by the *Times* (2/4/1918).

Ideas of home front sacrifice changed more substantially, the powers of the state and local government over local life increased with conscription and powers over food production (and, from early 1918, distribution); these changes saw the role of local authorities and elites increase in scale and importance as it changed from encouraging voluntary sacrifice (through enlistment, donation, or economy) to managing the level of (in)equality of sacrifice in the local area in an attempt to maintain consent, and promoting less-obviously-altruistic subscription to War Savings. These changes and the increase in the numbers of men serving and killed in the armed forces also brought an evolution in the public use of the memory of men in the armed forces and particularly those who had died, with a growing emphasis on self-sacrifice and heroic death, and later the qualities of the dead as good citizens. New levels of sacrifice were demand from both civilians and servicemen from 1916; their limits had to be established and an acceptable framework for understanding the war, and the anxieties and losses it brought, maintained.

## Chapter 5 – Tribunals, 1916-18

In time of war no patriot would attempt  
From duty's clarion call to keep exempt,  
Both rich and poor if physically fit  
Should now co-operate and "do their bit."<sup>1</sup>

We have seen that by the end of 1915, recruiting for Britain's armed forces amounted almost to compulsion.<sup>2</sup> In the first months of 1916, military service became legally compulsory, for single and then for married men aged 19-40, under successive Military Service Acts (MSAs). Through this system, 35,142 men were recruited in the Essex recruiting district (see Table 5.1) This change to compulsory enlistment did not replace free volunteering with a mechanistic state control (as suggested by Ilana Bet-El), but rather both periods saw mediation by local civic leaders and consideration of personal and local factors in enlistment. Just as the promotion of volunteering and later 'moral compulsion' was primarily performed locally, so too was much decision-making affecting the conscription of individuals. Men liable to be called up were able to appeal for exemption in front of a military service tribunal made up of local councillors and other local figures. The decision over whether he should serve or remain a civilian was thus made by this body rather than by the individual, in contrast to the voluntary period. This process was the first and most prominent example of the shift in the role of local elites from promoting voluntary sacrifice to attempting to manage and maintain equality of (often unwilling) sacrifice in their communities.<sup>3</sup> The work of the tribunals shows some continuation from decision-making in the voluntary period, including concerns over the impact of men's departure on their families and clear attempts by some men to

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<sup>1</sup> 'Exempt' by A.W. Hurry in *IR*, 7/4/1916.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 206-16.

avoid service; there was, however, an increased emphasis on equality of sacrifice and fairness.

Table 5.1 – Recruits in the Essex Recruiting District, 1916-1918.<sup>4</sup>

Month	1916	1917	1918
January	816	1,736	325
February	1,366	1,728	353
March	2,555	2,134	326
April	1,179	1,387	703
May	2,081	1,351	966
June	2,591	1,085	1,091
July	1,244	622	450
August	1,686	472	273
September	926	420	199
October	1,416	361	276
November	1,515	225	325
December	1,039	245	353
<i>Yearly total</i>	<i>18,414</i>	<i>11,766</i>	<i>4,962</i>
<i>Grand total of recruits, 1916-18</i>			<i>35,142</i>

### **The military service tribunals**

The failure of the Derby Scheme left public and political opinion broadly supportive of conscription, for single men at least, but there was heated argument.<sup>5</sup> A variety of trades councils and socialist groups spoke out against the MSA, while Grays Urban District Council passed a resolution in January 1916 denouncing it as a ‘menace to the liberty of the working classes of the country.’<sup>6</sup> On the other side, the anger of those who supported conscription is clear in their reaction to Sir John Simon’s resignation as Home Secretary in opposition to the Act: one local newspaper decried his insistence on his ‘legal right to misrepresent the electors’ and a neighbouring Liberal association demanded his resignation.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the

<sup>4</sup> TNA, NATS 1/399 recruits raised (monthly).

<sup>5</sup> See pp. 156-60.

<sup>6</sup> Rusiecki, *The Impact of Catastrophe: The People of Essex and the First World War* (Chelmsford, 2008), p. 89; *EWN*, 21/1/1916.

<sup>7</sup> *ECS*, 15/1/1916; *BA*, 15/1/1916. See also *EWN* 28/1/1916.

British Socialist Party in South West Ham called for local Labour MP Will Thorne to explain why he had voted *for* conscription.<sup>8</sup>

Under the January 1916 MSA and its successors, attested single men were called up from January and unattested men from March, their married contemporaries from April and June respectively.<sup>9</sup> Attested men were placed in ‘groups’, and the unattested in ‘classes’, to be called up by year of birth: Group 1 and Class 1 formed of single men born in 1897, Group 23 and Class 23 single men born in 1875, and 24-46 being the equivalent cohorts for married men. By mid-1916, all these cohorts had all been called and enlistment and non-enlistment depended much more on tribunal- or government-issued exemptions. Tribunals had been set up in late 1915 to hear appeals for exemption from service made by Derby attestees, but with the passage of the MSA in January 1916, their remit was expanded to include unattested men. There were forty-five tribunals across Essex, one in each urban district and large rural district;<sup>10</sup> a second local tier was created with a county appeal tribunal split into separate bodies dealing with Metropolitan Essex and the rest of the county. Nationally, there were 2,086 local tribunals and 83 county appeal tribunals.<sup>11</sup> For reasons of space and to allow for more comparison between

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<sup>8</sup> Newham Local Studies Centre, Minutes of the British Socialist Party, South West Ham branch, 28/1/1916.

<sup>9</sup> Ian F.W. Beckett, ‘The nation in arms, 1914-1918’ in Ian F.W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms: the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester, 1985), p. 14. In later years clergymen and those up to 50 years of age were included.

<sup>10</sup> Clark diaries, 16/6/1916.

<sup>11</sup> P.P. 1919 (Cmd 413), ‘Forty-eighth Annual Report of the Local Government Board,’ p. 116.

tribunals, this chapter deals with local tribunals and not the Essex Appeal Tribunal, other than where the actions of the latter affected the work of the local bodies.<sup>12</sup>

Local tribunals sat once or twice weekly (or occasionally more frequently in the larger districts) in 1916, but slowed to fortnightly or even monthly meetings in some areas during the slowest recruiting period over winter 1917-18. The tribunals had a vast amount of work, particularly in 1916 (see Fig. 5.1): in the first six months of the year 748,587 men appealed for exemptions nationwide, perhaps 60% of all those called up.<sup>13</sup> In Chelmsford around two-thirds of Derby attestees appealed in 1916.<sup>14</sup> By October 1.12 million men nationally held tribunal exemptions or had cases pending, falling to 780,000 exemptions and 111,000 pending by May 1917.<sup>15</sup> It was not only ‘men who could afford a solicitor or professional counsel [who] were likely to think it worth their while to confront the state’s whipper-in’:<sup>16</sup> men from all levels of society appeared before the tribunals. County appeal tribunals heard cases in which appellants or military representatives were unhappy with the local tribunal’s decision; the Essex County Appeal Tribunals heard around 600 cases in twenty-one sittings each month in its first year; from April 1917 to the end of the war it sat just over fifteen times per month, hearing just under 300 cases,

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<sup>12</sup> For an excellent study of a county appeal tribunal, see James McDermott, ‘The work of the Military Service Tribunals in Northamptonshire, 1916-1918’ (University of Northampton, Ph.D. Thesis, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> J.E. Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium: 1916*, vol. i (London, 1932), p152. Just over 770,000 men joined the army in this period, suggesting that around 1.25 million were called up (if a third of appeals failed) of whom 60% appealed.

<sup>14</sup> ERO, D/B 7 M3/2/1, Chelmsford Borough Military Service Tribunal, 1915-17 (hereafter ERO Chelmsford MST).

<sup>15</sup> TNA, CAB 17/158, Derby scheme: Statement of the War Committee, 24/10/1916; *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War. 1914-1920* (London, 1922), p. 367.

<sup>16</sup> Denis Winter, *Death’s Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London, 1978), p. 34.

making a wartime total of 12,719.<sup>17</sup> The importance of local tribunals looking at local cases was highlighted several times, such as in clashes between local and county tribunal decisions and in protests against the proposed merger of six tribunals in north Essex in late 1918.<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 5.1 – ‘Snowed up (It is reported that the appeals are literally coming in in their hundreds)’: Southend Tribunal members overwhelmed with appeals for exemption.<sup>19</sup>

Each local tribunal had at least five members, most had around seven or eight but some more than a dozen.<sup>20</sup> Individual members were not allowed to sit in cases in which they had a personal interest, such as their sons or employees. Council appeals for their employees could cause problems and at least one tribunal had to adjourn all

<sup>17</sup> Paul Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 92.

<sup>18</sup> ECS, 12/10/1918.

<sup>19</sup> © British Library Board, SWG, 9/6/1916.

<sup>20</sup> Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 90.

such cases from a hearing because there was no quorum of non-council members of the tribunal in attendance.<sup>21</sup> Attendance varied greatly, with a quorum of three; reports of tribunals in the *Essex Weekly News* in mid-March 1916 show an average of 6.5 members attending, in addition to the clerk and military representative who did not decide cases; rural tribunals usually had six to eight members present, while boroughs more often had the recommended five. Ten members often attended at Lexden and Winstree, while fewer than five attended most meetings at Chelmsford in 1916.<sup>22</sup> Through 1916 and 1917, most members of the Colchester tribunal attended at least three-quarters of the body's meetings, although three resigned because they were too busy.<sup>23</sup> In East Ham, attendance was so poor in mid-1917 that the members present complained of the unfairness that such important duties were being borne by so few and commented that if members were allowed compensation of a few hundred pounds per annum more would undoubtedly attend.<sup>24</sup> Adrian Gregory has described members as being drawn from 'the locally prominent and reliable',<sup>25</sup> an assessment borne out by the Essex tribunals. In boroughs and towns, they were predominantly local councillors and aldermen, many also local businessmen; similarly, rural districts' tribunals were formed of their local council members; mayors or council chairmen usually presided. Some tribunals also contained local priests, including the chair of Maldon rural tribunal,

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<sup>21</sup> *ECS*, 28/10/1916.

<sup>22</sup> *EWN*, 10/3/1916 and 17/3/1916 (roughly the same numbers and pattern also occurred in mid-September reports); *ECS*, 1916 editions; ERO Chelmsford MST.

<sup>23</sup> *ECS*, 19/1/1918.

<sup>24</sup> *WHSEM*, 1/6/1917.

<sup>25</sup> Adrian Gregory, 'Military Service Tribunals: Civil Society in Action, 1916-1918' in Jose Harris (ed), *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2003), p. 182.

but few contained women.<sup>26</sup> At meetings in early 1916, the inclusion of labour representation was discussed,<sup>27</sup> with mixed results: in general, rural tribunals featured an agriculture representative by mid-1916 and those in metropolitan districts a labour representative, but towns around the county often had neither. Members were drawn from the local elite that had also manned charitable and recruiting appeals and later ran pension and food committees.

The composition of tribunals caused uncertainty about their purpose: one liberal newspaper referred to them as the ‘Essex War Courts’.<sup>28</sup> The presence of a military representative and his role in assenting to or rejecting applications, often before they came to the tribunal, might appear to favour the military;<sup>29</sup> in fact, his assent to exemptions meant that there may well have been more appeals than the press reported.<sup>30</sup> In addition, they were backed up by advisory committees of men with knowledge of the local economy; in Colchester this body met around once a week for between two and five hours.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, many other members had previously been active in recruiting, such as the chairman of Leyton Tribunal, who had led the local recruiting effort.<sup>32</sup> One widely-noted appointment in Essex was that of a Quaker, Joseph Smith, as the chairman of the Braintree Rural Tribunal; his background (as a magistrate and county alderman) was similar to other members,

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<sup>26</sup> Revd Graves was chairman of the rural district council from 1910-21. Mrs F. Landon sat on the Brentwood Urban Tribunal (*EWN*, 10/3/1916).

<sup>27</sup> For example *ECS*, 19/2/1916.

<sup>28</sup> *ECC*, 24/3/1916 quoted in Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 90. The term was also used elsewhere: P. Spinks, ‘“The War Courts”: the Stratford-upon-Avon Borough Tribunal 1916-1918’, *Local Historian*, 32/4 (2002), pp. 210-17.

<sup>29</sup> John Rae, *Conscience and Politics: the British Government and the Conscientious Objector to Military Service, 1916-1919* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 61-66.

<sup>30</sup> See pp. 273-4.

<sup>31</sup> *ECS*, 19/1/1918.

<sup>32</sup> *LEI*, 8/1/1916.

and his attitude was that there was no conflict between his beliefs and this position since the tribunal was a civil body and not a military one.<sup>33</sup> He was correct, but many did not share his view. Tension over the tribunals' civil or military role and representation dragged on through 1916-17 until the creation of the Ministry of National Service confirmed civilian control of the system, with military representatives renamed National Service Representatives (NSRs).<sup>34</sup>

History has not been kind to the tribunals. Judgement is primarily based on their treatment of conscientious objectors, whose prominence in the literature is in roughly inverse proportion to their proportion of appeals. Where only around 2 percent of appeals to the tribunals were on moral grounds, almost the entire body of academic and popular works on tribunals relates to these cases, a trend which began during the war with disproportionate attention in the press.<sup>35</sup> Only one monograph (currently an unpublished thesis) on tribunals has so far been completed;<sup>36</sup> beyond this, scholarly attention comes from sections of John Rae's book on conscientious objectors, two short pieces by Adrian Gregory,<sup>37</sup> chapters in a small number of local histories,<sup>38</sup> and articles on individual tribunals.<sup>39</sup> Modern criticism of the tribunals is

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<sup>33</sup> Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 90. York tribunal contained a number of local Quakers (A.J. Peacock, *York in the Great War 1914-1918*, A History of York, 2 (York, 1993)).

<sup>34</sup> See pp. 272-78.

<sup>35</sup> For example, Rae, *Conscience and Politics*; Cyril Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience: the Story of an English Community's Opposition to the Great War* (London, 2001), the community being Huddersfield.

<sup>36</sup> McDermott, 'Military Service Tribunals'. Part of this work has been published as 'Conscience and the Military Service Tribunals during the First World War: Experiences in Northamptonshire', *War In History*, 17/1 (2010), pp. 60-85.

<sup>37</sup> Rae, *Conscription and Politics*; Gregory, 'Military Service Tribunals'; Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 101-108.

<sup>38</sup> Contemporary histories often ignored tribunals (eg Charles T. Perfect, *Hornchurch during the Great War* (Colchester, 1920) and E.A. Hunt (ed.)

also roughly the inverse of that expressed during the war: during the war they were widely criticised for being soft on ‘conchies’ but harsh or inconsistent on other claims; now their attitude towards moral objection to war is broadly (and often rightly) criticised while their other work is all but ignored.<sup>40</sup>

In her study of British conscripts, Ilana Bet-El depicts the conscription system as a faceless machine before which the conscript was a passive victim ‘shunted through – without his consent and without his knowledge.’<sup>41</sup> While it was a bureaucratic procedure to call masses of men into the army, the local appeal process made it more amenable to individual circumstances and local needs.<sup>42</sup> The system could certainly be confusing and men were called more quickly than they or the tribunals expected in 1916; thereafter, the unexpected call-up would generally only have been experienced by those who had suddenly become subject to conscription after a change in the MSA or the list of protected jobs. Furthermore, the plain statement of the dates associated with their call-up related in diaries does not necessarily imply

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*Colchester War Memorial Souvenir* (Colchester, 1923)), but some outside Essex did give some detail (for example Harry Cartmell, *For Remembrance. An Account of Some Fateful Years*, (Preston, 1919)), a pattern repeated in recent histories, although some such as Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe on Essex and Peacock, York in the Great War*, do address their work.

<sup>39</sup> Ivor Slocombe, ‘Recruitment in the Armed Forces during the First World War. The work of the Military Tribunals in Wiltshire, 1915-1918’, *Local Historian*, 30/2 (2000), pp. 105-23; Keith Grieves ‘Mobilising manpower: Audenshaw tribunal in the First World War’, *Manchester Region History Review*, 3/2 (1989-90), pp. 21-29; Keith Grieves, ‘Military Tribunal Papers: The case of Leek Local Tribunal in the First World War’, *Archives*, 16/70 (1983), pp. 145-50; Spinks, “‘The War Courts’”.

<sup>40</sup> This is part of the general disappearance of the conscript’s war from popular memory and much academic history of the war, which Ilana R. Bet-El calls the Myth of the Volunteer (‘Men and Soldiers: British Conscripts, Concepts of Masculinity, and the Great War’ in Billie Melman (ed.) *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace 1870-1930* (London, 1998)).

<sup>41</sup> Ilana R. Bet-El, *Conscripts. Forgotten Men of the Great War* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 29-30.

<sup>42</sup> See Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 101.

(as Bet-El concludes) resignation and helplessness. One Essex conscript showed no aversion to joining up when called in 1918, but his diary does not reveal in his impending military service; another contemporary claimed to have welcomed his call-up.<sup>43</sup> Others mitigated their call-up by seeking appropriate jobs in the military, such as Howard Bull who was initially exempted as a saddler with military contracts but had his certificate withdrawn; instead of simply awaiting the inevitable call-up, he enlisted as a saddler in the Royal Field Artillery.<sup>44</sup>

In some ways, the conscription system was fairer than voluntary recruiting and particularly the ‘moral compulsion’ state into which voluntarism had developed by late 1915; indeed fairness was the reason that many people supported the move to compulsion, to root out shirkers.<sup>45</sup> The option to not enlist did still exist, primarily through a change of career into munitions works or other essential industries. From 1916, men were able to have genuine reasons for not serving endorsed by the government or local tribunals and carried certificates to prove it, saving them from the social pressure present throughout 1915.

#### *Possible grounds and results of appeals*

Appeals before the tribunals were made on one (or often more) of five grounds: work of national importance (or in a protected industry), the risk of business hardship or domestic hardship, medical unfitness for service, and conscientious objection. Medical applications were technically outside their jurisdiction but a

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<sup>43</sup> Basil Harrison diary, July 1918; IWM Sound Archive, 9420, William Gillman.

<sup>44</sup> ERO T/B 245, microfilm diary of Robert Taylor Bull (hereafter ERO Bull diary), 5/10/1916 and 27/10/1916.

<sup>45</sup> Clark wrote to Lieutenant Colonel Taylor in May 1915 of his ‘frank opinion than men here would not enlist, unless conscription ensured that “the slackers” who are hanging back would be made to enlist with them.’ (Clark diaries, 14/5/1915)

small number were considered, while protected occupations were governed by frequently-amended lists and instructions from the government. The primary functions of the tribunals were, then, the of assessment men's indispensability at home, to a business or in the local community, and adjudication of the small number of cases of conscientious objection to war or to military service. A January 1917 newspaper editorial comment reflected some of the difficulty of assessing claims:

Our sympathies are generally with the applicants, especially the older, whose means of livelihood after the war are at stake; but, naturally, they do not make the least of their worries and ailments.<sup>46</sup>

It is perhaps not surprising that another local newspaper referred to the tribunals' task as enough to make Solomon's head ache.<sup>47</sup>

Conditional or temporary exemptions were by far the most common results of tribunal hearings, meaning that exemptions relied on the continued presence of exceptional circumstances and could be withdrawn or not renewed if these circumstances no longer applied. Unlike absolute exemption, this was in line with the idea that all adult males were officially considered to have enlisted in the armed forces under the MSA,<sup>48</sup> as it allowed the army to call them up in future. Conditions applied ranged from the continuation of current circumstances to enforced participation in schemes assisting the war effort such as the Special Constabulary, Motor Volunteers or the (increasingly only nominally voluntary) Volunteer

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<sup>46</sup> *WHSEM*, 26/1/1917.

<sup>47</sup> *EWN*, 25/2/1916.

<sup>48</sup> *ECS*, 28/10/1916.

Training Corps (VTC).<sup>49</sup> Beginning in East Ham but spreading elsewhere later, conditions often involved assisting rival businesses whose owners had been called up or working with the local Food Control Committee. Walthamstow Tribunal even directed some unfit men to help with the borough's Roll of Honour as a condition of their exemption.<sup>50</sup>

Temporary exemptions were the most frequent result of appeals, allowing men a period between a few days and more than six months before enlisting or making another appeal. In fact, an exemption of even a few days actually translated into two months as there was a period of grace after one's exemption expired.<sup>51</sup> These short periods of exemption were given in order to allow reassessment of the case after some lapse of time, for example to allow a man's wife to regain her health or in order for the appellant (or his employer) to make arrangements for his departure. In cases where employers were to find a substitute so that a current employee would have to enlist, there is evidence that many did not try very hard.<sup>52</sup> The tribunals' other options were rejection, adjournment or referral to another body, such as medical authorities, the War Office, or the county appeal tribunal. The likelihood of gaining an exemption and the delay inherent in having a case brought before the tribunal made applying for exemption a chance worth taking.

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<sup>49</sup> This became a regular condition for new exemptions from July 1916 and began to be applied to existing exemptions a few months later. By February 1918, 35% of all VTC members had been directed to join by tribunals (Beckett, 'Nation in arms', p. 16). That year, VTC service became mandatory for exemption, unless the tribunal decided against it (Cmd 413, p. 130).

<sup>50</sup> *WG*, 28/7/1918.

<sup>51</sup> *EHE*, 12/5/1916; *ECS* 18/3/1916. This did not apply to attested men, McDermott, 'Work of the Tribunals', p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> Andrew Clark records the lack of effort to replace George Rayner (diaries, 14/9/1917).

After the second MSA was passed in May 1916, tribunals were allowed to deny men the right to appeal for further exemption, making the current exemption 'final'.<sup>53</sup> This provided some of the tribunal hearings' more baffling outcomes: in December 1916, Colchester tribunal granted one man a 'final' exemption expiring in January while denying exemptions to two others, but it instructed the military not to call up one of the latter until February and the other 'till the end of three months and not then unless required.'<sup>54</sup> The parallel granting of 'final' exemptions and rejections with periods of grace is just one example of the inconsistency not only of the tribunals but also of their reporting, which leaves us no indication of why this was done.

There were extra options when dealing with conscientious objectors, who could be exempted absolutely, conditionally, temporarily or from combatant service, or could be allocated work of national importance. Despite the amount of press these conscience cases received at the time and the attention they have received since, the primary role of the local military service tribunals was to decide whether the importance of a man to the army outweighed the likelihood and extent of hardship in his family or the local community more broadly.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> McDermott, 'Work of the Tribunals', p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> *ECS*, 9/12/1916.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Rusiecki states erroneously that the Essex tribunals were set up primarily to hear conscience cases (*Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 97), as does Lee Jones in "The Others': Gender and Conscientious Objection in the First World War", *Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies*, 3/2 (2008), pp. 99-113, p. 105. In fact, the conscience aspect was added to their responsibilities by the passage of the MSA, rather than being the *raison d'être*.

*Tribunal records: sources and problems*

Before analysing the results of the local tribunals in Essex, it is worth outlining the problems with the sources, which are comprehensive in neither numbers nor details. The main source for information in most areas of Britain is local newspapers' reports of tribunal hearings.<sup>56</sup> For this study I have used the results reported throughout the war for Barking Town, Colchester, East Ham and the rural district of Lexden and Winstree, which encircles Colchester,<sup>57</sup> as well as some reports and partial results from other local tribunals. Alongside these, the minutes of the Chelmsford Borough Tribunal provides extra statistical evidence but few details.<sup>58</sup> Newspaper reports were not complete or consistent, subject as they were to the limitations of closed hearings (especially in their early months<sup>59</sup>), limited column-inches and limited or variable interest in the cases. Reports tended to concentrate on the more interesting and controversial cases and particularly those relating to conscientious objectors. Reports were often reduced to a short paragraph or even a single sentence listing the appellant's name, age and marital status, the result and often, but not always, the grounds on which he had applied.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Very few original sets of tribunal papers exist and most are records of County Appeal Tribunals (for Northampton, Middlesex, and Lothian and Peebles). New local tribunals record do appear relatively often, though, as local archives uncover them and come to appreciate their significance.

<sup>57</sup> Curiously, Lexden parish itself was not in Lexden and Winstree rural district, meaning that, for example, Lexden builder R. Beaumont appealed for a manager, E.T. Beaumont, in Colchester and a joiner from neighbouring Stanway at Lexden and Winstree Tribunal.

<sup>58</sup> ERO Chelmsford MST. Full details were recorded until August 1916, after which the names of applicants were not always recorded. The minutes only record decisions up to January 1917.

<sup>59</sup> See comments about Chingford Tribunal in *WG*, 5/1/1917.

<sup>60</sup> Cases at Saffron Walden Rural Tribunal were almost entirely ignored by the local newspaper on the basis that they were not 'of interest' (for example: *SWNN*, 7/4/1916).

The limitations are illustrated by comparing absolute figures and reported cases: Ilford tribunal heard 1,896 cases by the end of July 1916 and Chelmsford 453 by the end of August, representing 5% of their 1911 male populations respectively. By contrast, the *reported* cases in East Ham for the whole of 1916 numbered only 719, compared to 897 in Colchester and 501 in Barking Town; where the latter represent 4 percent and 3.2 percent of the 1911 male populations respectively, the figure for East Ham is only one percent.<sup>61</sup> It seems very unlikely that the number of cases in East Ham was less than a fifth that in Chelmsford, relative to their populations, even taking into account the larger potential for protected trades in the former's docks and industrial areas. Indeed the reports for 1917 list twice as many appeals in East Ham, as against a decline in tribunals more generally, showing the effect of editorial control on the reporting of meetings.<sup>62</sup> Total wartime appeals generally numbered around 7-8 percent of the 1911 civilian male population of each district.

The lack of details similarly means that we do not necessarily know *why* appeals were accepted or rejected. Whether an appeal was a man's first or for a renewal is equally inconsistently recorded. What information we do have suggests that even by late 1916 many cases, if not most, were for renewal: by the end of August 1916, 64 cases at Chelmsford had been appeals brought by men who had been before the tribunal before – including fourteen of the twenty-three cases heard that month.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Absolute figures from ERO Chelmsford MST and IR 21/4/1916; figures for reported cases from *EHE*, *ECS* and *BA* for the whole year.

<sup>62</sup> The 1916 results come from the *East Ham Echo* (*EHE*), while the 1917-18 results are taken from the *West Ham and South Essex Mail* (*WHSEM*), which covered East Ham and shared its editorial column with the *Echo*. Neither paper is available for the whole of the period in the British Library's newspaper archive.

<sup>63</sup> ERO Chelmsford MST. By way of comparison, over three quarters of the cases heard in at Huddersfield in the last three months of 1916 were second appearances by the appellant (Pearse, *Comrades in Conscience*, p. 314).

Meanwhile at East Ham the ten reported cases at one tribunal session in October included eight renewals, two of whom were making their third appearance; this was an unusually high number, but most sessions there reported at least two renewals among similar numbers of appellants. This lack of comprehensive reporting means that we can only make assessments on the basis of what evidence we have and assume that it is broadly representative, for which the Chelmsford tribunal minutes serve as a useful alternative to newspaper sources.

For ease of assessment, grounds for appeal have been simplified slightly: where business cases were heard but other factors mentioned, they are recorded here as 'Business', but where it is unclear which was the main grounds for appeal or appears that other factors were equally important they are 'Business and domestic'. Equally, it was not always clear whether the case was brought by an employer or employee, so an extra category is used for unclear cases; in the rural tribunals, all men who were listed as employed as or by farmers or as market gardeners are listed as 'farm workers'.

### *Appeals*

It is worth considering what it was that men appealed for as well as the grounds for appeals. This was not often stated in newspaper reports but is an important consideration since the difference between what was sought and what was granted would have affected the opinions of both appellants and observers about the tribunals' fairness.

Table 5.2 – Appeals and results for attested men at Chelmsford Borough Tribunal, 1916 (percentages in brackets, not including adjournment).<sup>64</sup>

Result:	Rejected	Temporary Exemption	Conditional Exemption	Total	<i>Percentage of stated appeals</i>
Exemption applied for (Jan.-Aug. 1916)					
Absolute	63 (23.6)	75 (28.1)	89 (33.3)	267	61.1
Conditional	11 (15.5)	16 (22.5)	46 (64.8)	71	16.2
Temporary	23 (23.2)	40 (40.4)	28 (28.3)	99	22.7
Total (Jan.-Aug. 1916)	97 (22.2)	131 (30.0)	163 (37.3)	437 (46 adjourned)	100
Total results for Jan. 1916-Jan. 1917	137 (24.0)	144 (25.2)	217 (37.9)	572 (74 adjourned)	-

In the first eight months of hearings at Chelmsford, nearly two thirds of appeals were for absolute exemption, which was very rarely granted anywhere. However, a third of them received conditional exemptions. On the face of it, appeals for conditional exemption were the most successful, with 64.8 percent exempted conditionally, 22.5 percent temporarily and only 15.5 percent rejected; however, it is also worth considering that appeals for temporary exemption resulted in exemptions in 68.7 percent of cases and were thus successful (if not necessarily to the duration desired), while a temporary reprieve in response to an appeal for conditional or absolute exemption might have been considered a failure. As certificates of temporary exemption came up for renewal, men seem to have continued to appeal for more permanent certificates, indeed many gained them. Even after receiving a temporary exemption, it was worth appealing for something more. Some received a conditional exemption after as many as five periods of temporary exemption in 1917 and 1918. Indeed, the proportions of cases in which

<sup>64</sup> ERO Chelmsford MST.

conditional exemption was awarded increased from 1916 to 1917 at most Essex tribunals.

### **The work of the tribunals**

See tables 5.3-5.8 at the end of this chapter for tribunal hearing statistics for Colchester, Barking, East Ham, Lexden and Winstree, Orsett and Ilford.<sup>65</sup>

In common with tribunals across Great Britain, those in Essex granted some form of exemption to in the majority of cases they heard, contradicting some historians' views of tribunals as rejecting most appeals.<sup>66</sup> Tribunals in Essex towns rejected around 20-30 percent of cases, while 1916-only statistics from Ilford and Chelmsford show around a quarter of cases rejected and rural tribunals rejected only around 15 percent.<sup>67</sup> This compares well with around 25 percent rejected in Leeds and Huddersfield and less than 10 percent in Calne rural district,<sup>68</sup> but does not mean that only a quarter of men called for went into the army. Aside from those who did not appeal at all (perhaps a third to two-fifths of all those called up) men whose temporary exemptions were not renewed or whose certificates were annulled by a change in protected trades also went.<sup>69</sup> Temporary exemptions were the most

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<sup>65</sup> Tables based on reports in *ECS* (Colchester and Lexden and Winstree), *EHE* and *WHSEM* (East Ham), *BA* (Barking) and *EWN* (Orsett), and *IR*, 21/4/1916 (Ilford, for which the number of results listed and the number of exemptions do not match the number of appeals made).

<sup>66</sup> Charles Messenger, *Call-To-Arms: The British Army 1914-18* (London, 2005), p. 136.

<sup>67</sup> In Ilford, 84 were rejected by the tribunal, making 37.2% of their cases, but when appeals 'assented' by the military representative are included we find that exemptions were granted in 257 of the 355 appeals made: 75.0%. East Ham's rejection rate was higher, at 42%.

<sup>68</sup> Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 106; Slocombe, 'Military Recruiting', p. 110.

<sup>69</sup> For example, Robert McNarry was exempted twice but eventually joined the army in 1917 (Ruth Meldrum, *The McNarrys, circa 1750 to 1950* (privately

common result of tribunal hearings, but it is hard to tell how many *individuals'* cases were heard. Exemptions usually lasted one to three months, meaning that a man remaining exempted from March 1916 to November 1918 would have had to appear before the tribunal around twelve times. Some men certainly did appear many times: a member of the Colchester tribunal resigned in October 1916 after an employee was rejected after eight appearances before the tribunal.<sup>70</sup> Despite increases in conditional exemptions, the large proportion of men receiving temporary exemptions and the trend towards 'final' exemptions meant that many of these men found themselves in the army before the war's end.

### *Domestic*

The small numbers of domestic hardship cases reported in the newspapers and the absence of clearly-stated grounds of appeal in the Chelmsford minutes make it hard to get a picture of these appeals and tribunals' attitudes towards them. Lexden and Winstree Tribunal heard very few domestic cases, as did the rural tribunal at Orsett in 1916.<sup>71</sup> From the results we do have, we can see that one third of purely domestic cases were rejected in Colchester and East Ham, but over half in Barking. In Ilford, by contrast, many domestic exemptions were granted in the first three months: seventy-three exemptions on domestic grounds compared to eighty-three rejections across *all* appeals. These domestic cases were the clearest example of family sacrifice being presented to the tribunals, primarily on the grounds of being sole support for sick or otherwise vulnerable family members, which most often resulted in temporary exemptions. In cases of temporarily illness, a three-month exemption

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published, Manitoba, 1995), pp. 318-339).

<sup>70</sup> *ECS*, 15/10/1916.

<sup>71</sup> *EWN*, 1916.

might be sufficient to see the family safely through that period and allow the man to leave with the family healthy and able to support itself, but if men were sole supporters of children (especially young siblings) or sick and elderly relatives, the situation was unlikely to improve dramatically within a matter of months. Public confidence was shaken in Brightlingsea when a man was granted only three months exemption to care for a blind and crippled brother and two other young siblings.<sup>72</sup>

Alongside widespread anger over the potential and then actual conscription of married men, appeals for exemption on domestic grounds asked a straight-forward question of the tribunals as to what level of family sacrifice was justified, and what level justified men remaining at home. Judgement of a man's role and importance in the family was fundamental; husbands and fathers had the clearest and most important domestic role as provider, whereas single men were both more easily spared and most easily cast as protectors who should go and fight. Problems often arose when single men were performing provider roles. As in the voluntary period, anti-‘shirker’ criticism was primarily directed at single men, especially when tribunals across the county called on the government to withdraw young, single men from war work in early 1916 before conscripting married men.<sup>73</sup>

Nationally, single men were more likely to have their appeals rejected than married men of the same age.<sup>74</sup> Preference was shown towards older married men and

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<sup>72</sup> Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 104.

<sup>73</sup> Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 106: Romford, Maldon and East Ham passed this resolution, among others.

<sup>74</sup> By May 1917, 63.1% of outstanding appeals by men under 30 were for single men, compared with 76.7% of those whose appeals had recently been dismissed, suggesting under two-thirds of appellants were single but they were more likely

resolutions passed in some places called for married men under 30 to be removed from war industries.<sup>75</sup> Trevor Wilson notes the disruption of families as a serious problem in 1918 when men over 41 were conscripted,<sup>76</sup> but it had been of concern throughout the war. Historians like John Tosh have highlighted a domestic masculinity prominent in Victorian British life, while Jessica Meyer notes that despite some decline ‘the power of the domestic role of men as providers and protectors remained strong’ before and throughout the war.<sup>77</sup> Where his family would suffer unduly because of a man’s absence, he could appeal with some prospect of success. Sometimes, the numbers of appeals on domestic grounds caused scepticism: one military representative commented on the numbers of ‘ailing mothers’ and the ‘groggy lot of wives’ in his area.<sup>78</sup> Equally, a mother appealing for her fit 18-year old son was accused of simply wanting to keep him at home; oddly, she countered this by stating that she did not want to see her family broken up.<sup>79</sup> Tribunals had to judge whether the man’s family would be sufficiently supported by other members’ employment or the separation allowance, or both. Strictness on domestic cases was often justified in terms of equal sacrifice: that some degree of suffering was to be expected in wartime and that this particular family would not be suffering more than others in losing a man to the army.<sup>80</sup>

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than married men to have their appeals rejected (*Statistics of the Military Effort*, p. 367).

<sup>75</sup> For example in Barking and Colchester: *BA*, 16/12/1916, and *ECS* 14/10/1916,

<sup>76</sup> Trevor Wilson, *Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 645.

<sup>77</sup> Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 6-7.

<sup>78</sup> *EHE*, 3/11/1916, *WHSEM*, 11/5/1917.

<sup>79</sup> *WHSEM*, 11/5/1917.

<sup>80</sup> *IR*, 3/3/1916

In cases where family sacrifices were brought up directly in the form of war records of the family, there was a great inconsistency in the tribunals' decisions, although since they were stated as mitigating factors in other appeals it is hard to judge what impact this type of sacrifice had, but it was clearly important to the families who stated their situations. Military representatives pointed out that family service records were not supposed to affect tribunal decisions.<sup>81</sup> Barking Tribunal told a man with five brothers serving that 'they were not expected to take any notice of that, but while they were human beings they would'.<sup>82</sup> Very often an expression of admiration or sympathy was given, but it seems unlikely that family service was a very great influence on decisions. Appellants with multiple servicemen in their families were often rejected or gained only temporary exemptions.<sup>83</sup> Lack of family sacrifice could, though, be used against an appellant, as in the case of an Orsett cowman who was refused exemption because his brother was exempted. In another case, a man's appeal was dismissed after his brother's work at the Admiralty in London was rejected as evidence of family sacrifice since he was not at the front.<sup>84</sup> Despite the importance of military service, it was fundamentally the hardships faced at home that swayed tribunal decisions.

### *Business*

Ideas of sacrifice and hardship also played a role in appeals on business grounds, particularly where national interest was not directly involved, although newspaper

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<sup>81</sup> *WHSEM*, 25/5/1917. In New Zealand, last sons of families were automatically exempted from the conscription ballot (Paul Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War* (Oxford, 1988))

<sup>82</sup> *BA*, 2/2/1918. East Ham's military representative commented on precedent from the Central Tribunal against considering family service (*WHSEM*, 25/5/1917).

<sup>83</sup> *ECS*, 22/7/1916, 12/1/1918; *EHE*, 3/11/1916 and 24/11/1916; *EWN*, 24/3/1916.

<sup>84</sup> *ECS*, 19/8/1916.

reports are not always clear about the exact grounds upon which men were appealing. Many business cases were heard as individual appeals at tribunal sittings, but large employers could co-operate with the military representative and agree exemptions and enlistments of groups of their employees *en masse*. Exemptions granted were often conditional, but employers were generally less successful than individuals in business cases; this may well have been a result of block appeals by employers, which generally led to only a certain proportion of their employees being exempted, or simply the fact that larger employers could afford to lose more men, while many other appeals came from owners of small businesses. Through 1916, group cases brought by Messrs Warne and Co. in Barking became less successful: the tribunal primarily gave temporary exemptions to their employees but the proportion of appeals rejected gradually increased from 20% in March to 36% in July.

Cases where men were employed in protected or nationally important work were easily resolved: for men working in such employment and of an age not 'combed-out' by the government (i.e. in the increases in the lower age limits for automatic exemption that often followed manpower crises), appeals were generally simply accepted. In April 1917, twice as many men held exemptions granted by the government than by tribunals.<sup>85</sup> There were repeated resolutions by tribunals and other organisations attempting to pressure the government into releasing young (and especially single) men from munitions work, 800 of whom were said to be working at 'Kynoch Town' in Thurrock alone.<sup>86</sup> Claims about vast numbers of these 'slackers' led one East Ham man to bring a list of young workers at Woolwich

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<sup>85</sup> *Statistics of the Military Effort*, p. 367.

<sup>86</sup> *EHE*, 10/3/1916; *ECS*, 22/7/1916.

Arsenal to his tribunal hearing, much to the chagrin of his co-workers. Elsewhere, a tribunal member produced a list of men aged over forty-one who had been called up from Kynoch's.<sup>87</sup> Tendring Tribunal asked local factories for a list of men who 'ought to be serving' so that replacements could be found, while Councillor Marshall at East Ham railed against the 'army corps of fit young men [at Woolwich Arsenal...]. They take old men and pale-faced babies, and leave the shirking bounders there.'<sup>88</sup> Slightly less clear-cut were the appeals made when government exemptions were removed in 'comb-outs'; here the tribunals often stated their inability to help.<sup>89</sup>

Where smaller businesses were concerned, the element of sacrifice was of more direct concern to the tribunal, particularly in cases involving matters of food production or public health. Tribunals had to walk a fine line between the community's duty to support the war effort by sending men to fight and its duty to provide for its citizens, a wider incarnation of domestic masculine roles that saw local elites attempting to maintain local consent by balancing local and national needs. Cases of self-owned businesses placed this consideration of their role in the community alongside the man's ability to support his family during his absence and on his return. In these cases, some leniency was granted to men whose business prospects for the future or the success of his existing investments relied on having regular customers.<sup>90</sup> Concerns about the conscription of men who owned small businesses and the risk of those businesses failing were discussed at the East Ham chamber of commerce and by Colchester's tribunal. As with men's domestic duties,

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<sup>87</sup> *WHSEM*, 8/6/1917; *EWN*, 2/6/1916.

<sup>88</sup> *WHSEM*, 12/7/1918.

<sup>89</sup> *BA*, 18/5/1918.

<sup>90</sup> *EHE*, 28/4/1916 and 5/5/1916; *ECS*, 10/6/1916.

their roles in the community and prospects for a successful return to civilian life were matters of great concern, particularly when married men were first called up. Frank Bull in Burnham was probably not alone in trying to avoid giving his local tribunal the impression that his business could be run by anyone else in his absence.<sup>91</sup>

Tribunals' actions were not limited to judging cases in terms of local and national needs; they were practical and proactive in trying to reorganise local businesses to best serve both. Recommendations were made for rationalising business arrangements: in East Ham one butcher's slaughterman was exempted on condition that his previously-exempted assistant enlist instead, and the town's butchers were ordered to arrange joint slaughtering and so reduce the number of exempted slaughtermen. The butchers' failure to do so led the tribunal to reject all business appeals for slaughtermen.<sup>92</sup> Elsewhere, bakers, dairymen, coal dealers, and even undertakers were instructed by local tribunals to rationalise their work or work together.<sup>93</sup> Offering hours to a co-operative scheme to support the businesses of men joining the forces became a regular condition of business exemptions in East Ham in 1917-18. That borough was ahead of others in its level of organisation, but others adopted similar schemes as enlistment increased in 1918; a Clacton solicitor was exempted in order to do legal work for a similar scheme.<sup>94</sup> In some places, this type of co-ordination between individual businesses or across whole sectors was

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<sup>91</sup> ERO Bull diary, 15/5/1916 (Frank Bull was the brother of Howard, the saddler mentioned above).

<sup>92</sup> *EHE*, 21/4/1916 and 5/5/1916.

<sup>93</sup> *BA*, 27/1/1917 and 17/2/1917; *EHE*, 21/4/1916; *ECS* 8/4/1916 and 29/5/1917.

<sup>94</sup> ERO, D/B 6 M23/7, minutes of the Special (Traders) Committee, April-May 1918, following letter received in July 1917; *ECS*, 27/4/1918.

well received, but on occasion it was resented, or ignored;<sup>95</sup> some initially described co-operation by business rivals as unworkable,<sup>96</sup> but such obstruction seems to have declined during and after the shortages of winter 1917-18. The use of female labour was also advocated by tribunals, with a range of responses, including several dismissive comments by employers, which cannot have aided the prospects of their appeals.<sup>97</sup> Unlike factory and farm work, it is notable that female replacements were not considered suitable for jobs in the butchery trade.<sup>98</sup> Through co-operation schemes and exemptions conditional on them, the tribunals actively fulfilled their complicated role of managing the level of sacrifice in its most prominent form: deciding which men could be spared while local life and industry were maintained and individual or collective sacrifice and hardship kept within acceptable levels.

#### *Farm workers and rural tribunals*

Although some agricultural cases arose in borough tribunals, they were primarily the preserve of rural tribunals, of which the results for Lexden and Winstree and the 1916 results for Orsett are presented in Tables 5.5 and 5.6. Little research has been done into rural tribunals, Ivor Slocombe's article on Calne, Wiltshire, being a useful but rare example.<sup>99</sup> The work of these tribunals was significantly different to those in the towns, with cases relating to farm workers dominating proceedings, which is

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<sup>95</sup> Local newspapers was very critical of butchers' failure to make labour-saving arrangements in wartime (*EHE*, 5/5/1916 and 18/6/1916, *WHSEM*, 12/1/1917); *ECS*, 22/7/1916 and 3/6/1916.

<sup>96</sup> *WHSEM*, 4/5/1917, referring to earlier scepticism; similar resistance has been noted elsewhere (Slocombe, 'Military Recruitment', p.120).

<sup>97</sup> One employer was shown a government booklet about women workers and responded that it 'looks very well on paper. They can pose for photographs.' The tribunal was not impressed with his attitude and rejected his appeal (*ECS*, 30/9/1916).

<sup>98</sup> Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 105.

<sup>99</sup> Slocombe, 'Military Recruitment'.

not surprising in districts where two-fifths of men were employed in agriculture. At Lexden and Winstree Tribunal at least 440 cases related to farmers, farm workers or market gardeners out of a total of 805 cases, the seventy agricultural cases at Orsett in 1916 were outnumbered by 206 business appeals (of a total of 343 appeals), but all but thirty of the latter were made by two large firms.<sup>100</sup>

Rural district councils followed the same course as their borough counterparts in selecting tribunal members predominantly from within their own ranks, many of them farmers. In fact, the military representatives were often also farmers: E.J. Keeble, a farmer from Great Oakley, served in as military representative at Tendring; retired naval captain P. K. Smythies' assistant at Lexden and Winstree was also a farmer. In response to the proposed addition of a Board of Agriculture representative at the latter, a Mr Trigg commented that 'the array of farmers on the tribunal was sufficient to represent agricultural interests. He added that there was one member of the tribunal in favour of the Army, and all the rest were in favour of keeping the men back.'<sup>101</sup> One wonders whether even this division was real in a tribunal with a farmer acting as military representative. At one point the Colchester tribunal's chair wrote complaining of military representatives pressing their case at the expense of food production;<sup>102</sup> if this was so, the low levels of rejection among farm cases show that it was ineffective: at below 14 percent in 1916 at both tribunals it was well below those recorded in boroughs. Was this favouritism towards farmers and their workers? In fact, it was reflective of a general trend of low levels of rejection in rural tribunals: across all cases less than 14 percent were

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<sup>100</sup> *ECS*, 4/3/1916 and 11/3/1916 (this domination is also noted at Calne, Slocombe 'Military Recruiting', p. 122).

<sup>101</sup> *ECS*, 13/5/1916.

<sup>102</sup> Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 105.

rejected at both Orsett and Lexden and Winstree in 1916, the latter rising thereafter but still seeing a wartime average of only 14.9 percent.<sup>103</sup>

Low levels of rejection, or rather the high levels of exemption that they allowed, provoked at least two attacks on Essex tribunals in the national press in 1916 and 1917.<sup>104</sup> The Local Government Board's assurances that it was not behind the 1916 attack perhaps suggests suspicion that the board considered the tribunal to be too lenient. However, when the system of agricultural exemptions was made countywide through the issuing of vouchers (first supplementing and later replacing tribunal exemptions), a similar proportion of applications was rejected: 11.5 percent up to the end of March 1918.<sup>105</sup> The protection of certain jobs in some ways tied the hands of rural tribunals, just as protected jobs and work of national importance constrained other tribunals. The large numbers of conditional exemptions granted at rural tribunals may be a reflection of this, with appeals made to place men (or confirm one's own position) on the list of those in protected employment.

Another major criticism of the conscription system in rural areas is that farmers' sons were being kept out of the military unfairly; the accusation was the subject of a polemic leaflet in 1917 regarding Norfolk farmers and was made frequently in Essex, such as by a group of farmers in the army who attacked the practice of farmers claiming that their sons were cowmen, ploughmen, or performing some other protected or indispensable role on the farm, roles with which they would have

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<sup>103</sup> Calne Tribunal appear to have rejected less than 10% of all appeals (Slocombe, 'Military Recruitment', p. 110).

<sup>104</sup> *ECS*, 25/11/1916; *The Times*, 13/4/1917.

<sup>105</sup> ERO, D/Z 45/16-20, War Agricultural Executive Committee, minutes.

been offended to have been associated in peacetime.<sup>106</sup> Unfortunately, the statistical evidence does not exist to compare the Essex situation with that outlined in the Norfolk leaflet, although similar claims made publicly at Southend provoked an angry discussion in the local press.<sup>107</sup> In terms of the work of tribunals, there certainly were a large number of fathers appealing for their sons, but this is also true of other business applications. It is hard to tell to what extent this reflected selfishness on the part of farmers and other employers or the genuine needs of businesses and farms at a time when many were run by families. Some clearly went too far and tribunals did occasionally make a point of the selfishness of certain farmers.<sup>108</sup> One yeomanry trooper appealing to be released to help on his father's farm was told angrily 'that the applicant's father got along well until the applicant was certified for foreign service.'<sup>109</sup> As the supply of rural manpower became increasingly short, farmers were able to apply to the War Agricultural Executive Committee for either specific or anonymous skilled farm workers to be released permanently or on a short furlough to assist on their farms. In the last six whole months of the war, 1,750 specified individuals were applied for, many among the small number named in the committee's minutes apparently being farmers' sons, or farmer-soldiers applying for their own release. Without figures on the numbers of farmers' sons serving, this evidence is not conclusive and could mean that farmers' sons *did* join in large numbers, or that farmers were selfish and applied for the return of their soldier sons rather than other workers; indeed both could be true and

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<sup>106</sup> Walter Rye, *The Great War. Statistics of Recruiting in East & North Norfolk among Tenant Farmers and their Sons* (Norwich, 1917); ECS, 27/1/1917.

<sup>107</sup> See SWG, 31/3/1916, 7/4/1916, and 14/4/1916.

<sup>108</sup> Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 105.

<sup>109</sup> ECS 18/3/1916.

neither the negative stereotype of farmers nor their self-projected image of selfless sacrifice was completely justified.<sup>110</sup>

Table 5.9 – Results of the Agricultural Census, December 1916 (arranged in by level of insufficient labour on holdings).<sup>111</sup>

Union/ Hundred	Total holdings classified	‘A’: Sufficient manpower		‘B’: excess manpower		‘C’: insufficient manpower	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Romford	325	173	53.23	37	11.38	115	35.38
Sudbury	151	67	44.37	42	27.81	42	27.81
Bishop’s Stortford	120	71	59.17	18	15.00	31	25.83
Braintree	416	237	56.97	81	19.47	98	23.56
Saffron Walden	361	238	65.93	47	13.02	76	21.05
Dunmow	473	324	68.50	56	11.84	93	19.66
Billericay	339	265	78.17	26	7.67	48	14.16
Ongar	279	183	65.59	62	22.22	34	12.19
Tendring	544	292	53.68	192	35.29	60	11.03
Chelmsford	538	397	73.79	86	15.99	55	10.22
Orsett	226	176	77.88	32	14.16	18	7.96
Epping	401	272	67.83	102	25.44	27	6.73
Lexden and Winstree	509	385	75.64	94	18.47	30	5.89
Rochford	385	275	71.43	99	25.71	11	2.86
<i>Total recorded</i>	<i>5,067</i>	<i>3,355</i>	<i>66.21</i>	<i>974</i>	<i>19.22</i>	<i>738</i>	<i>14.56</i>

Whether or not the appellant was related to the farmer, a prime concern of the tribunals was the maintenance of food production through the provision of sufficient manpower. At the end of 1916, a national agricultural census was carried out, local records of which report the numbers of men employed on each landholding (Table 5.9); as with 1915 recruiting measures, this national scheme repeated measures

<sup>110</sup> ERO D/Z 45/16-20, War Agricultural Executive Committee, minutes. Farmers could also apply for labour from soldiers set aside for the purpose among those based in the region.

<sup>111</sup> ERO, D/Z 45/1-14, Agricultural census forms for Essex Unions. Not all holdings were farms. Sudbury and Bishop’s Stortford record only the Essex parishes within these Unions, which crossed county borders but had their central towns outside Essex.

already undertaken locally.<sup>112</sup> Each holding was rated as having sufficient, insufficient or excess labour; an average of two-thirds in each district had sufficient labour. The results suggest that there was ‘sufficient’ labour across Essex, since more had excess labour than had insufficient.<sup>113</sup> As we shall see later, there was some correlation between the shortage of labour in 1916 and areas with low recruitment rates.

Farmers felt that they were hard done by and misunderstood by tribunals and recruiting authorities. Those in urban areas felt the exact opposite, that farmers were unfairly holding back their men (especially their sons) from military service. This resulted from the inconsistency of results between tribunals and the solipsistic feeling that many had of their own tribunal being strict while others were lax.<sup>114</sup> Tribunals in rural areas shared the difficult role of their urban counterparts in trying to weigh up the needs of the military and the needs of the community; to this was added the extra complexity of dealing with nationally-important food production, which required relatively large numbers of fit men, so giving the impression of laxity and slacking.

### *Medical*

In addition to considering the effect of men’s departure on their family, business, community, and the war effort, appeals on medical grounds were dealt with, bringing both fairness and fitness into tribunal decisions. Men were inspected by a

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<sup>112</sup> ECS, 10/6/1916.

<sup>113</sup> ERO, D/Z 45/1-14, Agricultural census forms.

<sup>114</sup> Clark regarded Braintree Rural Tribunal to be profligate with exemptions compared to the Chelmsford rural body to which he appealed for an employee (Clark diaries 22/3/1916).

medical officer and allocated a grade stating their fitness to serve at the front, on home defence and sedentary duties only, or their complete unfitness for service. Although the terminology changed during the war, the categories were roughly similar throughout.<sup>115</sup> Since men were examined by the military rather than the tribunals, appeals on medical grounds were not strictly within their purview,<sup>116</sup> however, appeals to tribunals were either made in order to be examined or re-examined in the hope of being placed in a low grade, or to argue that one's medical grade made one useless to the military compared with one's importance at home or in the community.

Prospective recruits were keen to stress their unfitness to both medical examiners and tribunals. One doctor working on the Derby Scheme commented that if men's claims about their physical well-being made for insurance applications were compared with those given to the military authorities, they would appear to be completely different people.<sup>117</sup> This trend of conscripts stressing their physical defects was noted in a post-war government report.<sup>118</sup> For most tribunals, medical cases were a very small minority, less than 3 percent of cases. An exception was East Ham, where a tenth of cases related solely to medical factors, and another 4.3 percent to joint appeals on medical and business or domestic grounds, or both. Usually, 20-40 percent were adjourned for medical examinations or other reasons;

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<sup>115</sup> J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, (Basingstoke, 2nd edn. 2003 [1985]), p. 52-53. The main change came in late 1917 with A to CIII being replaced with Grades 1 to 4.

<sup>116</sup> Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 96; ERO, C/DC 14/14, Tribunal material: Local government board circular R-76.

<sup>117</sup> Clark diaries, 17/12/1915.

<sup>118</sup> P.P. 1922, (Cmd 1734) 'Report of the Committee of Inquiry into "Shell-Shock"', p. 165 (by contrast, volunteers exaggerated their fitness).

around 30 percent were rejected in East Ham and Colchester and 12.5 percent at Lexden and Winstree, roughly the same as appeals on other grounds.<sup>119</sup>

As important as these appeals was the number of men who were unfit in general. We have seen that around a third of men were found to be unfit when they volunteered or attested in 1914-15.<sup>120</sup> In Ilford, 1,800 men were declared unfit by August 1916, compared to 1,896 cases brought before the tribunal and ‘hundreds’ of men in protected employment. The figure there is comparable with that in Saffron Walden: around one in twenty of the 1911 male population. Even with their limited role in deciding medical cases, tribunals still came in for criticism for rejecting appeals, many of which were calls for medical re-examination.<sup>121</sup> Medical conditions featured more often as a mitigating factor in appeals on other grounds than as the main complaint, the larger number of medical cases heard at East Ham being an exception. Where a man’s utility to the army (judged by his medical grading) was limited, he was more likely to be exempted on domestic or business grounds. ‘He was allowed conditional exemption because of the low medical classification’, reported one paper of such an appeal.<sup>122</sup> By early 1918, local tribunals had ‘grown increasingly strict in the standards they have applied; and in the case of fit men a very strong case has generally been required to justify exemption.’<sup>123</sup> Age played a similar role, with elder brothers or colleagues being more likely to be exempted when two were considered together.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Exceptionally, none were rejected at Barking.

<sup>120</sup> See pp. 166-68.

<sup>121</sup> *EHE*, 7/4/1916.

<sup>122</sup> *WHSEM*, 11/5/1917.

<sup>123</sup> P.P. 1918 (Cd 9157), ‘Forty-seventh Annual Report of the Local Government Board’, p. 51.

<sup>124</sup> For example, the Farthing brothers, *ECS* 5/8/1916.

County appeal tribunals had to decide a large number of medical cases in 1918, when the government ordered wholesale medical examinations of military-aged men.<sup>125</sup> Two and a half million men were eventually examined before the end of the war,<sup>126</sup> many of them after the German Spring Offensive at the end of March 1918, which gave the search for soldiers a new impetus. The monthly rate of examinations increased dramatically in this period and the proportions of top grades (Grades I and II) rose as fit men in protected jobs were examined, particularly in the midlands and northern regions, where greater proportions of fit men had previously been kept back in heavy and war industries. The less-than-average increase in recorded fitness in Eastern Command (including Essex) shows the shallowness of the remaining pool of fit men with exemptions in the region; large numbers of Essex men over 43 were found to be ‘prematurely aged and worn out’.<sup>127</sup> Appeals to the Essex Appeal Tribunal for re-examination increased dramatically alongside these inspections in late spring. Complaints were particularly aimed at the cursory or otherwise insufficient examinations of men at Southend, which accounted for 28 percent of all appeals but 41 percent of men whose grades were lowered after their appeal and re-examination, and over half of those whose grades fell by two or more. Rejection levels were comparable with appeals on medical grounds throughout the war (see Table 5.10). With a high chance of a re-examination, it was well worth a

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<sup>125</sup> It was reported in mid-June that only 1% of men had protested about their grade (Hansard H.C. (series 5), vol. 107, c145 (18/6/1918)).

<sup>126</sup> Winter, *Great War and the British People*, p. 55.

<sup>127</sup> Curiously, it was also noted that Essex medical officers had passed a particularly large proportion, over 21%, of these older men as Grade I and few men of all ages in Grade IV, relative to other counties in the region, perhaps suggesting that less fit men were being given top grades in Essex (P.P. 1919 (Cmd. 504), ‘Report upon the physical examination of men of military age by National Service Medical Boards from 1st November, 1917, to 31st October, 1918’, pp. 116-117).

man appealing; even if it did not result in a change in their grade (as was the case in almost half of re-examinations) the process would delay their call-up by one to three months.<sup>128</sup> For men whose top grade medical rating made them liable for front line service, the desire to change would have been even greater.

Table 5.10 – Appeals for medical re-examinations in Essex, November 1917-June 1918.<sup>129</sup>

Age of appellant	Number of cases	Success Rate	Result of re-examination	Number of cases	Percentage
17 to 20	17	52.9%	Graded higher	7	4.86
20 to 29	33	60.0%	Same grade	64	44.44
30 to 34	35	68.6%	One grade lower	42	29.17
35 to 39	45	51.1%	Two grades lower	24	16.67
Over 40	117	68.4%	Three grades lower	7	4.86
<i>Total</i>	<i>247</i>	<i>58.3%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>144</i>	<i>100</i>

### *Conscience*

Cases concerning conscientious objection to military service on religious or moral grounds were not at all common in Essex or elsewhere: nationally it is estimated that 2 percent of appeals were made on these grounds.<sup>130</sup> This was also the case in Essex (see tables 5.11a-c), where the proportion of conscience cases was generally less than 3 percent in 1916 and less than 2 percent through the war. East Ham's large proportion of cases in 1916 may be due to the less comprehensive nature of the reports consulted for this year. Perhaps a more reliable method of comparison is the number of conscientious objectors appealing per thousand males in the district (Table 5.11a). Since most cases were heard in 1916, figures available for that year alone are worth including, although might have increased slightly in 1917-18. There

<sup>128</sup> ERO, C/DC 14/5-9, appeals for medical re-examination, November 1917 - June 1918.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 101.

was a marked increase in local conscience cases closer to London both absolutely and in proportion to populations, with East Ham and Barking having a fifth more than Colchester. As a rural district near to London and with some industry, Orsett sat in the middle of the trend, but Clacton and Lexden and Winstree had very few.<sup>131</sup> Since there are no comparable data on conscientious objectors in East London, it is hard to say if this is a sign of Metropolitan and South-West Essex following trends there or simply a reflection of the strength of religious and political diversity and dissent in larger boroughs.<sup>132</sup> By way of comparison, although Gregory notes that conscience cases only made up less than one percent of tribunal appeals in Huddersfield, the number of appeals per 1,000 of the population was 2.22 in 1916; this is much higher than any of my Essex case studies and confirms Cyril Pearce's impression of the town as a hotbed of opposition to the war.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> In Ilford the 40 cases reported by mid-April alone represent 1.12 per 1000. The figure for Frinton-on-Sea is very high at 3.07, with two conscience cases of a 651-strong male population, but in a town where each man constituted over 1.5 per 1000 this is not a particularly useful statistic (Paul Rusiecki, 'NE Essex Seaside Resorts in World War One: Volunteering and Conscriptioin, *Essex Victoria County History, Works in Progress*, p. 2.

<[http://www.englishpastforeveryone.org.uk/resources/assets/R/Resorts\\_in\\_WW1\\_Volunteering\\_2\\_5972.pdf](http://www.englishpastforeveryone.org.uk/resources/assets/R/Resorts_in_WW1_Volunteering_2_5972.pdf)> accessed 1/9/2009).

<sup>132</sup> Julia Bush notes that West Ham had stronger trades unions and left-wing political organisation than elsewhere in 'East London', *Behind the lines. East London Labour 1914-1919*, (London, 1984) p. 15-16; whether this affected political activism in this neighbouring borough is not clear.

<sup>133</sup> Gregory, *Last Great War*, p. 101; Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, p. 314, it is not clear if Pearce's figures are individual appellants or cases, including repeat appearances.

Table 5.11a – Conscientious Objectors at Essex tribunals, 1916-18.<sup>134</sup>

Tribunal	Conscientious Objectors <sup>1</sup>		COs as % of appeals		1911 male population	CO appellants per 1000 males
	War	1916	War	1916		
East Ham	85	76	3.74	11.02	65,258	1.30
Barking Town	20	15	1.89	2.99	15,686	1.28
Colchester	16	11	0.83	1.18	18,308	1.09
Lexden & Winstree	6	5	0.75	0.84	9,914	0.61
Orsett (1916 only)	-	14	-	4.08	13,515	1.04
Chelmsford (1916-Jan 1917)	-	7	-	1.22	8,993	0.78
Clacton (1916 only)	-	3	-	1.40	9,777	0.31

Table 5.11b – Results of conscience-only appeals, 1916-18 (figures for 1916 only in brackets).<sup>135</sup>

	Rejected	Non-Combatant	Other conditions	Work of National Importance	Exempted
East Ham	43 (40)	21 (19)	1 (0)	2 (2)	0
Barking	3 (3)	7 (7)	1 (1)	3 (1)	0
Colchester	0	2 (2) & 1 temp (1)	2 (1)	3 (3) & 1 temp (1)	2 (1)
Lexden & Winstree	1 (0)	3 (3)	0	0	1 (1)

Table 5.11c – Results of appeals on multiple grounds including conscience, 1916-18 (figures for 1916 in brackets).<sup>136</sup>

	Rejected	Temporary Exemption	Conditional Exemption
East Ham	4 (3)	6 (6)	1 (0)
Barking	0	0	2 (0)
Colchester	0	1 (1)	3 (3)
Lexden & Winstree	0	0	1 (1)

<sup>134</sup> Sources same as Tables 5.3-5.8, plus Rusiecki, 'Volunteering and Conscription'. CO cases for which I have the hearings' results. There were 13 more in East Ham for whom the result was not stated, making 1.5 per 1000. Colchester's male population listed here excludes the military population (4,095 men in 1911). The town's overall male population was 22,403, making CO appellants 0.71 per 1000.

<sup>135</sup> Sources same as Tables 5.3-5.8.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

At East Ham, Orsett, and Ilford there is evidence of a majority of conscience cases being rejected in 1916. By April, 40 conscience cases were reportedly dealt with at Ilford, resulting in three men being granted exemption to carry out work of national importance, twelve exempted only from combatant service and one exempted on business grounds. The remaining twenty-three had their appeals rejected,<sup>137</sup> but given the early date of this statistic it is possible that some were dismissed because the appellant had attested and so was not legally entitled to appeal on conscience grounds. This may well also have been the case at Orsett, where ten of the thirteen conscience cases heard in March 1916 were rejected. In Barking, only three reported conscience cases were rejected, all in 1916: one on the basis that the man had attested and another because he agreed to join the Royal Army Medical Corps. It is not true, as Paul Rusiecki has claimed, that no Essex conscientious objectors were forced to join the army through rejection at the tribunals, but his survey of early results in north Essex does suggest a reluctance to reject cases completely there,<sup>138</sup> which is confirmed by the lack of rejections in Colchester, although Lexden and Winstree rejected one man in 1917. It is never completely clear why men's appeals were rejected, whether they were simply disbelieved or their reasons for seeking exemption were not thought to be robust, a factor that holds true for all tribunal cases. When considering the number of refusals it is worth bearing in mind that 29.6 percent of appeals for registration as a conscientious objector between 1939 and 1944 were also rejected.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> *IR*, 14/4/1916 and 21/4/1916.

<sup>138</sup> Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 103.

<sup>139</sup> Rachel Barker, *Conscience, Government and War* (London, 1982), Appendix 3. Almost 40% were rejected in London, compared to 12% in East Anglia.

In common with other appeals, the tribunal could grant temporary, conditional or absolute exemptions. The idea of a temporary reprieve in a case of a genuine conscientious objection to war seems absurd, as a few extra months would be unlikely to make an objector into a warrior. In fact, these were largely granted on other grounds put forward alongside their moral objection, only two being awarded otherwise in tribunals studied here. Where they might have been useful was for men to find work of national importance, and here we find the same muddle of decisions as in other appeals.<sup>140</sup>

When granting exemptions to conscientious objectors, tribunals were given the extra option of exempting men from combatant service only, included as ‘conditional exemption’ in the tables presented here. Unfortunately, the MSA was worded in a way that left it unclear whether this was in addition to or instead of the exemptions available to other appellants.<sup>141</sup> Despite attempts to clarify the situation,<sup>142</sup> the meaning of Act was not clear to tribunal members, particularly over the option of absolute exemption. Leyton Tribunal apparently granted an absolute exemption and then denied that they could do so within two weeks in March 1916.<sup>143</sup> In Colchester, a local newspaper commented that it was unclear whether absolute exemptions could be granted, but that the local tribunal appeared to have come down in favour of them. At East Ham, where a great many more cases appeared, there was an argument between the solicitor for a conscientious objector and the local military representative (also a lawyer) on the matter, in which the latter stated explicitly that only combatant service (i.e. rejection of the appeal) or

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<sup>140</sup> *WHSEM*, 19/7/1918 and 26/7/1918.

<sup>141</sup> Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, pp. 45-48.

<sup>142</sup> McDermott, ‘Military Service Tribunals’, pp. 43-44.

<sup>143</sup> *The Tribunal*, 15/3/1916.

non-combatant service could be granted.<sup>144</sup> By the summer of 1916, Barking and Colchester tribunals were both offering work of national importance as an alternative condition for exemption, but still very few men were given complete exemptions. Even in May 1917, the military representative at Colchester denied that absolute exemption was available as an option for conscientious objectors.<sup>145</sup>

That the majority of conscience cases arose in the first months of conscription is not surprising since most genuine objectors would not have been employed in protected jobs that supported the war effort. Indeed, working in some way towards the war effort was often a factor picked up on in cross-examination of objectors, one man being denied an exemption in East Ham because he worked supplying food for the army.<sup>146</sup> Thus conscience cases were largely heard while the rules were not clearly understood. New non-combatant certificates of exemption were rare after 1916. For a man with a real conscientious objection to military service, or the war effort in general, exemption from combatant service or to do work of national importance was not a satisfactory resolution of his appeal. Again, it is worth considering the provisions for conscientious objectors in the Second World War, which have not attracted such condemnation: only 4.7 percent of all appellants received absolute exemption, compared to 37.3 allotted civilian work in the war effort and 28.5 liable to be called up for non-combatant military service.<sup>147</sup> Many men appealed to local tribunals against their rejection or the conditions of their exemption in 1916-18, usually with minimal success; more often, appeals were taken to the county appeal

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<sup>144</sup> *ECS*, 18/3/1916; *EHE*, 24/3/1916.

<sup>145</sup> *ECS*, 12/5/1917.

<sup>146</sup> *EHE*, 14/7/1916.

<sup>147</sup> Barker, *Conscience*, Appendix 3. The remainder, as noted above, were rejected completely. In London only 1.4% of cases were granted absolute exemption, compared to 10% in East Anglia.

tribunal and even the Central Tribunal in London.<sup>148</sup> More extreme opposition to rejection or limited exemptions included not reporting for duty, refusing military orders or going on the run, for which reports of apprehended men appeared frequently in 1916.<sup>149</sup>

The aggressive reputation of the tribunals reflects more their verbal cross-examinations and attacks on conscientious objectors than their actual decisions in these cases; James McDermott refers to ‘a real, and often marked, dislocation between expression and judgement’.<sup>150</sup> Tribunal members often held the opinion that objectors were simply shirking their duty and their share of the local and national sacrifice. One military representative called a conscientious objector a ‘worm’ after some comments by the latter felt to be offensive to the bereaved, while East Ham Tribunal members joked about sausages made from objectors, concluding that no one would want to eat them.<sup>151</sup> Such talk overshadows the fact that the latter tribunal exempted more cases than it rejected in 1917-18, as did most Essex tribunals throughout the whole war; in 1916, many tribunals granted exemptions to the extent that they *believed* to be permissible (i.e. exemption from combatant service). As across the country, though, tribunal members and newspapers leapt upon the slightest inconsistency in actions or reasoning, such as working providing food for the army or mis-quoting scripture.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> *IR*, 31/3/1916

<sup>149</sup> See *EHE*, May and July 1916,

<sup>150</sup> McDermott, ‘Military Service Tribunals’, p. 41.

<sup>151</sup> *SWG*, 28/7/1916; *WHSEM* 1/6/1917

<sup>152</sup> *ECS*, 25/3/1916.

Technically, religious and political objections were equally acceptable in claiming exemptions, but in reality different tribunals treated them differently. The military representative at Colchester dismissively described one appeal as ‘founded more on politics than conscience’,<sup>153</sup> while an East Ham solicitor felt the need to state explicitly that political and religious objections were equal under the law.<sup>154</sup> On the other hand, some felt that socialists there were treated leniently compared to religious appellants, who were subjected to a thorough cross-examination of their knowledge and use of scripture. East Ham Tribunal’s chairman expressed his doubts over the possibility of young men having such deep religious convictions and knowledge, but was more inclined to accept the case of a man who had actively engaged in anti-war propaganda.<sup>155</sup> Elsewhere in Essex, and indeed the country more generally, this apparent sympathy for ‘unpatriotic’ political cases would have met stiff resistance.<sup>156</sup> Many newspapers and even priests challenged religious claims across the county, as well as in the hearings themselves, and generally *all* conscientious objectors were tarred with the same brush of selfish and unpatriotic slacking and living easily on the backs of others’ sacrifices.<sup>157</sup> The *Ilford Recorder* railed against these ‘moral Calibans’ who were willing to stand by as their mothers were ‘being ruthlessly murdered by brutal German soldiery’, referring to the common line of tribunal questioning as men were asked whether they would protect their families in the event of an invasion.<sup>158</sup> Other newspapers were seldom more forgiving.

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<sup>153</sup> *ECS*, 12/5/1917.

<sup>154</sup> *EHE*, 24/3/1916.

<sup>155</sup> *EHE*, 17/3/1916 and 31/3/1916. This doubt about young men’s deep-held was reflected in a Local Government Board circular in 1918.

<sup>156</sup> *ECS* 25/3/1916; McDermott, ‘Military Service Tribunals’, pp. 56-57.

<sup>157</sup> *ECS*, 25/3/1916; *WHSEM*, 2/2/1917, and Rusiecki, *Impact of catastrophe*, p. 98.

<sup>158</sup> *IR*, 7/4/1916.

A common accusation against appellants was that their views had been formed since the outbreak of the war and were thus based on selfish unwillingness to fighting *this* war, rather than a moral objection to war itself. It was specified by the MSA that objections had to predate the war, but this was hard to prove except through long-term membership of religious or political groups with an established moral objection to war. One newspaper summed up the criticism: ‘9 out of 10 of [them...] never had a conscientious objection to warfare at all until they observed, or thought they observed, a loophole by which they might possibly escape doing their duty like men.’<sup>159</sup> Correspondingly, applications on conscience grounds were not accepted if other grounds of appeal had been tried first, as in the case of Barking undertaker and member of the Plymouth Brethren, William Cooper. When his job was no longer considered of national importance, Cooper appealed on conscience grounds in April 1917 but was informed that objection formed since the outbreak of war was not adequate grounds for appeal, his father’s business appeal having been put forward in 1916 rather than his own conscience appeal; the county appeal tribunal also denied him a new hearing.<sup>160</sup> One of the most extreme cases of a changed mind was an ‘Army officer who turned “Conchy”’: H.S. Buss of Stanford-le-Hope, who ‘lost his way’, volunteered early in the war and served at the front but managed to gain a discharge over his conscientious objection; when he was called up, the local and appeal tribunals were, perhaps unsurprisingly, sceptical of his claims to have been an objector before the war and rejected his appeals.<sup>161</sup> By

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<sup>159</sup> Quoted in Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 98. Many similar opinions appeared in 1916, see *EWN*, 10/3/1916

<sup>160</sup> Liddle Collection, CO 021, William Cooper diary.

<sup>161</sup> *BA*, 27/4/1916 and 11/5/1916; TNA, WO 339/49646, Officers Service Files: Hugh Stanley Buss.

contrast, a man who had volunteered to fight in the Boer War but who had developed a conscientious objection to war by 1904 was exempted by Lexden and Winstree Tribunal.<sup>162</sup> Nationally, John Rae notes an increase in conscience claims when munitions workers were ‘combed-out’ in 1918, which must have confirmed many people’s impressions of them as ‘slackers’,<sup>163</sup> although it was not in evidence in Essex.

The claim that ‘their objection to military service [was] not merely a matter of conscience, but also a matter of personal convenience’<sup>164</sup> was at the heart of people’s distrust of ‘conchies’. People feared that they were living the good life in the UK on the back of the blood sacrifices of their fellow citizens.<sup>165</sup> Statements about not ‘doing their duty like real men’ echoed earlier rhetoric referring to shirkers in terms of masculinity. Criticism often referred to objectors ‘having too much of a run for his money’, living life as though there was no war on, or something similar.<sup>166</sup> This theme of lack of sacrifice was prominent in discussions of conscience cases and was a clear hangover from the ‘shirker’ discourse of the voluntary period; it was also present in some other types of appeal. Lexden and Winstree Tribunal discussed the fact that a local teacher, if exempted, would continue to receive his regular wage while others suffered loss of earnings as well as risking their lives.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> ECS, 14/7/1916.

<sup>163</sup> Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>164</sup> ECS, 4/3/1916.

<sup>165</sup> On perceptions of objectors, see Lois Bibbings, *Telling Tales About Men: Conceptions of Conscientious Objectors to Military Service during the First World War* (Manchester, 2009).

<sup>166</sup> Quoted in Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 99; ECS, 12/5/1916.

<sup>167</sup> The man was eventually sent into the Friends’ Ambulance Unit (ECS, 27/5/1916 and 8/7/1916).

The position of the objector was seen as a prime example of the lack of sacrifices among some civilians; some local authorities feared an adverse reaction to their presence. Members of the Essex War Agriculture Committee expected farm workers to refuse to work alongside objectors but one man reported, apparently from experience, that many objectors were men of good character and worked well.<sup>168</sup> Lexden and Winstree rural council refused to use objectors as labourers, but were willing to use German prisoners.<sup>169</sup> In Colchester, a tribunal member successfully pressed for an investigation into the placement of military police outside a café owned by a conscientious objector, presumably to deny him soldiers' custom.<sup>170</sup> Although indicative of an unsympathetic attitude among some military figures, the need for a guard implies that soldiers were spending their pay in a café owned by a known 'conchy'. Mirroring methods used to demonstrate voluntary sacrifice, a newspaper columnist suggested that traders claiming conscientious objection should advertise their objection with a sign in their shop windows.<sup>171</sup>

It is not possible for us to judge today how heartfelt and honest were the objections put before the tribunals over ninety years ago; tempting though it is, it is dangerous to assume that objections on conscience or other grounds were always genuine, some simply were not. What we can judge is the attitude and competence of the tribunals to judge these cases. The combination of (sometimes wilfully) misunderstood legislation and often-aggressive public distaste for conscience

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<sup>168</sup> ERO, D/Z 45/15, Essex War Agricultural Executive Committee, minutes, 4/8/1916.

<sup>169</sup> ECS, 29/4/1916 and 4/11/1916.

<sup>170</sup> ECS, 3/2/1917.

<sup>171</sup> ECS, 2/6/1917.

appeals meant that objectors were unlikely to have a genuinely fair hearing. The number of exemptions from combatant duty suggest that tribunals either believed many appellants or wished to get rid of cases of conscientious objection; in these cases the element of sacrifice involved in non-combatant duty (or later work of national importance) fitted well with more general expectations that everyone should share the burden of the war. Objectors were generally felt to be shirking the sacrifices made by others, thus going fully against the prevailing discourses of willing or equal sacrifice; as a result, their treatment by tribunals was distinctly unsympathetic, but the granting of non-combatant exemptions seems to have been the preferred solution to the problems they posed to those bodies.

### **Trends and tensions within tribunals' work**

#### *Military or civilian control*

The most prominent tension within the work of the tribunals was over its role as a body serving the interests of the local community but also the needs of the armed forces: whether they were civilian bodies or military 'war courts'.<sup>172</sup> As we have seen, there was disagreement on this at the outset of their work and a confusion of roles given the appointment of a military representative and the former recruiting activities of many members. There was a debate about whether the military representative should partake in the actual decision-making or leave the room at the same time as the appellant, both having stated their cases. By law, he was not entitled to be present while deliberations were made, but local tribunals debated and passed resolutions on the matter into 1918, many allowing his presence.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Rachel Barker's description of the 1916-18 tribunals as 'administered by the War Office' (*Conscience*, p. 114) is, perhaps, indicative of their reputation.

<sup>173</sup> *BDA*, 26/2/1916; *EHE*, 10/11/1916; *ECS*, 20/1/1917 and 20/5/1916.

Before looking at what they did, it is worth considering who these military or national service representatives actually were. Most modern accounts completely ignore their identity or mention names in passing with no further comment.<sup>174</sup> This and their prominent role in questioning conscientious objectors have created an image (to the extent that there is one) of a bluff old army officer or bulldog-like ‘emissary of the War Office, a standing counsel against every application.’<sup>175</sup> This was reinforced by the actions and attitudes of some military representatives themselves, like Walthamstow’s Captain Eve, who stated that ‘We are here to find men for the Army’; this opinion was vigorously opposed by the tribunal’s chairman who felt their role was ‘to see that the rights of the civil population are respected and that no injustice is done.’ Eve was also the vice-chairman of the local council and clearly was not seen as a distant, aggressive figure, since appellants called at his house to discuss their cases instead of writing to the tribunal as they had been instructed.<sup>176</sup>

Military representatives generally came from one or more of four backgrounds: retired military men (or officers of the Volunteers), local men involved in

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<sup>174</sup> Even James McDermott’s study of Northamptonshire tribunals refers to military representatives without considering who they were, simply describing them as retired soldiers or Territorial officers (‘Military Service Tribunals’, pp. 20-21); the same is true of Rusiecki, *Impact of Castastrophe*, and Peacock, *York in the Great War*.

<sup>175</sup> Quotation from John W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience: a History 1916-22* (New York, 1969 [1922]), p. 66. See also Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade: the Church of England and the First World War*, (Duke, N.C., 1974), p158.

<sup>176</sup> *WG*, 23/3/1917 and 30/3/1917. The military representative’s aggressive image is shown in the contemporary song ‘The military representative’ by R.P. Weston and Bert Lee, c. 1918. Andrew Clark regarded the military representative as simply opposing appeals after his groundsman was denied exemption, (Clark diaries, 9/3/1916).

recruiting,<sup>177</sup> lawyers, or local magistrates. East Ham's military representatives in 1916 and 1917 were retired solicitors from London;<sup>178</sup> the Essex County Appeal Tribunal's Captain Howard was also a lawyer. Indeed, a lord referred in parliament to military representatives as 'charming men [...] nine out of ten of them being solicitors in khaki'.<sup>179</sup> As we have seen, the Tendring military representative was a local farmer and magistrate, as was the assistant representative at Lexden and Winstree. Based on newspaper reports from 1916 and relating to the tribunals studied here, it appears that more than half of military representatives had no military rank and many who did were simply former Volunteer or Territorial officers with successful civilian careers, often in law or business. Military representatives whose prewar positions could be identified ranged from farmers to schoolmasters, from business owners to the Tolleshunt district medical officer; many were also magistrates. Other than West Ham and Leyton, most tribunals had representatives from the local area, or at least the county; this is not to suggest that as locals these men were less scrupulous and harsh, merely that they *were* largely either local or had a legal background. Indeed their cross-examinations of appellants, especially conscientious objectors, may have owed some of their bite to the legal experience of representatives. These men were drawn from roughly the same class and often local background as most tribunal members and essentially (Captain Eve's comments aside) sought the same goal: to provide the army with men within the terms of the MSA and without provoking undue hardship for families, communities or the war effort.

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<sup>177</sup> See the description of Mr T.P. Trounce in W.J. Trounce, *The Trounce Ancestry* (1923) [online book].

<[http://webhome.idirect.com/~djttrounce/index\\_files/ancestry.html](http://webhome.idirect.com/~djttrounce/index_files/ancestry.html)> accessed 20/4/2009.

<sup>178</sup> *WHSEM*, 30/11/1917

<sup>179</sup> Hansard, H.L. (series 5), vol. 21, col. 680 (12/4/1916).

These representatives were given the chance to assent to or dissent from an appeal before the tribunal made its decision, which has perhaps led to an impression then and since that ‘applications for exemption or postponements were unlikely to succeed without the backing of the military authorities.’<sup>180</sup> In fact, the ability to assent to appeals could be used as a labour-saving device in reducing the burden of the tribunal rather than military domination of the process.<sup>181</sup> The military representative’s role was limited also by the fact that his assent or dissent was advisory, not categorical: Captain D.S. Smith assented to 150 of the 300 Chelmsford cases in which he stated an opinion between March and August 1916 and the tribunal granted exemptions in 90 of the 150 appeals from which he dissented.<sup>182</sup> The first few months at Ilford followed a similar pattern.

More significant and controversial was the power of the military representative or NSR to appeal against the tribunal’s decision, either immediately at the county appeal tribunal or by bringing a case back to the local tribunal at a later date. These appeals were not very successful in removing men’s exemptions: less than a third in Colchester resulted in the withdrawal of exemptions and only 18.6 percent in Lexden and Winstree, slightly higher than the proportion of appeals rejected at each in general, although more exemptions were withdrawn at East Ham. Complete withdrawal was not always the aim of the appeals, which also sought to alter men’s certificates from conditional to temporary exemption or to add extra conditions such

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<sup>180</sup> Peter Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army: the Raising of the New Armies 1914-1916* (Manchester, 1988), p. 152.

<sup>181</sup> James McDermott appears to have missed this role in his description of how tribunal applications proceeded (‘Military Service Tribunals, pp. 27-28).

<sup>182</sup> ERO Chelmsford MST.

as service in the VTC. An effort was made to review locally-granted exemptions following the German Spring Offensive of 1918, when, as the Romford NSR put it, ‘the enemy was practically on our doorstep’. In fact, his thirty-nine appeals over the next fortnight resulted in only six men losing their exemptions entirely and sixteen having their existing exemptions renewed without alteration.<sup>183</sup> Colchester NSR appeals rose from four in March to thirty-eight in April and thirty in May, but resulted in the complete withdrawal of only eight certificates of exemption, forty-four men having conditional exemptions renewed. These appeals in a time of crisis were in fact less successful than the 294 similar cases in 1917.

The military and national service representatives’ appeals were often the result not of their personal or professional opinion of cases, but rather of centrally-issued instructions. Nonetheless, this action and the 1917 campaign of rehearing cases in particular, accompanied by press criticism of ‘lax tribunals’, caused great consternation among the civilian members of the tribunals.<sup>184</sup> In some places, the civilian members rebelled against interference from the military representatives and central authority. In Colchester, the case of the grocer T. Macklin was the breaking point for some: three policemen were apparently needed to control the crowd outside his shop in April 1917, so great was the demand for his produce, but the military representative successfully appealed against his exemption at the county tribunal after the local body had granted him conditional exemption on three occasions. Three members of the local tribunal walked out of their next session, saying that they might as well not have bothered to hear the man’s case if this was going to happen despite their efforts, one of them declaring that ‘We might as well

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<sup>183</sup> *BA*, 20/4/1918, 27/4/1918 and 4/5/1918.

<sup>184</sup> *Times*, 13/4/1917; Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 103.

be in Russia or Germany today'; the following week, the ability of the county tribunal to properly judge these local cases was called into question.<sup>185</sup> In Southend, the civilian members threatened to resign over a similar matter, and Ongar Tribunal refused to sit entirely in February 1917 in protest at the military representative's rudeness to local farmers.<sup>186</sup> Back in Colchester, a tribunal member resigned the refusal to renew an employee's exemption for which he had appeared eight times.<sup>187</sup>

Tribunal members saw themselves as defending local interests and trying to ensure fair treatment, often in the face of military demands, and were willing to stand up for the men of the area. When the labour member at Witham was accused of pushing for the greatest exemption available in each case, he did not to refute the accusation.<sup>188</sup> Even the military representative at Walton-on-the-Naze resigned over the conscription of married men while single men remained at home.<sup>189</sup> The presence of a military representative did not turn the tribunals into faceless recruiting sergeants; they were, as John Rae states, 'civilian, middle-class and public-minded'.<sup>190</sup> When the military appeared to be overstepping the mark, civilian members rebelled, and even when they were acting in concert, military advice was not always heeded. Defending the tribunal as a civilian body in early 1917, the mayor of East Ham (and chairman of its tribunal) summed up the role of all the local tribunals:

[T]o weigh the merits and demerits of all applications that come before them, with a view to ascertaining whether the persons concerned could render more

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<sup>185</sup> *ECS*, 21/4/1917 and 28/4/1917; Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 106.

<sup>186</sup> Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 106.

<sup>187</sup> *ECS*, 15/10/1917.

<sup>188</sup> *WHSEM*, 7/4/1917; Rusiecki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 106.

<sup>189</sup> Rusiecki, 'Volunteering and Conscription', p. 2.

<sup>190</sup> Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, p. 55.

valuable service to the community by remaining in civilian life than by joining the Army.<sup>191</sup>

They and their contemporaries in other towns and rural areas had the difficult job of weighing up military and civilian needs and faced criticism from both sides but ultimately performed the role as representatives of the local community, not of the War Office.

### *Chance and timing*

As well as the facts of their cases, chance, timing and even whim also played a role in deciding the fates of men making appeals, adding an unfortunate element of inequality to proceedings. Tribunals were often uncertain of the best course of action for certain types of appeal and frequently adjourned cases to wait instructions on how to proceed, especially concerning married men and men who ran businesses single-handed; in all, 244 circulars were sent out to tribunals with new instructions and clarifications.<sup>192</sup> The results in cases heard before advice was sought were not necessarily in line with the government's intentions as expressed in these circulars and early conscience cases were particularly adversely affected by lack of clarity and consistency. In this situation, the timing of a man's appeal or the expiry of an exemption might have a serious impact. The repeated modification of the lists of protected or nationally-important jobs<sup>193</sup> and the military representative's right to appeal also added an element of chance as to when or whether men would have to

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<sup>191</sup> *WHSEM*, 2/2/1917.

<sup>192</sup> *ECS*, 10/6/1916 and 9/9/1916. Denis Winter states that these circulars were intended to 'close every loophole' (*Death's Men*, p. 30), but this seems a rather unfair view of what were, rather, attempts to alleviate the variations and uncertainties between tribunals.

<sup>193</sup> And the ages at which men were exempted in certain jobs, which were also subject to variation.

serve. The character and identity of tribunal members probably affected results and criticisms of rudeness or over-sympathy with applications suggest a great variety of styles and attitudes among tribunal members. The attitudes of local tribunals would thus have varied along with the specific members attending.

Criticisms of medical examinations also revolved around the element of chance. In their appeals for re-examination in 1918, many men complained about cursory examinations and produced medical certificates from civilian doctors; many were regraded into lower categories of fitness.<sup>194</sup> In late 1916, a satirical article in the *East Ham Collegian* magazine suggested that the quality and quantity of the medical officer's lunch was more important than the condition of the man being examined; directly after lunch was said to be the best time to be graded as unfit.<sup>195</sup> Exaggerated though it was, this comment highlights another of the uncertainties of men who were being called up, another element of chance in deciding whether he would have to serve or not. Such uncertainties undermined the sense of fairness that was key to public faith in the tribunals, and to consent for the war.

#### *Town and countryside*

It is a plain fact of demographics that a greater proportion of men were absent as servicemen in 1918 from the towns and Metropolitan districts than in the rural districts. Between parliamentary divisions, the difference between those in East and West Ham and in Maldon or Saffron Walden Divisions is striking (See Table 5.12).<sup>196</sup> Within divisions, the same pattern is repeated so that towns with over

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<sup>194</sup> See Table 5.10.

<sup>195</sup> *EHE*, 29/12/1916

<sup>196</sup> P.P. 1918 (138) 'Return showing, with regard to each Parliamentary

2,000 voters tended to have sent more men into the forces; in most towns the proportion of voters listed as military absentees was around four percentage points higher than in surrounding rural areas.<sup>197</sup> For example, within Saffron Walden division, 22.4 percent of those in the largest towns (Saffron Walden, Stansted Mountfitchet and Halstead) were absent, compared to 18.2 percent in the rest of the area.<sup>198</sup> The absent voter figures for small and medium-sized Essex towns were similar to that in the metropolitan boroughs.<sup>199</sup> The rural areas, then, sent markedly fewer men to the war. What was the cause of this disparity between town and countryside? Was it down to the tribunals or other factors?

One consideration that is not often taken into account when looking at rural recruiting is the demographic picture of labour. Simply put, there was a smaller supply of surplus labour in the countryside, meaning that fewer men could reasonably be spared.<sup>200</sup> Larger settlements had much greater diversity of employment, including a larger service and clerical sector, and were less reliant (in Essex at least) on one specific type of employment. P.E. Dewey has pointed out that ‘the more unbalanced a region’s industrial structure, the more did enlistment

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Constituency in the United Kingdom, the Total Number, and, as far as possible, Number in each Class of Electors on the Register for the year 1918.’ (hereafter ‘Return of Electors, 1918’).

<sup>197</sup> Braintree and Chelmsford actually had lower absence rates than the surrounding districts, possibly due to the presence of major munitions works.

<sup>198</sup> ERO, C/E, Electoral registers for Saffron Walden, Chelmsford, Maldon and Harwich divisions.

<sup>199</sup> For example, absentees in each ward in Leyton varied between 19 and 28% percent but averaged 22.8%; Electoral registers for Leyton East and West consulted at WFA; ‘Return of Electors, 1918’.

<sup>200</sup> By contrast, French rural areas sent more men to war than did urban districts, perhaps owing to less efficient farming practices in France (Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, trans. Arnold Pomerans, (Oxford, 1985), p. 333).

rates follow the dominant industries.’<sup>201</sup> Since agriculture was both the dominant industry in rural Essex and one of the sectors with the lowest recruitment rates,<sup>202</sup> it is not surprising to find low proportions of men absent as servicemen in these areas. In fact, on a national scale, even Saffron Walden Division’s proportion of absent voters (the lowest in Essex) is respectable: 31.9 percent of male voters absent was higher than most English county divisions and nearly a third of ‘parliamentary boroughs’ outside London.<sup>203</sup>

Worries about shortages of labour, along with protection granted to agricultural labourers by the government, meant that rural recruiting remained within levels that were felt to be conducive to maintaining food production. The areas that made up the new Saffron Walden division in 1918 (Saffron Walden, Bishop’s Stortford, Sudbury and Dunmow) had four of the six highest rates of insufficient labour on farms in 1916 (Table 5.9), suggesting that labour shortage was a real problem in the area, one that would have reduced conscript recruitment. One of the remaining two was Braintree district, which also had low levels of absent voters in 1918 in both urban and rural areas. These areas of the county also had lower proportions of people living in towns than the rest of the county.

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<sup>201</sup> P.E. Dewey, ‘Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force during the First World War’, *Historical Journal*, 27/1 (1984), pp. 199-223, p. 217; a report on Welsh recruiting and fitness confirms the importance of industry and agriculture in holding men back (Cmd. 504, p. 146).

<sup>202</sup> *Census* 1911; Dewey, ‘Military Recruiting’, p. 216.

<sup>203</sup> For example, no Welsh parliamentary counties had a higher proportion absent than Saffron Walden.

Table 5.12 –Absent voters in Essex, 1918.<sup>204</sup>

	Male Voters	Total Voters	Male Absent	Male absent as % of male voters	Total Absent	Total absent as % of total voters
<i>Parliamentary boroughs</i>						
East Ham, North	20,223	34,219	8,189	40.49	8,192	23.94
East Ham, South	19,776	32,472	7,385	37.34	7,388	22.75
Ilford	23,818	40,749	8,110	34.05	8,124	19.94
Leyton, East	15,673	26,735	5,942	37.91	5,943	22.23
Leyton, West	19,282	32,567	7,597	39.40	7,598	23.33
Southend-on-Sea	20,231	36,357	7,691	38.02	7,692	21.16
Walthamstow, East	16,908	28,363	6,306	37.30	6,309	22.24
Walthamstow, West	18,178	30,225	6,546	36.01	6,546	21.66
West Ham, Plaistow	20,582	33,890	7,792	37.86	7,792	22.99
West Ham, Silvertown	19,562	31,943	7,545	38.57	7,545	23.62
West Ham, Stratford	18,983	31,458	7,326	38.59	7,328	23.30
West Ham, Upton	18,149	30,752	7,023	38.70	7,031	22.86
<i>Parliamentary county seats</i>						
Chelmsford	19,447	33,429	6,422	33.02	6,431	19.24
Colchester	18,015	30,372	6,923	38.43	6,934	22.83
Epping	22,132	38,519	7,464	33.73	7,473	19.40
Harwich	15,988	27,421	6,315	39.50	6,320	23.05
Maldon	16,581	28,127	5,382	32.46	5,391	19.17
Romford	22,162	37,055	7,901	35.65	7,910	21.35
Saffron Walden	18,816	31,682	6,009	31.94	6,012	18.98
South-Eastern	21,879	36,213	7,522	34.38	7,529	20.79
Total	386,285	652,548	141,390	36.60	141,488	21.69

We have seen that the Orsett and Lexden and Winstree Tribunals were more likely to give exemptions than their urban and borough counterparts. The figures are similar in both farm-based and other business appeals, which suggests that it was not simply protection of farms but of local businesses more generally behind these

<sup>204</sup> 'Return of Electors, 1918'.

decisions. The size of a settlement would have made a significant difference to the availability of its men for the armed forces: where in East Ham or Colchester, tribunals could pressure businessmen to co-operate so that some of their number might join up, in small towns like Steeple Bumpstead, with only one butcher, this would not have been possible. Thus even where men were not employed in agriculture, they were not as easily removed from the rural workforce as in larger towns.

Rural districts and tribunals were able to make use of substitute labour to replace men who went to war; women, prisoners of war, conscientious objectors and men of low medical grades could be used on the land or other local projects. In 1917, over 1,200 soldiers were released to work on farms during the Essex harvest and it was stated that 6,700 women were working on the land (although few belonged to any of the official schemes to provide female labour); by the end of the year 760 prisoners were also working on the land. The next year more soldiers were available either on furlough or provided by Agricultural Companies based at Warley and another 1,000 were promised for the harvest. In addition there were now 1,320 prisoners of war; there were continual requests for more men and fourteen 'migratory gangs' of Germans were provided for the harvest.<sup>205</sup> It is hard to judge how much the enlistment of military-aged men affected rural manpower. In 1911, roughly 58 percent of male agricultural workers were of military age (18-44 years old), making perhaps 26,200 in Essex. The War Agricultural Executive Committee had issued exemption cards to 14,000 men or 53.3 percent of this prewar estimate by November 1918. Dewey quotes a figure of 35 percent of the national prewar

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<sup>205</sup> ERO, D/Z 45/16-20, War Agricultural Executive Committee, minutes and D/Z 45/15 general committee minutes.

agricultural labour force having enlisted, which leaves with around 10 percent unaccounted for in Essex; these men may well have held other exemptions or not been called up for other reasons (such as unfitness) or simply left the land for other work.<sup>206</sup> The statistics on replacement labour suggest that the missing 13,000 agricultural labourers were replaced by perhaps 5,000 soldiers and German prisoners, in addition to which a number of women, old men and boys worked on the land, but the vagaries of rural labour and census records do not give us prewar or wartime statistics on their numbers. There was thus a shortfall in rural workforce, as well as a reduction in skill levels as most replacement labour was unskilled; on the other side, tractors (of which 152 were provided by the government and operating in the county<sup>207</sup>) would have reduced the amount of labour needed. Farmers may have benefited from the decrease in numbers of workers to be paid and the availability of substitute labourers, but shortage of skilled and experienced labour was a serious problem.

#### *Personal, family and communal sacrifice*

The level of sacrifice deemed just for families and communities was a major element in tribunals' work in cases of business and domestic hardship and where domestic factors were mentioned in support of other applications. This was particularly the case in protecting local food supplies and ensuring that families would not suffer unduly from the departure of a breadwinner. Efforts were made to minimise the impact on families and communities. The Macklin case, which caused such problems in Colchester, would probably not have arisen if he had been married; the local tribunal felt that his role in the community was sufficient to grant

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<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*; *Census*, 1911; Dewey, 'Military Recruiting', p. 205.

<sup>207</sup> ERO, D/Z 45/20, War Agricultural Executive Committee, minutes 8/11/1918

this unmarried man an exemption, but the county appeal tribunal did not, showing how variable the level considered to be acceptable could be. Where the domestic role of a husband or father as provider was combined with nationally or locally important work, a man could be reasonably confident of remaining exempt from military service.<sup>208</sup> In borderline cases or where men hoped to continue their civilian position (at home or at work), some other form of sacrifice was either expected or enforced. The latter was done through exemptions being made conditional on VTC service or assisting either the war effort or another business. Discussions about the position of a conscientious objector working as a teacher included concerns that he was able to continue working for a full wage while other men served in the army for less money, an unfair inequality of sacrifice. Similarly, a man working in aircraft production was criticised for his high wage compared to servicemen and was directed into the Royal Flying Corps.<sup>209</sup> Tribunals had considerable power to decide whether a man should serve; the reasons for their decisions varied, but potential and existing communal and familial sacrifices certainly played their part.

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The work of the tribunals consisted of two fundamental judgements: the first over the veracity of the appeal; this could be done by cross-examining the appellant or investigating his circumstances and was relatively straight-forward except in the case of men's consciences. The second was over whether the man's departure would cause undue hardship in the family and local community, or hinder the war effort; this was the area in which more decision-making was required of tribunals.

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<sup>208</sup> W.W. Lawrence, a married munitions worker, was apparently never called before a tribunal (W.W. Lawrence, *WW Lawrence, 1888-1968*, (unpublished memoir in ERO), pp. 44-46).

<sup>209</sup> *WHSEM*, 8/2/1918.

They had the difficult task of weighing up the importance of a man to his family and locality as against his utility to the armed forces, and the level of sacrifice for the family and community that was deemed acceptable. In a system created without precedent and after two years of voluntary recruiting, increasing pressure on military-aged men, and mounting casualties, it is perhaps not surprising that there was some unfairness and unevenness in the treatment of cases and some degree of arbitrary and unpredictable behaviour. Tribunals were better placed to judge men's importance at home or in the local community than their consciences, leading many to seek the apparently easier option of exempting the latter from combatant service only, thereby acknowledging their conscientious objection but forcing them to undertake (or illegally avoid) some military service. It is unfortunate for their popular legacy that tribunals were saddled with these cases when their actions in seeking to maintain both a supply of men for the armed forces and the continuance of local business and food production and supply was much more forward-thinking and generally effective, if not without a share of flaws and inequalities.

The work of the tribunals, military and national service representatives, and advisory committees are a prime example of the mobilisation of civil society for the war effort.<sup>210</sup> In contrast to the voluntary recruitment period, though, this effort was aimed at maintaining fairness and equality of sacrifice rather than encouraging willing sacrifices. While their own role was a vital display of voluntary work for the local community, they were inherently dealing with sacrifices that the appellants were unwilling to make (either in general or owing to temporary circumstances). If volunteering for military service was the paradigmatic wartime sacrifice on the

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<sup>210</sup> Gregory, 'Military Service Tribunals.'

home front,<sup>211</sup> the work of the tribunals was the paradigmatic example of the management of equal sacrifice as the encouragement of voluntary sacrifices receded.

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<sup>211</sup> Adrian Gregory, 'Britain and Ireland' in John Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I*, (Oxford, 2010), p. 406.

Table 5.3a – Appeals and rejection at Colchester Borough Tribunal, 1916-1918 (percentage rejected in brackets)

	Domestic	Medical	Business & Domestic	Business		Not stated	Conscientious Objection	Military Representative's appeal <sup>2</sup>	Total
				Self <sup>1</sup>	Employer <sup>1</sup>				
1916	137 (34.2)	20 (55.6)	43 (16.22)	162 (19.7)	439 (37.0)	85 (36.1)	11	32 (28.0)	929 (32.0)
1917	63 (36.7)	22 (40.0)	6 (33.3)	36 (18.5)	137 (25.0)	83 (40.)	3	294 (37.8)	644 (34.0)
1918	27 (20.0)	12 (0)	1 (0)	18 (12.5)	57 (13.5)	135 (19.8)	2	81 (32.5)	365 (15.4)
Total	227 (33.0)	54 (34.4)	50 (17.1)	216 (19.0)	633 (32.5)	303 (29.2)	16	407 (32.5)	1938 (29.5)
				881 (28.3) <sup>3</sup>			Plus 4 MR appeals		

Table 5.3b – Types of exemption granted at Colchester Borough Tribunal (percentage of appeals by type in brackets)

	Domestic	Medical	Business & Domestic	Business		Not stated	Conscientious Objection	Military Representative's appeal <sup>2</sup>	Total
				Self <sup>1</sup>	Employer <sup>1</sup>				
Rejection	65 (33.0)	11 (34.4)	7 (17.1)	36 (19.0)	186 (32.5)	70 (29.2)	0 (0)	108 (32.5)	484 (29.5)
Temporary	89 (45.2)	10 (32.1)	20 (48.8)	90 (47.4)	207 (36.2)	93 (38.8)	1 (7.1)	67 (20.2)	591 (36.0)
Conditional (inc some Absolute)	43 (21.8)	11 (34.4)	14 (34.2)	64 (33.8)	179 (32.3)	77 (32.1)	13 (92.9)	157 (47.3)	568 (34.6)
Total (no. adjourned in brackets)	227 (30)	54 (22)	50 (9)	216 (26)	633 (61)	303 (63)	16 (2)	407 (75)	1938 (295)
				881 (94) <sup>3</sup>			Plus 4 MR appeals		

Notes:

1 – Appeal made by: i.e. either the man himself or his employer

2 – Rejections in military/national service representatives' appeals indicate withdrawal of exemption (i.e. the appeal was successful, the man had to join the army).

3 – In 32 cases in 1918, it is not clear who appealed.

Table 5.4a – Appeals and rejections at Barking Town Borough Tribunal, 1916-1918 (percentage rejected in brackets)

	Domestic	Medical	Business & Domestic	Business		Not stated	Conscientious Objection	Military Representative's appeal	Total
				Self	Employer				
1916	63 (60)	2 (0)	7 (40)	49 (39)	213 (25)	157 (21.5)	15 (25)	0	501 (30.1)
1917	4 (0)	1 (0)	4 (0)	40 (0)	83 (3)	278 (8.9)	4 (0)	3 (0)	418 (7)
1918	2 (0)	1 (0)	5 (40)	9 (11.1)	8 (16.7)	118 (31.6)	1 (0)	21 (5.8)	136 (26.2)
Total	69 (55.6)	4 (0)	16 (30.7)	98 (20.9)	304 (21.5)	553 (17.2)	20 (17.6)	24 (5.6)	1059 (21.1)
				402 (21)					

Table 5.4b – Types of exemption granted at Barking Town Borough Tribunal, 1916-1918 (percentage of appeals by type in brackets)

	Domestic	Medical	Business & Domestic	Business		Not stated	Conscientious Objection	Military Representative's appeal <sup>2</sup>	Total
				Self <sup>1</sup>	Employer <sup>1</sup>				
Rejection	35 (55.56)	0	4 (30.77)	17 (20.99)	46 (21.50)	82 (17.19)	3 (17.65)	1 (5.56)	182 (21.1)
Temporary	24 (38.10)	3 (75.00)	7 (53.85)	56 (69.14)	127 (59.35)	341 (71.49)	0	17 (94.44)	554 (64.2)
Conditional (inc some Absolute)	4 (5.35)	2 (25.00)	2 (15.38)	8 (9.88)	41 (19.16)	54 (11.32)	14 (82.35)	0	127 (14.7)
Total (no. adjourned in brackets)	69 (6)	4 (0)	16 (3)	98 (17)	304 (90)	553 (76)	20 (3)	24 (6)	1059 (196)
				402 (107)					

For notes see Tables 5.3a and b

Table 5.5a – Appeals and rejections at Lexden and Winstree Rural District Tribunal (percentage rejected in brackets)

	Domestic	Medical	Business & Domestic	Business		Farm workers	Not stated	Conscientious Objection	Military Representative's appeal	Total
				Self	Employer					
1916	22 (22.2)	4 (25.0)	3 (0)	29 (14.8)	91 (14.1)	369 (13.3)	49 (10.6)	5 (0)	26 (19.2)	598 (13.8)
1917	0 (0)	5 (0)	2 (0)	4 (25.0)	25 (8.0)	51 (20.8)	8 (25.0)	0 (0)	24 (22.3)	120 (18.6)
1918	3 (100)	1 (0)	0	0 (0)	2 (50.0)	20 (11.8)	35 (12.5)	1 (100)	7 (0)	53 (23.9)
Total	25 (34.8)	10 (12.5)	5 (0)	33 (16.1)	118 (13.4)	440 (14.1)	92 (12.6)	6 (16.7)	62 (12.6)	805 (14.9)

Table 5.5b - Types of exemption granted at Lexden and Winstree Rural District tribunal, 1916-1918 (percentage of appeals by type in brackets)

	Domestic	Medical	Business & Domestic	Business		Farm workers	Not stated	Conscientious Objection	Military Representative's appeal <sup>2</sup>	Total
				Self <sup>1</sup>	Empl oyer <sup>1</sup>					
Rejection	8 (34.8)	1 (12.5)	0 (0)	5 (16.1)	15 (13.4)	60 (14.1)	11 (12.6)	1 (16.7)	11 (12.6)	115 (14.9)
Temporary	11 (47.8)	1 (12.5)	5 (100)	16 (51.6)	48 (42.9)	124 (29.0)	41 (47.1)	0	22 (25.3)	275 (35.6)
Conditional (inc some Absolute)	4 (17.4)	6 (75.0)	0 (0)	10 (32.3)	49 (43.8)	243 (56.9)	35 (40.2)	5 (83.3)	26 (29.9)	382 (49.5)
Total (no. adjourned in brackets)	25 (2)	10 (2)	5 (0)	33 (2)	118 (6)	440 (13)	92 (5)	6 (0)	62 (3)	805 (33)

For notes see Tables 5.3a and b

Table 5.6 - Appeals and results at Orsett Rural District Tribunal, 1916 (percentage of appeals by type in brackets)

	Domestic	Medical	Business & Domestic	Business		Farm work ers	Not stated	Conscientious Objection	Military Representative's appeal <sup>2</sup>	Total
				Self <sup>1</sup>	Empl oyer <sup>1</sup>					
Rejection	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	7 (3.8)	9 (13.6)	22 (19.3)	10 (71.4)	0 (0)	39 (12.2)
Temporary	4 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (75.0)	136 (74.3)	44 (63.8)	71 (62.3)	1 (7.1)	0 (0)	215 (67.0)
Conditional (inc some Absolute)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (100)	1 (25.0)	40 (21.9)	16 (23.2)	21 (18.4)	3 (21.4)	1 (100)	67 (20.9)
Total (no. adjourned in brackets)	4 (0)	1 (1)	1 (0)	4 (0)	202 (19)	70 (1)	116 (2)	14 (0)	1 (0)	343 (22)

For notes see Tables 5.3a and b

Table 5.7a – Appeals and rejections at East Ham Borough Tribunal (percentage rejected in brackets)

	Domestic	Including medical factors <sup>1</sup>	Business & Domestic	Business		Not stated	Conscientious Objection	Military Representative's appeal <sup>3</sup>	Total
				Self <sup>2</sup>	Employer <sup>2</sup>				
1916	130 (54.0)	43 (57.7)	44 (33.3)	217 (21.6)	162 (47.1)	36 (64.7)	76 (59.7)	1 (0)	714 (42.1)
1917	222 (28.4)	286 (22.1)	93 (11.0)	363 (8.4)	292 (12.6)	163 (23.2)	4 (75.0)	28 (34.6)	1453 (17.3)
1918	8 (83.3)	6 (33.3)	1 (0)	13 (20.0)	16 (28.6)	112 (34.1)	5 (25.0)	18 (56.3)	183 (37.1)
Total reported	361 (39.0)	337 (26.1)	138 (17.9)	593 (13.6)	470 (25.0)	311 (31.9)	85 (58.8)	47 (41.9)	2349 (26.5)

Table 5.7b - Types of exemption granted at East Ham Borough Tribunal, 1916-1918 (percentage of appeals by type in brackets)

	Domestic	Including medical factors <sup>1</sup>	Business & Domestic	Business		Not stated	Conscientious Objection	Military Representative's appeal <sup>3</sup>	Total
				Self <sup>2</sup>	Employer <sup>2</sup>				
Rejection	131 (39.0)	64 (26.1)	24 (17.9)	75 (13.6)	111 (25.0)	86 (31.9)	47 (58.8)	18 (41.9)	558 (26.5)
Temporary	170 (50.6)	112 (45.7)	90 (67.2)	355 (64.5)	225 (50.7)	122 (45.2)	8 (10.0)	2 (4.7)	1088 (51.6)
Conditional (inc some Absolute)	35 (10.4)	69 (28.2)	20 (14.9)	120 (21.8)	108 (24.3)	62 (23.0)	25 (31.3)	23 (53.5)	462 (21.9)
Total reported (adjourned in brackets)	361 (25)	337 (92)	138 (4)	593 (43)	470 (26)	311 (41)	85 (5)	47 (4)	2349 (242)

1 – includes domestic and medical, business and medical, and domestic, business and medical. Of these, 236 were for medical reasons only.

2 – Appeal made by: i.e. either the man himself or his employer

3 – Rejections in military/national service representatives' appeals indicate withdrawal of exemption (i.e. the appeal was successful, the man had to join the army).

Table 5.8 – Results at Ilford, January-March 1916.

	Number	Percentage of Tribunal cases	Percentage of appeal decisions (of 355)
Total cases	408	-	
Assented by Military Representative	130	-	36.6
Adjourned or withdrawn	53	-	
Heard by Tribunal	225	100	
Result			
Absolute exemption	6	2.6	1.7
Conditional exemption	15	6.6	4.2
Non-combatant service	12	5.3	3.4
Temporary exemption	106	46.9	29.9
Rejected	84	37.2	23.7
Sent to County Appeal	3	1.3	0.8
Grounds on which exemptions granted by tribunal	Number	Percentage of Exemptions (of 140)	
Domestic	73	52.1	
Business	42	30.0	
Business & Domestic	9	6.4	
Conscience	12	8.6	
Medical	4	2.9	

## Chapter 6 – Crisis, 1917-18

Q stands for Quest of a Quarrelling Queue,  
 Things are unequal for me and for you.  
 Q for the Quarter of butter or “marge,”  
 Also for Quantity little or large.  
 Q for the Question on which all agree,  
 Have they butter or margarine, sugar or tea?<sup>1</sup>

The winter of 1917-1918 saw the nadir of British morale in the Great War, on both the home front and the Western Front.<sup>2</sup> Although there had been earlier signs of declining morale in the country and government fears of collapse,<sup>3</sup> the crisis of confidence among civilians is observable in Essex roughly from late-November 1917 to March 1918; it combined factors relating to the war in general and to the experience of the home front in particular, indeed to the physical experience of life at home. The collapse of Russia, a battlefield crisis for Italy and the German show of strength in their counter-attack at Cambrai showed that Britain and its allies were not on the verge of crushing the Germans, as the existing narrative of the war held.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, food shortages and queues impacted directly and regularly on many civilians' lives in a much more widespread way than other events (such as air raids) had done; they brought into question whether equality of sacrifice was really being practised and brought to light underlying tensions over inequalities between places, people and classes.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Queues' by A.B.F., *WG*, 4/1/1918.

<sup>2</sup> On the latter, see G.D. Sheffield, 'The Morale of the British Army on the Western Front, 1914-18. A Case Study in the Importance of the "Human Factor" in Twentieth-Century Total War', in Geoffrey Jensen and Andrew Wiest (eds.), *War in the Age of Technology: Myriad Faces of Modern Armed Conflict* (New York, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Brock Millman charts dissent from well before this and 'despair' in government circles through 1917: see his *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London, 2004) and 'A Counsel of Despair: British Strategy and War Aims, 1917-18', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 36/ 2 (2001), pp. 241-270.

<sup>4</sup> See pp. 183-89; Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 508.

Inequality and the disjuncture between the reported (and expected) course of the war and what really appeared to be happening were at the root of the morale crisis. Maureen Healy stresses that access to food and reliable news were vital to home front morale; their disruption could be devastating.<sup>5</sup> In terms of Jean-Jacques Becker's division between contingent factors (such as conditions) and fundamental confidence in the war effort, Britain faced crises in both at the same time.<sup>6</sup> While both problems affected people across Essex, food shortages were more acute in urban areas and particularly the Metropolitan districts. Eventually, a mixture of practical steps and reshaping of narratives helped to restore faith in equality of sacrifice and eventual victory. Before looking at the crises themselves in detail, it is worth attempting to chart the decline in morale, its features and its extent.

### **Assessing support for the war**

#### *Personal sources*

The last winter of the war saw an increase in negative attitudes and a decline in optimism. It is useful at this point to look at how these were expressed and differed from general feelings about the war. Looking at negative expressions about the war, we must be careful not to conflate the desire for peace with pacifist or defeatist sentiment. Benjamin Ziemann, for instance, tends to see pacifism in what others (such as Jean-Jacques Becker) chart as resignation.<sup>7</sup> The longing for peace and

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<sup>5</sup> Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 26

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (Leamington, 1985), pp. 138-9.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany, 1914-1923*, trans. Alex Skinner (Oxford, 2007); Becker, *Great War and the French People*.

desire to bring it closer was, in fact, used to promote enlistment and other public campaigns supporting the war effort.<sup>8</sup>

From the start of the war, the wives of soldiers in the 2nd Rifle Brigade exchanged letters with the battalion commander's wife, creating an important network of support;<sup>9</sup> the letters show a deep longing for peace, without being defeatist. Mrs Midlane wrote from Upton Park in December 1914 of her wish 'that the war would soon come to an end, it make[s] life quite miserable'; similarly, one Stratford woman wrote: 'I hope and trust that the Lord will soon end this murderous war and restore to everyone those most dear to them as I am sure it is one long anxiety from day to day.'<sup>10</sup> Essex men in the army wrote home with similar sentiments.<sup>11</sup> Writing from Walthamstow to her gunner husband in 1916-18, Edith Bennett constantly referred to her longing for his return.<sup>12</sup> In July 1917, she compared his absence to a death in the household and prayed that the war would end and save him from the battlefield; similarly, two years earlier, a Mrs Falltrick wrote that she felt 'that [her] all had gone' when her husband went to France: 'I shall be very glad when this dreadful war is over[.] Pleased God it wont [sic] be long'.<sup>13</sup> We have seen in a previous chapter the anger Mrs Bennett felt towards the Germans, so cannot

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<sup>8</sup> The National War Savings Committee (NWSC) became worried at the end of 1917 when the idea that investment might prolong the war appeared to be spreading (TNA NSC 1/6, Minutes of the NWSC, 12/12/1917). Similarly, the *BDA* stressed the desire for peace as a rallying call (20/3/1915).

<sup>9</sup> See Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester, 2009), p. 215-6.

<sup>10</sup> NAM, 1989-02-201-1233, Letter from Mrs Midlane to Mrs Stephens, December 1914, and -1334, from Mrs Brown to Mrs Stephens, nd (c1915).

<sup>11</sup> See ERO, D/P 98/28/18, letter from Bugler A. Bolt to Revd Reeve, 17/12/1914.

<sup>12</sup> For example IWM, 96/3/1, letter from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 4/8/1917

<sup>13</sup> IWM, 96/3/1, letter from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 27/7/17; NAM, 1989-02-201-1275, letter from Mrs Falltrick to Mrs Stephens, nd (Easter 1915).

presume her general desire for peace to include defeat. Instead, she and many others longed for peace but only through victory.

Katherine Luard, the anonymous author of the wartime *Diary of a Nursing Sister on the Western Front*,<sup>14</sup> apologised to her sister for her ‘wailing’ about ‘the Damned War’ in late 1917, saying that she (and ‘everybody else’) would probably be a conscientious objector if there was another war: ‘the WAR now annoys me personally like toothache or chilblains! I’ve no patience with the devilish folly of it. And we’ve got to win, but how?’ Luard was clearly sick of war but still did not see defeat as an option.<sup>15</sup> Mrs Bennett’s declining morale in late 1917 is clear when she called for ‘peace at any cost’ to save her family from being ‘starved to death’ in January 1918, feeling that conditions would be easier to handle if they could see any prospect of the end. In early February, she wrote of expecting ‘an enormous battle which is to decide it one way or other so people think, and thank goodness when it is, as everyone here seems properly fed up with this miserable uninteresting life.’ It is worth remembering that Edwin Bennett was serving in Mesopotamia and so would not take part in this fight; what his wife’s view would have been if he had been at such risk is impossible to tell. Two weeks later, the general war situation, from Russia’s collapse to air raids and food shortages were still getting to Mrs Bennett and those she met: ‘all the Tommies that come home from France say its impossible they are fed up and dont [sic] care whether its one way or the other’.<sup>16</sup> Luard still felt that there must be a British victory: ‘it would be too boring to finish

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<sup>14</sup> Anon [K.E. Luard], *Diary of a Nursing Sister on the Western Front, 1914-15* (London, 1915).

<sup>15</sup> ERO, D/DLu 55/13/1, letters from K.E. Luard to C.G. Luard, 5/11/1917 and 29/12/1917.

<sup>16</sup> IWM, 96/3/1, letters from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 8/1/1918, 15/1/1918, 24/1/1918, 2/2/1918 and 27/2/1918.

the War with the Boche instead of with the British.<sup>17</sup> There was despair but not to the point of giving in.

Home front concerns did not remain on the home front: not only did news from the front worry those at home but news from home also worried servicemen to a degree that troubled the authorities. Army postal censors reported the dire effect that news of food shortages, queues and despondency at home had on the morale of soldiers.<sup>18</sup> In February 1918, the *Essex County Chronicle* quoted with approval a message from the War Correspondents' Headquarters in France criticising civilians, and women in particular, who were:

[W]riting to their men out here absurdly exaggerated stories of the hardships of queue-hunting, and of their sufferings from inadequate supplies of butter and margarine. Of course, it is nice to make interesting letters, and women are not notoriously exempt from the human love of exaggeration. But it is very unkind to the men.

It is only because it is the first taste of inconvenience from the war that people at home, without thinking, make too much of it in their letters. But it is neither kind nor wise, for telling men depressing things cannot make them better soldiers, and these men out here are entitled to all the cheery news that they can get, and as few tales of woe as possible.<sup>19</sup>

Even before this, though, civilians were conscious of the effects that bad news might have on soldiers;<sup>20</sup> Edith Bennett's friends appreciated her pessimistic frame of mind and told her she 'never ought to write and tell you things especially the food question, but your [sic] sure to know by other chaps letters'.<sup>21</sup> Soldiers' morale

<sup>17</sup> ERO, D/DLu 55/13/1, letters from K.E. Luard to C.G. Luard, 19/2/1918.

<sup>18</sup> IWM, 84/46/1, papers of Capt. M. Hardie, 'Report on Postal Censorship, Italian Expeditionary Force. December, 1917-February, 1918'

<sup>19</sup> *ECC*, 15/2/1918. In Austria-Hungary, letters thought to be injurious to morale were confiscated (Healy, *Vienna*, p. 1).

<sup>20</sup> This is also true of personal information unrelated to the war: Ellen Mackey, while urging honesty in her medic husband's letters, repeatedly withheld from him information about her continuing illness (WFA, Acc 10218, Mackey letters).

<sup>21</sup> IWM, 96/3/1, letter from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 30/1/1917.

was undermined that winter by numerous factors relating to conditions at the front and the lack of victory; bad news from home served to exacerbate these concerns.<sup>22</sup> The numerous mentions of air raids in letters and diaries shows the importance of the air war on the experiences and morale of those in the endangered areas and those who cared about them, whether soldiers or civilians.<sup>23</sup>

We have seen that expectations of imminent victory ebbed and flowed with battlefield actions; at the end of 1917, they reached their lowest ebb and the end seemed further off than ever. Ellen Mackey's fear in early 1918 of another two years of war showed her lack of confidence in an imminent outcome,<sup>24</sup> but it was not confined to that point in the war: Mrs Bennett wrote of a two-year timeframe in August 1917,<sup>25</sup> while some soldiers said that 'the first five years will be the worst'.<sup>26</sup> In 1917 and early 1918, Revd Reeve heard various indications about military and civilian confidence: his soldier nephew was confident of imminent success in October, while two local soldiers on leave seemed 'confident of eventual victory' in November; Reeve's former gardener wrote in the latter month that he no longer expected to be back in the garden before the next summer as he had hoped. Captain Frederick Fane, a local landowner and former England cricketer, regarded the war as 'look[ing] like a draw' in June and then told Reeve in January 1918 'that our men are in good spirits, but all sick and tired of the War. There is no idea of the

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<sup>22</sup> See morale reports in IWM, 84/46/1, papers of Capt. M. Hardie.

<sup>23</sup> See pp. 99-102 and 118-22.

<sup>24</sup> WFA, Acc 10218, letter from Ellen to Haydn Mackey, 3 and 7/2/1918.

<sup>25</sup> IWM, 96/3/1, letter from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 10/8/1917.

<sup>26</sup> NAM, 2006-07-8-1, letter from Gunner Dennison to Alice, 8/8/1917, quoted by permission of Miss D.G. Freeman.

termination, however, at present; no sign of any end.’<sup>27</sup> As we shall see, the change from November to January in the prospects of victory was significant. In March 1918, Reeve noted with some understatement the ‘sober and almost pessimistic mood’ of a local man who told him that “[The Germans] have practically won [...]. So far, all along the line; and we have little or nothing to show for all our sacrifices.” The British retreat on the Western Front over the next month, meanwhile, ‘made the nation anxious and faces have been grave which scarcely ever before have worn the appearance of doubt.’<sup>28</sup> From these sources and others, it is clear that there was a grave dip in morale and confidence over that winter, which went lower than ever before.

### *War campaigns*

Two major national campaigns point, in different ways, to Essex people’s feelings about the war in 1917 and 1918: the National War Aims Committee (NWAC) and War Savings. The NWAC evidence is undermined somewhat by its timing, with only ten of the 213 extant reports for meetings in Essex dated between 21 October 1917 and 1 July 1918, a gap that encompasses most of the crisis period and the German Spring Offensive.<sup>29</sup> Just over a third of the meetings took place in August-October 1917, though, and the speakers’ reports from these and later meetings give some indications of feeling in the towns. In August 1918, Mr Tyrell, a speaker from Romford, reported that a meeting outside a West Ham pub had a surprisingly

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<sup>27</sup> ERO, T/P 188/3, Stondon Massey, Materials for a History of the Parish (hereafter Stondon diary), 18/11/1917, 26/6/1917 and 2/1/1918. ERO, D/P 98/28/18, letters to Revd Reeve from Leonard Hawkins, 11/10/1917, and William Penson 28/11/1917.

<sup>28</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 15/3/1918 and 12/4/1918.

<sup>29</sup> A separate ‘Meetings Register’ (TNA, T102/17) shows no indication of unreported meetings in this period, indeed a series of meetings in West Ham in late October 1917 was cancelled.

good reception: 'Unanimous support. You remember Oct last when we had to fight at the "Green Man" [sic]/ Our meetings have done their work'.<sup>30</sup> It seems unlikely that the meetings themselves had had much impact given their scarcity since October, but this recollection of previous difficulties is instructive. Reports by Tyrell and others from this earlier period of meetings actually show a large degree of support for the campaign's aims; the 1917 reports do, however, note more direct challenges by pacifists and over the issue of profiteers than in 1918. Several speakers at the 'Green Gates' were questioned about what the NWAC was: whether a 'jingo' or even a 'pacifist' organisation.<sup>31</sup> Meetings were disturbed more often by rain or air raids than by dissent in West Ham, one speaker reporting 'No war weariness or pacifists present. Or at any rate not in evidence. Many keen on reprisals on German homes'.<sup>32</sup> Tyrell's comments most likely refer to the number of questions asked about profiteering, which seems to have been the main cause for complaint: 'What does appear to be agitating the mind of the people here is the matter of profiteering; but in spite of this there is a determination to "carry on"'.<sup>33</sup> Others indicated 'a keen desire for a lasting peace' along the lines the NWAC was promoting, with questions about guaranteeing democracy and preventing future wars.<sup>34</sup> In Southend, air raids were again a problem, but apart from one 'rabid pacifist' the crowds were again attentive and supportive.<sup>35</sup> The county's first series of speeches was made in Harwich, where the local committee was one of only 23

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<sup>30</sup> TNA, T 102/22, Speaker's report: West Ham, 12/8/1918.

<sup>31</sup> TNA, T 102/25, Speakers' reports: West Ham, 11 and 18/10/1917.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*: West Ham, 20/10/1917

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*: West Ham, 13/10/1917, see also report from 9/10/1917.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*: West Ham, 10/10/1917; similar comments were made by other speakers.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*: Southend, 25/9/1917.

established before 4 August 1917.<sup>36</sup> The organisers here, as in many places, were the same political agents behind the (very active) local Parliamentary Recruiting Committee in 1914.<sup>37</sup> Following outdoor meetings in Clacton, this local campaign took its meetings into village schools around the area, much in contrast to the emphasis on outdoor meetings in Southend and West Ham; they too noted little adverse comment.

The limited reports from this early period of the NWAC, then, suggest that war weariness was not widespread by October, even in West Ham. It must be borne in mind, of course, that pacifist-minded or war-weary citizens would not necessarily have attended NWAC meetings, especially those in closed halls, just as men who did not want to enlist avoided recruiting meetings in 1914-1915. A speaker in Southend, though, opined that 99 percent of people did seem to want their memories refreshed about the war.<sup>38</sup> The meetings of the summer and autumn of 1918 showed broadly similar levels of apparent support with occasional opposition but with fewer specific complaints, suggesting that profiteering was of greater concern in late 1917. No meetings were held in the Harwich Division in 1918, only twelve in East Ham and a handful across the rest of the county. This relative lack of meetings outside West Ham and Southend suggest that local and national organisers did not feel that the effort was required in the rest of the county. On the other hand, there was clearly concern about the morale of the Metropolitan population in the summer of

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<sup>36</sup> David Monger, 'The National War Aims Committee and British patriotism during the First World War' (King's College, London, Ph.D. Thesis, 2009) (hereafter 'NWAC'), pp. 43-44.

<sup>37</sup> The men were Thomas Ablewhite and J.A. Bolton; see ERO, D/P 80/28/2, Records of Little Clacton in the Great War, for a PRC leaflet written by them.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, T 102/25, Speaker's report: Southend, 25/9/1917 (this was reported by the other speaker appearing with that quoted above).

1918, with an organised campaign of meetings outside pubs in West Ham and during the holiday season in Southend.

	Total Meetings	Southend	West Ham	East Ham	Harwich	Rest of Essex
August 1917	8				8	
September	38	34			2	2
October	32		20		12	
November	0					
December	2					2
January 1918	0					
February	1					1
March	0					
April	7			6		1
May	0					
June	0					
July	34	10	19	5		
August	66	51	14	1		
September	16		16			
October	9		9			
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>6</b>

Table 6.1 – NWAC meetings reported in Essex, 1917-1918.<sup>39</sup>

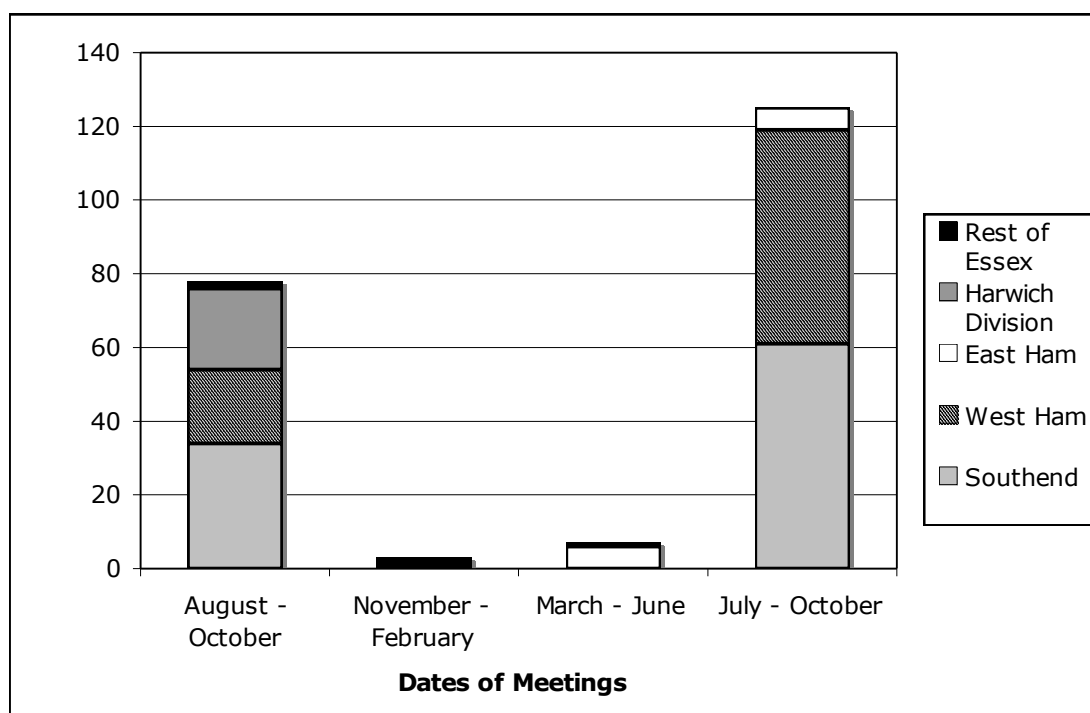


Fig 6.1 – NWAC meetings reported in Essex, 1917-1918.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> TNA, T 102/22-25, Speakers reports.

Another measure of support for the war can be found in support for the War Savings movement and investment in War Savings certificates, war loans and war bonds. As we have seen, these came to replace charitable donations as the major financial sacrifice called for from the civilian population from 1916 onwards, particularly in terms of the public organisation and campaigning for the cause.<sup>41</sup> As well as having a financial incentive for the purchaser, they can be seen as indicative of investors' belief in victory.<sup>42</sup> This link between investment and victory was made by Revd Reeve, for whom a successful campaign in Ongar in 1918 showed that 'Essex people still believe in the stability of their country, and recognise their country's obligation to bring the War, under the Divine Blessing, to a victorious conclusion.'<sup>43</sup>

How did Essex people perform as 'war-loaners'? At first glance, the answer is 'not well', since the National War Savings Committee (NWSC) annual reports showed the county in the bottom six of England's forty-two counties throughout 1917 and 1918 in terms of the number of affiliated local War Savings Associations (WSAs), taken as a proportion of the population.<sup>44</sup> Although the number of associations increased from 639 in March 1917 to 1,055 by December 1918, this was below the

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> See pp. 210-16.

<sup>42</sup> Worries about the government defaulting on their debt to investors caused troubles for the scheme in some areas, suggesting that investors generally *did* think that this money would be returned and thus that Britain would win the war. See TNA, NSC 1/6, Minutes of the NWSC, 12/12/1917.

<sup>43</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 24/6/1918; See Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 223-9.

<sup>44</sup> P.P.s 1917-18 (Cd 8516), 1918 (Cd 9112), and 1919 (Cmd 194), First, Second and Third Annual Reports of the National War Savings Committee.

national increase in these bodies. Adrian Gregory's claim that Scotland produced the most WSAs is based on a misreading of the statistics;<sup>45</sup> in fact the largest absolute number came in the populous counties of Lancashire and West Yorkshire, with the most organisations per head appearing in smaller counties like Westmorland, Huntingdonshire and Rutland. This measure is biased against large urban areas, since rural counties had more settlements in which to form associations, compared to the larger, more populous but less numerous districts in the larger boroughs, towns and cities.<sup>46</sup>

The impression of a rural bias is confirmed when the Metropolitan and 'county' sections of Essex are studied. According to an NWSC representative, there were 1,721 affiliated associations in Essex in June 1918, suggesting that Metropolitan WSAs were not being included in the publicly stated figure of 1,024; the higher figure boosts the WSAs per 10,000 citizens to an above-average 12.74.<sup>47</sup> Stated numbers of WSAs in the populous East and West Ham were well below even the London average of 9.03; however, without these two boroughs the rest of the county reaches a respectable 15 WSAs per 10,000 citizens.<sup>48</sup> Relative success in forming WSAs was not, of course, the whole story, since investments were not evenly

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<sup>45</sup> He compares the number of local *organising* committees (of which there were only a small number in each county) in England and Wales with the total number of WSAs in Scotland (Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 221-222).

<sup>46</sup> Lancashire performed rather badly on a per capita measurement.

<sup>47</sup> *ECS*, 15/5/1918; TNA, NSC 1/6, Minutes of the NWSC, 19/6/1918. Both quoted the same number of associations nationally though, so we can assume that the *ECS* figure is accurate. The metropolitan boroughs were not included in a list of London WSAs (*ibid*, 15/5/1918), which begs the question of where they were being counted!

<sup>48</sup> Borough and London totals from TNA, NSC 1/6, Minutes of the NWSC, 10/5/1918; Chingford had over 15 WSAs per 10,000 citizens by this point (*WG*, 17/5/1918).

distributed between schemes.<sup>49</sup> In terms of the amount raised, again, Essex's figures suffered from its proximity to London, both for overlapping statistics and because some investments from the county undoubtedly went into the capital rather than through local bodies.<sup>50</sup> Statistics published in Spring 1918 again place Essex at the bottom of the table with 2s-5d raised per head per week so far against a target of 10s, a figure that only three of the thirty-five counties listed had achieved; once again though, the Metropolitan districts were not included.<sup>51</sup> Assuming that the 2s-5d was calculated on the basis of 1.35m Essex people but was raised from the 600,000 citizens of non-Metropolitan Essex, we can estimate that the figure per capita of the latter population alone would have been around 5s-5d. Again this puts Essex around the middle of the table (next to Suffolk); from these sets of countywide statistics, it would appear that Essex people invested at an average level through 1917-1918; this (rather blunt) measure suggests a level of support for the war in Essex comparable with much of England and Wales.

Looking below the county level, the NWSC published a list of towns and their investment in the first 14 weeks of the new campaign launched in autumn 1917, against the 10s per head per week target.<sup>52</sup> Only six of the 13 largest English and Welsh towns and cities listed (which did not include London or Metropolitan Essex) had reached this figure, all of them aided by the visit of a tank to stir up local interest. The impact of these visits may be judged from the daily takings in a similar campaign in October 1918, when the amount invested in Ilford and West Ham grew

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<sup>49</sup> This was stressed in *War Savings*, 1/2 (October 1916), p. 14.

<sup>50</sup> The *ECS* (16/3/1918) reported that Messrs. Courtauld in Braintree had invested in London rather than locally.

<sup>51</sup> The other three counties in the same situation also had totals under 4s (*War Savings*, 2/6, (March-April 1918), p. 80).

<sup>52</sup> *Times*, 15/1/1918.

tenfold on the day that the tank visited, the amount in East Ham a hundredfold.<sup>53</sup> In the January 1918 figures, Essex towns ranged between around 1s-3d (Grays Thurrock) and 6s (Chelmsford). Few of the listed towns across England and Wales had raised more than 7s, most had raised less than 4s; Essex was once again quite average for an English county. As well as this solid but below expectations performance overall, it is interesting to look, where possible, at the chronology of investments. Investment figures for Colchester are the most consistently reported and two averages are shown in Fig 6.2, each tracking per capita investments per week beginning ten weeks into the campaign; one is the average of all the weeks so far, the other for the week(s) since the previous stated total.

This graph shows clearly the impact of a March 1918 'Business Men's Week', but even this push only put the average for the whole period over 5s briefly, a level passed in week-on-week subscriptions again in June. The since-last-statement measurement shows a dip in support at first, which may be indicative of a general decline in December or from an initial rush (the first point is the average for the first ten weeks, the second the total for one week); however, it is notable that investments increased again over Christmas and New Year, declining slightly through to the end of February. By this measure there was not any substantial decline in support for the war – or at least investment that denoted a faith in victory – in the period from mid-December to late January. The level of support for War Savings was by no means overwhelming, but it does not indicate a population having given up hope. Such a statistical survey cannot, of course, function directly as a public opinion gauge since it is a measure of the amount invested by those

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<sup>53</sup> *Times*, 9-16/10/1918.

supporting it, not the feelings of those who did not invest or could not afford to, or of the population as a whole. Statistics of WSA membership suggest that around 6 to 13% of the population in each village and town across the whole county were members,<sup>54</sup> although a few (such as Mount Bures at 18%) had significantly more. Taking into account the numbers absent on military service and we can estimate 10-20% of local civilians invested in War Savings, enough for their actions to be indicative, if not conclusive.

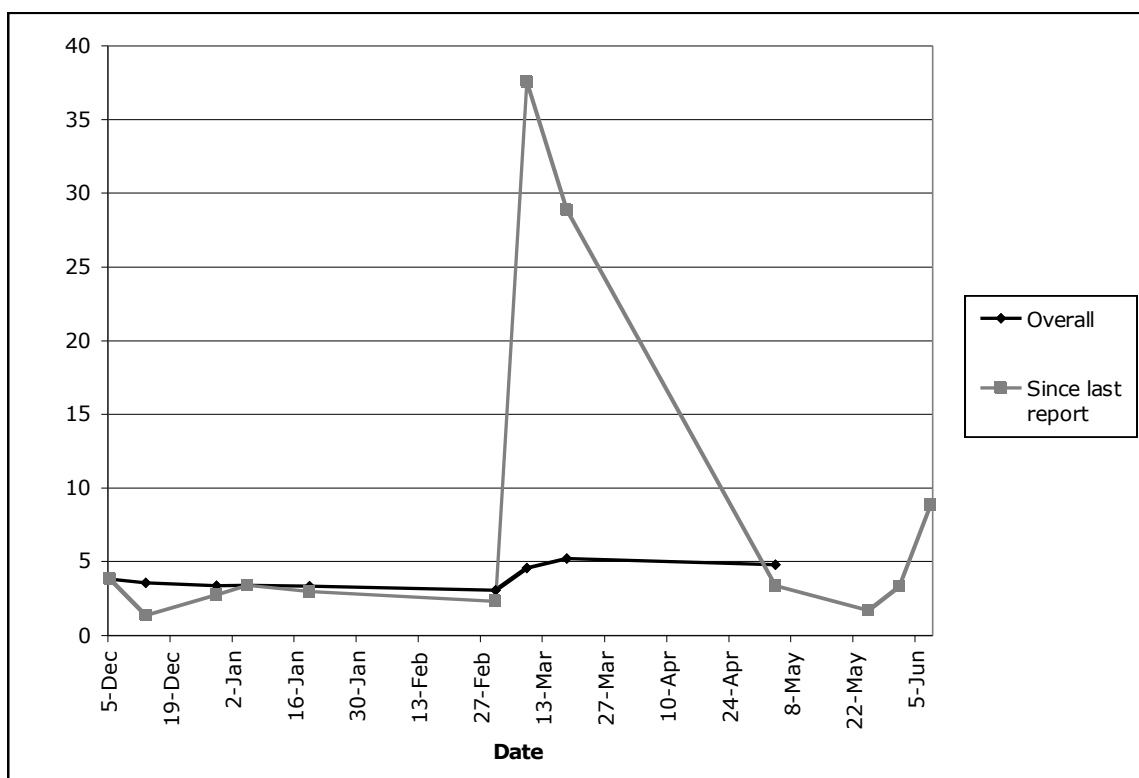


Fig 6.2 – War Savings investment in Colchester, December 1917-June 1918.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *ECS* and *WG*, various issues 1917-1918; West Ham increased from 6.4 to 9% between October 1917 and April 1918 (TNA, NSC 1/6 Minutes of the NWSC, 15/5/1918); the WSAs of Great and Little Leighs had a combined membership of 100, roughly 12% of their join population in early 1918 (Clark diaries, 10/2/1918). Similarly, 12% of Preston's population subscribed to war loans (Harry Cartmell, *For Remembrance. An Account of Some Fateful Years* (Preston, 1919), p. 151).

<sup>55</sup> *ECS*, December 1917-June 1918.

*Support for the war, 1917-1918*

From these literary and statistical sources, we can draw some tentative conclusions. The first is that Essex was not substantially more or less committed to calculable war causes than the English average. A second is that while the non-Metropolitan areas were not felt to be suffering from excessive war-weariness in 1917 and 1918, West Ham was felt to be at risk and its people voiced their anger at profiteers. Lastly, while people talked of their longing for peace throughout the war, there was a noticeable dip in confidence and increase in distress voiced through the winter. This dip in confidence, while prompting comment that victory was so far off as to be almost invisible, did not completely undermine faith that the war would end in victory, peace and a return on one's war loan investment.

**Crisis on the home front**

It is no great exaggeration to state that that the crisis on the home front over the winter of 1917-1918 centred on food, at least in Essex. Other factors were present and wider concerns were brought into focus by the food crisis, but it was the supply and distribution of food that fuelled concerns and discontent. Mrs Bennett's cries for peace were rooted in fears that she and her daughter would starve (never really a risk in Great War Essex); her local newspaper wrote at the end of 1917 that the Food Control Committee (FCC) had 'had to deal with problems which are of paramount importance to the happiness of the people in the district. In the near future the work of the Committee is likely to become increasingly difficult'.<sup>56</sup> A month later, it declared that the 'question of food is the question of the hour'.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *WG*, 28/12/1917.

<sup>57</sup> *WG*, 25/1/1918.

Meanwhile the *East London Advertiser*, covering the East End and sections of metropolitan Essex, likewise stated that

The unequal distribution of food has brought more discontent and dissatisfaction to the people of East London than anything we have known since the war started. Although less terrifying than the air-raids, the food scarcity has produced an amount of exasperation which German terrorism never did. At the back of it all is the feeling that there is plenty of food in the country but that the apportioning of it has been unequal and unjust.<sup>58</sup>

Studies of Berlin and Vienna have shown the devastating impact that real shortages could have on Great War home fronts, criminalising consumers through the black market and creating new categories of enemy within the population.<sup>59</sup> It is important to note that the British ‘food crisis’ was one primarily of distribution rather than overall severe shortage of supply; Thierry Bonzon and Belinda Davis stress the enormous difference in scale between the crisis in Berlin compared with Paris and London, while Maureen Healy describes a Vienna that suffered greater hardships, and the situation in Petrograd was worse still.<sup>60</sup> The scavenging expeditions that became an antagonistic characteristic of life in the Central Powers did not come to Essex.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, it was relative shortage and the sense of inequality that caused friction;<sup>62</sup> distribution problems, perceived inequality, and growing queues brought the spectre of discontent to the streets and gave inequality of sacrifice physical

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<sup>58</sup> *East London Advertiser*, 11/1/1918, quoted in Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, p. 519.

<sup>59</sup> Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (London, 2000); Healy, *Vienna*; Roger Chickering notes the same of the whole of Germany, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 149.

<sup>60</sup> Thierry Bonzon and Belinda Davis, ‘Feeding the cities’ in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert *et al*, *Capital Cities At War*, vol. i (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 321-22; Healy, *Vienna*, pp. 43-44. Peter Gatrell describes food as Russia’s Achilles Heel (*Russia’s First World War: A Social and Economic History* (Harlow, 2008), Ch. 7).

<sup>61</sup> Chickering, *Imperial Germany*, pp. 45-46; Healy, *Vienna*, pp. 54-56. There was some theft in Essex, but only on a petty level (*WG* 24/8/1917).

<sup>62</sup> Bonzon and Davis, ‘Feeding the cities’, p. 339.

form. As in Berlin and Vienna, the food queue became an increasingly political site that brought to the surface new or previously-submerged antagonisms, most notably over apparent inequalities: between town and country, between consumer and trader, and between classes. A more distinctively British aspect came in arguments over compulsion, which repeated the pattern of 1915 and debates about recruiting as public and local organisations called for compulsory measures while the government dragged its feet. After the London and Home Counties rationing scheme came into force on 25 February and removed the food queues from streets, one Essex paper wrote that ‘The blessed word “compulsion” has again justified itself.’<sup>63</sup> Local measures alone were not enough to solve the problem and it was through this large-scale scheme,<sup>64</sup> organised locally by FCCs, that the image of equality of sacrifice was re-established in the vital arena of food.

### *Chronology of the food troubles*

Concerns about the price and availability of food had been present since the outbreak of war, one of the major concerns of early August having been the actions of hoarders.<sup>65</sup> From 1914 to the start of 1917, concerns at a personal level had primarily been over the increasing cost of food; a March 1916 advert for “Tiptree Jam” stressed its small increase in price compared to sugar and other foods; a month later the *Southend and Westcliff Graphic* included ‘Dearer food’ in a cartoon showing the pressures breaking a camel’s back.<sup>66</sup> By that point, the price of sugar in Greater London had doubled, milk, butter and margarine had increased in price

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<sup>63</sup> *ECS*, 2/3/1918.

<sup>64</sup> The scheme encompassed about a quarter of the English population, P.P. 1918 (Cd 9005), ‘War Cabinet Report for the year 1917’, p. 178.

<sup>65</sup> See *LEI*, 8/8/1914 and *ST*, 8/8/1914.

<sup>66</sup> *EWN*, 17/3/1916; *SWG*, 14/4/1916. In September 1916 there was a public meeting at East Ham Town Hall over the price of food (*EWN*, 8/9/1916).

by over 50 percent and bread, beef and mutton by 20 percent. Consumption of sugar and fresh meat declined markedly.<sup>67</sup> More broadly, efforts were made to encourage awareness of Britain's vulnerable food supply and encourage economy in food consumption.<sup>68</sup> The breaking up of uncultivated land into allotments was well-received and in many towns around 5 percent of the population voluntarily took up allotment work in the last years of the war.<sup>69</sup> The countywide War Agricultural Executive Committee sought to increase cultivation on farmland and unused plots.<sup>70</sup>

At the consumer's end, spring 1917 saw the first appearance of food queues resulting from the poor potato harvest of 1916, but the situation had improved by the summer.<sup>71</sup> There were queues in the larger towns of the county during March-May and complaints about the supply of food;<sup>72</sup> crowds of several hundred gathered in East Ham and scuffles were reported.<sup>73</sup> At this point and through the summer, much of the public effort made by local and national authorities was in attempting to stave off a crisis through education in more effective use of food.<sup>74</sup> One Ministry of Food spokesman told a crowd in Southend that rationing was impractical and would cause riots, citing Germany as an example: if Germany could not do it effectively, then neither could Britain.<sup>75</sup> It was this educational function that FCCs

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<sup>67</sup> Bonzon and Davis, 'Feeding the cities', pp. 318-9.

<sup>68</sup> See *ECS*, 1/4/1916 and 6/5/1916.

<sup>69</sup> Reports stated 766 allotment-holders in Harwich (*ECS*, 13/7/1918), 2,200 in Colchester (*ECS*, 28/9/1918) and around 2,000 in Southend in 1917 (*SWG* 3/10/1917).

<sup>70</sup> See pp. 207-10.

<sup>71</sup> Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, p. 513.

<sup>72</sup> See *WG*, 4/5/1917 and 11/5/1917, and *WHSEM*, 30/3/1917.

<sup>73</sup> *WHSEM*, 23/3/1917.

<sup>74</sup> *WHSEM*, 11/5/1917 and 18/5/1917; *SWG*, 20/4/1917.

<sup>75</sup> *SWG*, 18/5/1917.

initially undertook;<sup>76</sup> indeed, there was a worry in the War Savings movement, which had led economy efforts, that along with this aspect of their work, FCCs would siphon off personnel and effort needed for the savings campaigns.<sup>77</sup> The initial reaction to increasing food troubles in 1917 was similar to other elite responses during the war: a voluntary effort on their part to promote awareness and voluntary action among the general population.

The real crisis of food queues came in the weeks between late November and late February.<sup>78</sup> Shortages of sugar, tea, and margarine had brought queues to the streets by the start of December: Clark noted the absence of one or more of these in Braintree and Chelmsford, and, on 21 December, the presence of a queue of 500 people outside the Braintree branch of the multiple (or, in modern parlance, chain) store, the Maypole Dairy; Robert Bull reported queues of 300 in Burnham.<sup>79</sup> A scheme for rationing sugar was announced, beginning on 1 January, but queues were also growing for butter, for its less desired but more common substitute margarine, and, increasingly towards the end of the month, for meat. In the last weeks of 1917 the situation became critical and although some sources suggest a hope that the situation would improve after Christmas, the queues continued and grew.<sup>80</sup> The first editions of newspapers in the New Year carried stories of FCC Executive Officers across the county using newly-granted powers to requisition supplies intended for one store (often the Maypole) and redistribute the goods

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<sup>76</sup> *WG*, 10/8/1917 and 28/10/1917. See Clark diaries, 30/11/1917 and 6/12/1917 for a rather abortive visit from the local FCC.

<sup>77</sup> TNA, NSC 1/6, Minutes of the NWSC, 9/8/1917.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp.214-16; Bonzon and Davis, 'Feeding the Cities', pp. 329-30.

<sup>79</sup> Clark diaries, 15/12/1917, 28/12/1917 and 21/12/1917; ERO, T/P 245/3-4, microfilm of Robert Taylor Bull's diary (hereafter ERO Bull diary), 30/11/1917.

<sup>80</sup> See letter from Miss E. Price in *WG*, 4/1/1918.

among various retailers around the district.<sup>81</sup> In Colchester, the FCC chairman later recalled that after the first occurrence of requisitioning, which calmed a crowd of 2,000, the FCC met and distributed Maypole deliveries every day until rationing was introduced in February.<sup>82</sup> This power to requisition was much welcomed and encouraged by critics of the existing supply system, but came with risks and limits: first, it was emphasised that the supply was not being increased, only the sites of distribution; second, there was a worry that companies might respond to repeated requisitioning of their goods by simply reducing the amount they sent.<sup>83</sup> Supply problems continued through January, with failures in the meat supply being noted as well as margarine, and queues continued.<sup>84</sup> Many sources attest to there being upwards of 300 or 500 in queues in Essex towns, often queuing well before the opening times of the shops in the hope of buying meat or margarine.<sup>85</sup> Although the food supply appears to have increased from January to February,<sup>86</sup> the perception from newspapers and other sources is one of a problem increasing or at least not receding. The allocation of food supplies on the basis of a quota of half the amount supplied in October 1917 cannot have helped matters since, as one paper found after an investigation, the amount of goods coming into Walthamstow had fallen by over a third in the twelve months before that date.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *WG* 4/1/1918, *ECC* 4/1/1918. This power was granted on 22 December, (Cd 9005), p. 178.

<sup>82</sup> E.A. Hunt (ed.), *Colchester War Memorial Souvenir* (Colchester, 1923), pp. 62-3.

<sup>83</sup> *WG*, 4/1/1918 and *ECC*, 25/1/1918.

<sup>84</sup> For example, see *ECC*, 25/1/1918.

<sup>85</sup> For example, *ECC*, 25/1/1918. See also IWM, 96/3/1, letters from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 24/1/1918 and 7/2/1918, and Liddle Collection DF 148, memoir of CS Joad, p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 214-6.

<sup>87</sup> *WG*, 30/11/1917.

From the middle of January, there was a crescendo of calls for rationing, coming from FCCs, other local bodies, and newspapers of various political hues.<sup>88</sup> These calls came amid continued reports of mounting queues outside shops, one paper noting the problems caused to neighbouring shops whose entrances were constantly blocked by food queues.<sup>89</sup> More worrying still for all involved was the worsening mood of those queuing. In East Ham, queues were described as malicious in mid-January, while two weeks later the distribution of goods to invalids from school buildings was thought unfeasible because ‘the present temper of the people [meant that] it would be most difficult to get the supplies away from the shops.’<sup>90</sup> The Colchester Trades Union Council (TUC) warned the local FCC of the dangers of a population angered by this issue a few weeks after male munitions workers, angered by the long waits and variable success of their wives’ attempts to buy food, had left work and barged into shops demanding to be served immediately.<sup>91</sup> In Leytonstone, they reportedly went even further and looted closed provision stores; West Ham Town Hall was raided on suspicion that food was being stored there.<sup>92</sup>

Alongside their calls for compulsory rationing, many FCCs urged or attempted to organise local rationing systems<sup>93</sup> and attempted to answer concerns about people from outside buying up their districts’ precious provisions. This concern about unfair allocation of resources also provoked criticism of people hopping between different queues to get more than their share and led Chingford, Buckhurst Hill, Loughton and other neighbouring boroughs’ FCCs to coordinate their fixed prices

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<sup>88</sup> *ECC*, 8/2/1918; *ECS*, 8/2/1918; *WHSEM*, 18/1/1918 and 2/1/1918.

<sup>89</sup> *WHSEM*, 18/1/1918.

<sup>90</sup> *WHSEM*, 25/1/1918 and 8/1/1918. See also *ECC*, 25/1/1918.

<sup>91</sup> *ECS*, 19/2/1918, *ECC*, 1/2/1918.

<sup>92</sup> Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, p. 514; Rusieki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p.196.

<sup>93</sup> For example, Woodham Ferrers (*ECS*, 1/2/1918).

for meat.<sup>94</sup> By early February, many places had introduced schemes allowing the purchase of certain goods only after the customer had shown their sugar ration card to prove that they were indeed local.<sup>95</sup> Some commented by mid-February that queues were now being formed out of habit or a desire to gossip; whether or not that was true, the certainly were still forming right up until the institution of the London and Home Counties rationing scheme.<sup>96</sup> In keeping with the parallels to 1915 and recruiting, the voluntary nature of the effort to ensure equal sacrifice in setting up the rationing schemes was stressed: one newspaper explicitly compared the organisation of rationing with the compilation of the National Register in August 1915.<sup>97</sup> Although problems persisted in the registration system for rationing and occasionally the supply of food,<sup>98</sup> rationing removed the queues from the streets.<sup>99</sup> The end of the mass queues took away both a reason for discontent and a site for its incubation. The relative ease of resolution of the food problem stood in stark contrast to Germany and Austria-Hungary.<sup>100</sup>

### *Tensions*

Studies of the wartime food crises in Europe have emphasised the tensions that shortages and perceived unfairness brought. These were far greater in the German, Austrian, and Russian capitals than in London and Metropolitan Essex; towns in the county suffered more than the countryside but not so badly as the Metropolitan

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<sup>94</sup> *WG*, 4/1/1918.

<sup>95</sup> See *ECC*, 8/2/1918; *WG*, 1/2/1918; *WHSEM*, 8/2/1918.

<sup>96</sup> *WHSEM*, 22/2/1918, reporting comments at East Ham FCC, particularly those of Councillor Dean, and *WHSEM*, 1/3/1918.

<sup>97</sup> *ECS*, 2/2/1918.

<sup>98</sup> See *WG*, 8/3/1918, and ERO, D/DU 2917/2/8/10, minutes of Gosfield Hall Food economy committee, 1917-20.

<sup>99</sup> *WHSEM*, 1/3/1918; IWM, 96/3/1, letter from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 4/3/1917.

<sup>100</sup> Healy, *Vienna*; Davis, *Home Fires*; Chickering, *Imperial Germany*, pp. 140-46.

boroughs. Nonetheless, underlying or new tensions were brought to the surface by the crisis of early 1918. Calls for action over the queues were accompanied by allocations of blame for the food crisis, most notably against both local and national authorities for their inaction, and against traders and consumers where their behaviour was seen as unfair.<sup>101</sup> In January, the Stratford Co-operative Society felt that the government should take control of distribution rather than passing the responsibility on to traders, while local butchers advocated the requisitioning of meat to enforce equality of distribution.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, the Walthamstow branch of the British Workers' League called upon the FCC to take further action and there was a debate in East Ham over whether the problems were the fault of the FCC's lack of powers or its laxity in using them.<sup>103</sup> Brentwood FCC blamed the neighbouring Billericay Rural FCC for exacerbating problems by their failure to act.<sup>104</sup> Walthamstow butchers felt that the national Food Controller, rather than the local FCC, was to blame and criticised his policies and actions for making butchers feel like criminals.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, Colchester's butchers felt that they were being portrayed as profiteers during the food crisis,<sup>106</sup> perhaps the worst epithet available in debates about equality of hardship and sacrifice.<sup>107</sup>

Some also blamed multiples whose margarine supplies were in such demand, as the poem quoted at the start of this chapter concludes: 'The "powers that be" no one can

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<sup>101</sup> Healy notes the tendency of Viennese citizens to blame municipal authorities (*Vienna*, p. 58).

<sup>102</sup> *WHSEM*, 1/2/1918.

<sup>103</sup> *WG*, 11/1/1918; *WHSEM*, 8/1/1918.

<sup>104</sup> *ECC*, 25/1/1918.

<sup>105</sup> *WG*, 11/1/1918.

<sup>106</sup> *ECS*, 2/3/1918.

<sup>107</sup> See Jean-Louis Robert 'Image of the Profiteer' in Jay Winter, Jean-Louis Robert, *et al*, *Capital Cities at War, Volume 2: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, 2007).

excuse/ For letting the “multiples” encourage Queues.’<sup>108</sup> James Caldwell echoed this when he criticised the Maypole Dairy for not distributing its supplies to other stores in mid-December.<sup>109</sup> The multiples certainly provided the sites of many of the queues, but this seems to have owed more to the failure of wider local distribution (as compared with the separate networks supplying Maypole stores). It seems unlikely that they were to blame for the queues, while the continued delivery of supplies once they began to be requisitioned certainly eased local problems. The chairman of Chelmsford FCC went so far as to say that ‘the whole country was immensely indebted to the Maypole Dairy Co. for what they had done in the crisis.’<sup>110</sup>

Some blamed the customers themselves for the crisis over their failure to heed official advice on food economy and, more often, for hoarding food by buying more than their fair share or going from shop to shop stocking up on goods.<sup>111</sup> The idea of queues forming by habit certainly extended this criticism. These accusations seemed to be have been confirmed when a rush was observed among those wanting to buy goods before the rationing system limited purchasing power and when queues apparently formed in response to rumours of rationed goods available without the need for ration tickets.<sup>112</sup>

While responsibility for the extent of the queues was hotly debated, inequalities in supply and hardship between places and classes were apparent to many.

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<sup>108</sup> ‘Queues’ by ABF, *WG*, 4/1/1918.

<sup>109</sup> Clark diaries, 21/12/1917.

<sup>110</sup> *ECC*, 15/2/1918.

<sup>111</sup> *ECC*, 25/1/1918 and 8/2/1918; *ECS*, 18/1/1918.

<sup>112</sup> *WHSEM*, 1/3/1918; *WG*, 8/1/1918.

Metropolitan districts areas suffered the most from shortages and queues, but towns also suffered and villages also saw days without supplies.<sup>113</sup> A priest noted the distinct increase in shortages in his move from a rural parish to a small town in the county, while the difference between a small town and a large one was recorded by the chronicler of Hornchurch's war, who emphasised the pitiable situation in Romford.<sup>114</sup> The success of (and need for) communal kitchens in West Ham stood in contrast to the failure of a Colchester kitchen and their absence from much of Essex beyond the Metropolitan districts.<sup>115</sup> Just as concerns over food disappearing into neighbouring boroughs worried some FCCs, so too did the impression that provisions meant for the county were not being distributed equally. Walthamstow FCC was outraged in January 1918 by the holding back of milk at the County Dairy in Chelmsford, criticising this localism and the keeping of resources from 'the mothers and babies of Walthamstow' in order to make cheese for 'a few well-to-do people in the borough of Chelmsford'.<sup>116</sup>

The outrage in Walthamstow hints at the inequality of supply and hardship that was clearest to many observers: class, or at least on a crude distinction between workers and the well-off. Epping FCC heard complaints in February that well-to-do strangers were receiving preferential treatment over locals from some traders, and that seeing meat for wealthy customers leaving by the side doors angered women

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<sup>113</sup> Clark diaries, 3/1/1918. The vicar at Hutton earned his parishioners undying thanks for his purchase of cows to give them milk (ERO T/Z 25/614 Age Concern essay by Mrs H. Dixon, 1966).

<sup>114</sup> Charles T. Perfect, *Hornchurch during the Great War* (Colchester, 1920), p. 286.

<sup>115</sup> *ECS*, 5/1/1918 and 17/8/1918. A Walthamstow kitchen was opened in 1918 (*WG*, 12/1/1918).

<sup>116</sup> *WG* 4/1/1918.

queuing in the street.<sup>117</sup> One member told Brentwood FCC that rationing was opposed only by those whose purchase of food by delivery meant that they had avoided queues.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, Braintree's FCC chairman wanted to inspect the order books of big London stores to see what they were sending to large country houses in the district.<sup>119</sup> The honorary director of food economy was heckled with similar criticisms at a meeting in Maldon in January:

Miss Finch asked why the richer classes in Maldon, as well as other towns, were absent from the queues for food? (Applause.)

Sir Arthur Yapp: In a sense some rich people do stand in queues. (A voice: "Not in Maldon.") The difference was they stood under cover, while others were exposed to view.

Yapp's rather enigmatic response clearly did not satisfy his audience: a councillor quoted him an example of a local father turned away empty-handed by butchers all week while a 'gentleman' was able to buy a leg of mutton.<sup>120</sup> At a meeting in Chelmsford, Yapp was supported by the local MP, but the pair's reassurances were similarly dismissed by the audience.<sup>121</sup> Unlike in the Central Powers, the distinctions broadly remained on prewar class grounds, rather than being substantially reordered along the lines of access to supplies.<sup>122</sup> The feeling among FCCs was very much that the poor were suffering unfairly, an impression echoed by the TUC delegation that visited Colchester's FCC and warned of violence in the street; they emphasised the suffering of the working-classes while 'they saw a lot of

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<sup>117</sup> *ECC*, 8/2/1918.

<sup>118</sup> *ECS*, 25/1/1918.

<sup>119</sup> *EH*, 22/1/1918.

<sup>120</sup> *EH*, 29/1/1918.

<sup>121</sup> Rusieki, *Impact of Catastrophe*, p. 196.

<sup>122</sup> Healy, *Vienna*, pp. 62-3; Davis, *Home Fires*, pp. 245-6.

things going up Lexden Road way': while the workers suffered, food went to the middle class district.<sup>123</sup>

The workers themselves, or more specifically organised labour, bore much of the blame in the eyes of some observers. James Caldwell was never shy in allocating blame, and his accusation that the Labour party was blocking rationing in late 1917 was similar to David Lloyd George's post-hoc statement that organised labour would not accept it.<sup>124</sup> The responses of different newspapers to the Colchester munitions workers' actions reveals something of the tensions over this issue. The liberal *Essex County Chronicle* reported as follows:

On Wednesday, a number of engineers left work and proceeded to a multiple shop in Long Wyre Street, where there was a queue. The police allowed the men to be immediately served, and within a few minutes all were back at work again.<sup>125</sup>

Meanwhile, the Conservative *Essex County Standard* emphasised that such actions and 'imperious demands' did not help matters, undermined equitable distribution, and in fact led to those men's families receiving more than their fair share as their wives would still have queued for more food.<sup>126</sup> Thus, direct action in protest at the unfairness of current conditions was deflected as damaging, unfair and even selfish. Both papers, though, accepted the workers' implied message that rationing was the only way forward.

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<sup>123</sup> *ECS*, 9/2/1918.

<sup>124</sup> Clark 14/12/1917; Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London, 1996), p. 91.

<sup>125</sup> *ECC*, 1/2/1918.

<sup>126</sup> *ECS*, 2/2/1918.

Food shortages caused a crisis in the discourse of equal sacrifice, which had not been so keenly debated in Essex since the last days of voluntary recruitment. The comparison of sacrifices made by those who had enlisted and those who were suffering home front hardships was frequently made in 1917 and 1918. As Thierry Bonzon and Belinda Davis have written, ‘Tolerance for sacrifices in civilian nutrition was tempered by reminders of front-line hardships.’<sup>127</sup> At the very start of 1918, a columnist in the *Walthamstow Guardian* commented directly on the hardships of servicemen and urging that civilians face their growing hardships with the same sense of determination as was shown at the front, a message echoed later in the appeal for less depressing letters quoted above.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, the *Chronicle* told its readers that they were ‘in “the Food Front,” and it behoves to them to show something of the courage and endurance that their kith and kin are showing on the battle fronts and in the firing lines.’<sup>129</sup> Questions could be raised about equal sacrifices at home, but the benchmark sacrifice was still that of the serviceman.

#### *Crisis and resolution on the ‘food front’*

The problems over food opened up debates about equal sacrifice more than any other aspect of life other than recruiting. The idea that the well-off, queue-hoppers, or pushy workmen were gaining unfairly and making others suffer cut to the heart of the discourse of civilians’ equality of sacrifice. Colchester’s civic war memoir discusses the food problem in terms of ‘equality of treatment’ and sharing.<sup>130</sup> The food crisis fundamentally challenged this image of equality, opening up areas of

<sup>127</sup> Bonzon and Davis, ‘Feeding the cities’, p. 324.

<sup>128</sup> *WG*, 4/1/1918. Sir Arthur Yapp made a similar appeal on a national level in December 1917 (*Times*, 22/12/1917).

<sup>129</sup> *ECC*, 25/1/1918. The phrase was widely used in early 1918, for example *Times*, 18/3/1918 and 16/4/1918.

<sup>130</sup> Hunt (Ed.), *Colchester War Memorial*, p. 62

tension between places, people and classes over the provision of food and their level of sacrifice or selfishness. At a stage when local bodies were attempting to manage (in)equality in a variety of aspects of life and so maintain civilian consent, the crisis proved too much for local solutions: try as they might through redistribution, local FCCs could not prevent the growth of queues until a regional rationing system was introduced on 25 February. Only this measure was able to both remove the queues from the street and erase the impression of inequity. This confirms the trend noted by Thierry Bonzon and Belinda Davis, whereby food concerns connected local areas into a national and international network and solutions to them became accordingly national or international in character.<sup>131</sup> The sense of relief when the food crisis was over is clear from both private and newspaper comments at the start of March;<sup>132</sup> both contemporary national observations and this study of Essex suggest that unrest in Britain was strongly related to the price and distribution of food.<sup>133</sup> The resolution of the food crisis allowed attention to focus once again on the situation on the battlefields of France and Flanders and the progress of the war in general, which was also facing a crisis.

### **Crisis on the war front**

Almost exactly alongside the crisis over food came the crisis over the course of the war. Where food shortages highlighted failures in the maintenance of equality of sacrifice at home, events further afield in late 1917 undermined the narrative of the war that had emerged since the summer of 1916: the wearing out of the German army to the point of collapse. The crisis called for a reshaping of this narrative to fit

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<sup>131</sup> Bonzon and Davis, 'Feeding the cities', p. 333.

<sup>132</sup> *WHSEM*, 1/3/1918; IWM, 96/3/1, letter from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 4/3/1917.

<sup>133</sup> These and the related issue of profiteering are cited in Cd. 9005, p. 96.

events that seemed to suggest that Germany, far from being defeated, had the upper hand. Trevor Wilson is correct to say that public understanding of the German Spring Offensive of 1918 needed a realignment of public understanding that recalled 1914 and the stemming of Germany's first great offensive.<sup>134</sup> The timing of the change, though, is more complex than simply a reaction to the offensive from 21 March; instead, the process of altering people's expectations and the narrative of the course to victory had begun at the start of the year; this shaped responses to the eventual attack.

*August-December 1917: bad news follows good*

We have seen that local press coverage had, by 1917, adopted a combination of hailing successes and stressing the gradual nature of the effort.<sup>135</sup> This was repeated during the Third Battle of Ypres,<sup>136</sup> the progress of which was marked in both newspapers and private diaries with victories, advances, and the capture of towns from the start of August through to the 'Great victory for Sir Douglas Haig's troops' at Broodseinde in October and the happy coincidence in November of the capture of Passchendaele ridge with that of Gaza by General Allenby's forces in the Middle East.<sup>137</sup> From the start of the offensive, the weekly 'Progress of the War' column in the *Essex Herald* stressed both the achievements and limited effects of each individual battle: Haig's objectives were always attained, but the battles, large in

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<sup>134</sup> Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, p. 644.

<sup>135</sup> See p. 185-7.

<sup>136</sup> P.J. Flood notes similarly positive early reports in France of the failed Chemin des Dames offensive in 1917 (*France 1914-18: Public Opinion and the War Effort* (Basingstoke, 1990), p. 145).

<sup>137</sup> *EH*, 7/8/1917, 9/10/1917 and 13/11/1917; quotation from NAM, 1984-06-135, Diary of Mrs E.A. Courtauld (hereafter NAM Courtauld diary), 4/10/1917. The last-named events are also recorded in IWM, 96/3/1, letter from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 2/11/1917

size compared those of days gone by, were simply ‘spade work’ to wear down the Germans.<sup>138</sup> Great victories were still hailed, within the limited context of a siege war, and Broodseinde was said to be the greatest since the Marne in 1914, but they were clearly not knockout blows in themselves.<sup>139</sup> The peak of this apparent progression towards victory was the advance by troops under Sir Julian Byng at Cambrai at the end of November, which prompted the ringing of church bells and an impromptu firework display by Royal Engineers at Broomfield.<sup>140</sup> At the same time, there was awareness that conditions at the front were horrendous: soldiers and civilians referred to the ‘hell’ of the war in France,<sup>141</sup> while casualties were publicly reported in national statistics, local newspaper lists, and changes to war shrines.<sup>142</sup> Despite the apparent successes, the mood was not altogether positive. For Robert Bull in Burnham, even the success at Cambrai could not shift the heavy cloud of revolution in Russia, troubles on the Italian Front, and food shortages at home.<sup>143</sup>

Events at the start of December severely undermined the fragile confidence given by Byng’s victory. From 30 November to 3 December the Germans fought a major counter-attack at Cambrai, which, after a British withdrawal, succeeded in retaking almost the same territory the British had originally captured.<sup>144</sup> Newspapers and official despatches were keen to play down the reversal: the *Herald* on 4 December

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<sup>138</sup> *EH*, 7/8/1917, 14/8/1917 and 11/9/1917.

<sup>139</sup> *EH*, 25/9/1917, 9/10/1917, 13/11/1917, and 27/11/1917.

<sup>140</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 1/12/1917; Clark diaries, 24/11/1917. Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, p. 507. Essex newspapers reported Byng’s success particularly eagerly since he lived (in more peaceful days) in Thorpe Hall, Thorpe-le-Soken.

<sup>141</sup> IWM, 96/3/1, letters from Edith to Edwin Bennett, for example 2/8/1917 and 23/4/1918; Sweeney letters quoted in Michael Moynihan (ed), *Greater Love: Letters Home 1914-1918* (London, 1980), pp. 57, 59, 61.

<sup>142</sup> See pp. 175-77 and 199-203

<sup>143</sup> ERO Bull diary, 30/11/1917.

<sup>144</sup> The territory was similar in size, but not the exact same land.

reporting the German failure to defeat the British and a week later stressing German failure and the prodigal loss of (German) lives; by the 18th, the withdrawal was confirmed but only alongside further German failure.<sup>145</sup> Newspaper reports (correctly) reassured the reader that the worst-case scenario, a German breakthrough, had not occurred;<sup>146</sup> however, they also rendered the whole counter-attack as a failure, despite its success being roughly equivalent to the earlier British attack. The *Herald's* end-of-year summary likewise stressed British successes and referred only to a bend in the line caused by the German counter-attack having been straightened by a withdrawal; it assured readers that the Allies still held the initiative.<sup>147</sup> Other, more positive news was highlighted when it arose, most notably the capture of Jerusalem by Allenby's forces.<sup>148</sup>

This was perhaps the point of the war at which the dissonance between reported actions on the battlefield and reality was most obvious to civilians as news of the battle came back to them through unofficial channels. It was also the first time that the wearing-out narrative was demonstrably challenged and found wanting, particularly given the quick reversal of a supposedly great victory. The battle appears in many diaries of the period, some simply reporting official news or the writer's relief at hearing from their friends who had been there,<sup>149</sup> but others revealing a growing realisation that what had been reported was not the whole truth.

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<sup>145</sup> *EH*, 4/12/1917, 11/12/1917 and 18/12/1917. Clark (diary, 2/12/1917) notes the posting of the first Official Bulletin of war news in some months; this referred to German attacks and the British recapture of Gooneliu (which was subsequently given up).

<sup>146</sup> Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, pp. 491-2.

<sup>147</sup> *EH*, 25/12/1917.

<sup>148</sup> NAM Courtauld diary, 11/12/1917; IWM, 96/3/1, letter from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 13/12/1917.

<sup>149</sup> See Basil Harrison diary, 5/12/1918; ERO, D/DGa F2/2/41, transcript diary of Margaret Gardner 11/12/1917 and 15/12/1917.

On 7 December, James Caldwell told Andrew Clark the official line-straightening version of the British withdrawal; a week later, after meeting a friend who had been there, he opined that the whole Cambrai affair was really a complete failure and a ‘most unholy muddle’.<sup>150</sup> Similarly, Revd Reeve noted heavy losses on both sides on 6 December, but six days later recorded a ‘surprise victory’ for Germany:

The case is as grave, some say, as in 1914. We are better prepared with material, but there must be no sapping of our foundations with calls for a premature peace. The nation needs to be united in the face of real danger.

Following confirmation of a local man’s death in the battle, Reeve recorded further details: ‘The counter-attack was a very serious matter, from accounts since privately received, and the Germans penetrated into the Divisional Head-quarters!’<sup>151</sup>

The German counter-attack had not actually broken the British line; nonetheless, this show of strength from a supposedly weakened enemy was shocking. In addition, events further afield showed the Germans to be far from beaten. In the early months of 1918, this situation was clear to civilians in Essex: Robert Bull noted the German advance into Russia and their victory over Romania with great concern; Edith Bennett was similarly worried that the ‘treachery’ of the Russians would prolong the war by another year.<sup>152</sup> By mid-March, a bereaved father in Stondon Massey told Reeve that the war was practically lost since German victory over Russia would bring them the supplies the British blockade had sought to keep

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<sup>150</sup> Caldwell also criticised the newspapers’ withholding of information about the operation and the losses involved (Clark diaries, 7/12/1917, 12/12/1917 and 28/12/1917).

<sup>151</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 6/12/1917, 12/12/1917 and 25/12/1917.

<sup>152</sup> ERO Bull diary, 2/3/1918; IWM, 96/3/1, letter from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 27/2/1918.

from the Central Powers.<sup>153</sup> The course of the war in 1918 certainly did not seem to be in Britain's hands.

*January-February 1918: months of expectation*

Part of the solution to this crisis of confidence was the creation of a new narrative to replace the gradual wearing down of the enemy. As with many of the narrative changes in 1916-17, it was not a complete departure from what went before, but rather a modified image that emerged: the German army would take one last gamble, which would fail and allow the Allies to press on to victory. As in other areas, this was an accumulation in the narrative rather than a complete change: the idea that the Germans were being worn down was still there, what was new was that their last great effort was still to come before Allied victory could be achieved.

The main aspects of the narrative (the inevitability of a German offensive and its subsequent failure) were built up in the months between Christmas 1917 and March 1918. A fortnight into the New Year, the *Herald* had reversed its earlier assurance that the Allies held the initiative and stated that, although the snowy weather would prevent action for now, the Germans were reportedly planning a great offensive. Robert Bull likewise commented on the 16th that 'great preparations are being made by the Huns for [their] Spring offensive'.<sup>154</sup> A month later, the *Chronicle* reported a 'wonderful unanimity [that] appears to exist throughout the country that the Germans are going to launch, in the immediate future, a colossal offensive on the Western Front', although since it was not like the Germans to reveal their plans,

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<sup>153</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 15/3/1918. The pessimistic local was Mr Gann, whose son had died at Cambrai.

<sup>154</sup> *EH*, 15/1/1918; ERO Bull diary, 16/1/1918

Britons could not be certain.<sup>155</sup> This ambiguity was maintained in the *Herald* right up until the middle of March, when probing attacks were reported but not yet the expected offensive, suggesting to them that the latter might never come, and that the build-up might be defensive.<sup>156</sup> These early reports of clashes drew some people's minds in the opposite direction, highlighting the inevitable great clash: 'Yesterday the newsboys were shouting "Hand to hand fighting all along the British front." It sounded awful although over here we have been expecting to hear that the offensive had begun by the Germans.'<sup>157</sup>

Just as important as the near inevitability of the German offensive was the impression that it was their last gamble and was doomed to fail. The *Herald* told its readers that the bubble of German invincibility had been punctured and that, despite their numerical superiority, any attack they made would suffer the same fate as their attacks at Ypres and Verdun. On the eve of the battle, they reported that the two sides were even in numbers but, crucially, the Germans were war-weary whereas the Allies were in excellent spirits.<sup>158</sup> A similar impression was reported to Robert Bull: 'No great German offensive on the Western Front; our men on leave say [that] the defence is enormous on our side; and the enemy appear to think so too.'<sup>159</sup>

The German offensive was, then, anticipated for at least two months before it occurred; coverage in the press discussed German numerical superiority (or

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<sup>155</sup> *ECC*, 15/2/1918.

<sup>156</sup> *EH*, 12/1/1918, 12/3/1918 and 20/3/1918.

<sup>157</sup> WFA, Acc 10218, letter from Ellen Mackey to Haydn, 4/3/1918.

<sup>158</sup> *EH*, 19/2/1918 and 19/3/1918. It is not clear, but the reference to Ypres probably refers to the battle of 1914.

<sup>159</sup> ERO Bull diary, 18/1/1918

otherwise), the use of storm troops,<sup>160</sup> and the inevitable failure of the offensive. This type of discussion took place in both the national press and local newspapers across the country: local press in Wolverhampton covered the ‘Coming Storm’ and storm troops from at least mid-February, while the *Daily Express* combined slight ambiguity about the attack with confidence that it would be repulsed.<sup>161</sup>

### *March-May 1918: retreat and reaction*

Diaries and letters written after the offensive was launched on 21 March reflect anticipation that the offensive would take place and an awareness of its course; particularly prominent is writers’ concerns for their loved ones. Less straightforward, though, are ideas of the attack’s future course, which varied between confidence that it was indeed a doomed last gamble and a real despair for the future. The latter was definitely observed by Revd Reeve in Stondon Massey, as quoted earlier in this chapter. Likewise, Robert Bull commented on the weariness of the British defenders, although his thoughts were directed primarily towards the safety of his two sons at the front.<sup>162</sup> Basil Harrison in Chelmsford also recorded the fate of friends at the front and noted the gains made by the Germans, noting on 22 March, ‘Great German Offensive begun at last on a front of 50 miles. Their forces outnumber ours, and it will be a poor lookout for us’; over the next month he recorded further German advances, his 11 April entry concluding, ‘Fearful fighting

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<sup>160</sup> *EH*, 19/3/1918.

<sup>161</sup> Adrian Faber, ‘The Provincial Press During The First World War: A Case Study of the Wolverhampton *Express & Star* between January and March 1918’, (University of Birmingham, MA thesis, 2006, p. 20; *Daily Express*, 22/2/1918, p. 2, (pasted into Clark diaries, 22/2/1918). Clark usually pasted in cuttings to back up things he was hearing from his friends and correspondences, which suggests that this was not his only source of these opinions. Similar expectations are recalled in Francis Paul Armitage, *Leicester 1914-1918*, (Leicester, 1933), p. 246.

<sup>162</sup> ERO Bull diary, entries for March and April 1918.

in France and Germans gaining plenty of ground.’<sup>163</sup> Others reacted more positively or with more overt confidence in British arms, one noting on 23 March, ‘Battle news most terrible, am sure we must win’, and a week later, ‘Awful battle raging all week, our men keep the line.’<sup>164</sup> Similarly, a Walthamstow woman wrote to a battlefield medic of her concern for him, but she felt that ‘Our men are grand, and will withstand all the German onrushes’;<sup>165</sup> Mrs Courtauld, although fearful of enormous losses, wrote, ‘If only we can now break their attacking forces sent from Russian Front against us, perhaps the war will be finished soon after all. They are evidently trying for a decision before the American army is all in the field’.<sup>166</sup>

Trevor Wilson’s reference to the reminders of Mons and the Marne in 1914 is apt and this was broadly the impression given both before and during the crisis. A dual approach after 21 March stressed the enormous scale and significance of the attack but stressed that it was all in hand, even minimising the extent of German gains. The first mention of the offensive in an Essex paper summed up this approach in two headlines: ‘On a Larger Scale Than Any Other During the War’ and ‘Nothing More than was Expected’.<sup>167</sup> That the battle was enormous but under control was the essential message: it was ‘the greatest battle in world history’; that ‘the blow dealt by the Germans in the fighting in France is severe goes without saying, yet notwithstanding his immense sacrifice of men the enemy has not attained any

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<sup>163</sup> Harrison diary, March-April 1918, quotations from 22/3/1918 and 11/4/1918.

<sup>164</sup> ERO, D/DGa F2/2/41, Gardner diary, 23 and 30/3/1918.

<sup>165</sup> WFA, Acc 10218, ‘Nettie’s’ postscript to letter from Ellen to Edwin Mackey, 23/3/1918.

<sup>166</sup> NAM Courtauld diary, 23/3/1918.

<sup>167</sup> *ECC*, 22/3/1918. This was a ‘stop press’ announcement and little other information was given.

strategical success, and the British line holds intact.’<sup>168</sup> ‘Recognising the general anxiety as to the Western Front’, a new Official Bulletin was sent to village post offices on 24 March (the first since 2 December) carrying a similar message: most of the line was successfully being held and the enemy were being repulsed with heavy losses; British troops fought valiantly.<sup>169</sup> Such was the importance of the battle that the weekly official bulletin was not only revived during April, but also had an unprecedented supplementary edition one week.<sup>170</sup> The Germans were said to be attacking in ‘close order’ or ‘massed ranks’ and their commanders profligate with men’s lives, another reminder of reporting in 1914.<sup>171</sup> At this rate the attacks could not last long: for Edith Bennett, ‘we must be nearer the end after this terrific struggle we are going through and Killing Germans wholesale it cannot go on much longer’.<sup>172</sup> An extension of this confidence was the impression that the Germans had shot their bolt: the Mayor of Colchester told the town’s chamber of commerce in early April that this was the last effort of the Germans and that within a year the British would be able to congratulate themselves on their victory.<sup>173</sup> This impression was repeatedly given as each new German attack ground to a halt and appeared to confirm the version of events predicted before 21 March.

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<sup>168</sup> *EH* 26/3/1918; *ECC*, 29/3/1918. On 27 March, Clark was told that ‘the Stock Exchange was taking the German advance, with the utmost composure, as just what was expected and provided for.’ (Clark diaries, 27/3/1918)

<sup>169</sup> Clark diaries, 24/3/1918, the quotation is Clark’s phrase.

<sup>170</sup> Clark diaries, March-April 1918; the next bulletins came in June. The extra edition came on 1 April.

<sup>171</sup> For example, see Clark diaries 19/4/1918.

<sup>172</sup> IWM, 96/3/1, letter from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 3-4/4/1918; *EH* 2/4/1918; NAM Courtauld diary, 30/3/1918. Trant Luard wrote in similar terms from Cairo to his sister Rosie in Cambridge on 22 April (ERO D/DLu 55/14/5, letters of Trant Luard).

<sup>173</sup> *ECS*, 13/4/1918 and 1/4/1918; see also *ECC* ‘sign of the times’ column, 29/3/1918.

As during the fighting at Ypres in 1917, newspapers reported and diarists recorded the details of towns and villages that had changed hands.<sup>174</sup> Geoffrey Blades' study of the Battles of the Lys notes this accurate reporting of gains and losses in the 1918 battles, although he is critical of press coverage in general.<sup>175</sup> The recitation of place-names was different in the retreat of early 1918 to the advance of the previous autumn; instead of showing the onward march of British arms, they recorded a withdrawal over the hard-won battlefields of previous years. Official bulletins reported only limited news, generally only that of the previous day's fighting, and always reassured readers that the BEF was holding out and the Germans suffering enormously. It is notable that maps of the battlefields were not published in the local press; this could be explained through the shrinking size of newspapers, but it is rather telling. In response to the ongoing retreat, at least one newspaper spoke of the retreat in terms that acknowledged the loss of territory but gave an impression of Britain successfully holding the line: noting that over a million acres had been captured by the Germans, a columnist in the *Essex County Standard* pointed out that this was around the size of Essex and thus not very large compared to the size of France.<sup>176</sup> Quite what his readers made of this assessment, especially when compared to 'great victories' that had gained the Allies far less in 1917, is not possible to glean from diaries and letters, although it is notable that none of those consulted mention the limited extent of German gains in terms of territory.

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<sup>174</sup> For examples, see NAM Courtauld diary, March-April 1918, and ERO Bull diary, 4/6/1918.

<sup>175</sup> Geoffrey David Blades, 'The battles of the Lys: the British army on the defensive in April 1918' (University of London, M.Phil Thesis, 1999), p. 199; quoted in Faber 'Provincial Press'. See also, Armitage, *Leicester 1914-1918*, p. 248.

<sup>176</sup> *ECS*, 6/4/1918.

Comments more often related to the failure to break the British line or to separate the British and French Armies.<sup>177</sup>

A significant feature of diaries from early 1918 (as after Cambrai) is the record kept of the well-being and often location of loved ones; the circumstances of a retreat made the desire for information more acute, both because there was a major battle and particularly because it was no longer only the infantry and other combat arms that were involved, but also those in supporting roles. The first mention of the battle in Robert Bull's diary is significantly worded in this regard: 'Great break through of Germans on Cambrai front: Bapaume near where Howard lay is in their hands again.' A few days later, he heard from this son, who 'says for 6 days and nights he had no covering and had seen enough to last him till he gets the old age pension'; throughout the following weeks he received word every few days of the condition and location of Howard and his brother Frank.<sup>178</sup> Ellen Mackey likewise implored her medic husband for news, or at least the means to follow his progress in the newspapers:

I am anxious to hear from you now I know such a big battle is in progress, and Hadyn dear whenever possible do let me have a field card. I know you must be rushed off your feet, but I do hope you will be able to manage a card pretty often. All I need is your writing, and the date when written, and also the number of your Division.<sup>179</sup>

Concerns about the course of the war were always tied up with the fate of loved ones. The circumstances of the 1918 retreat brought this aspect to the fore and added to home front anxiety about the situation. By this point, most people would

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<sup>177</sup> ERO Bull diary, 15/4/1918.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, March-May 1918, quotations from 25/3/1918 and 30/3/1918.

<sup>179</sup> WFA, Acc 10218, letter from Ellen to Haydn Mackey, 25/3/1918. Ellen Mackey died soon afterwards from tuberculosis ending this interesting correspondence.

have known somebody at the front and news of their well-being came, either first or second hand, to most Essex homes along with the general picture painted by the press.

*June-November 1918: advance to victory*

Through the remaining months of 1918, events on the Western Front roughly followed the predicted pattern. Diarists' records show a gradual transition from discussion of the next German offensive and German losses in April and May to the weakening of these attacks, presaging an Allied advance from June or July.<sup>180</sup> Once the Allied assault had started, the general advance and specific gains were recorded; on 29 August, Robert Bull recorded 'Very good advances made by Allies on W. Front [sic], Germans compelled to fall back.'<sup>181</sup> The allied nature of the offensive and General Foch's leadership were widely remarked upon: 'Everyone is overjoyed at the good news from France, of the Allied victorious advance. Our success seems greatly due to better co-operation among the Allied Armies, due to the unity of command'.<sup>182</sup> Stephen Badsey suggests that a contemporary underplaying of the advances on the Western Front contributed to a later sense that the war had not been won militarily on that front.<sup>183</sup> Certainly attention was paid to other fronts in newspaper reports and in people's diaries and discussions (especially when they had relatives in other theatres), but the Western Front was still very much the centre of

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<sup>180</sup> NAM Courtauld diary, 25-27/5/1918; ERO Stondon diary, 19/4/1918; ERO Bull diary, 29/5/1918, 5/6/1918 and 16/7/1918; Clark diaries, 18/5/1918, 23/5/1918, 24/6/1918 and 20/7/1918.

<sup>181</sup> ERO Bull diary (emphasis in original).

<sup>182</sup> NAM Courtauld diary, 12/8/1918. See also Clark diaries, 22/6/1918 and *ST*, 24/8/1918. Foch had become Supreme Allied Commander in the wake of the German Spring Offensive.

<sup>183</sup> Stephen Badsey, *The British Army in Battle and Its Image 1914-18* (London, 2009), Ch. 8.

Essex attention in terms of the progress of the war. Official Bulletins, when they were published, focused on France and Flanders but gave a surprising amount of attention to the air war.<sup>184</sup> The Dean of Bocking even complained that ‘while war-correspondents were writing fairy tales from the Flanders front’, the vital work of the Royal Navy was undervalued.<sup>185</sup>

People were wary of predicting peace too readily. Robert Bull correctly calculated in August that his son Frank was due home on leave in October, which suggests that he did not expect the war to be over by then; in September, he was told by wounded soldiers that the conflict was likely to last through the winter.<sup>186</sup> Edith Bennett’s view fluctuated and her reports of good news in France were tempered by fears that the war would not end for years yet (if ever!); her father-in-law was more optimistic, predicting in June an end to the conflict in August or September; by October, Edith finally believed that peace might come in 1918.<sup>187</sup> By then soldiers spoke of peace by Christmas and Crittall’s warned their women workers of potentially imminent cessation of war work.<sup>188</sup> From these snapshots, we can sense a feeling growing through summer 1918 that this offensive really would bring peace. Using the measures utilised above, it is notable that NWAC activities were not deemed necessary for the vast majority of the county in 1918. Weekly records of War Savings investment are not regularly recorded but specific campaigns were

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<sup>184</sup> See Clark diaries; there was a break in bulletins in late July, but an unusual two-page edition on 1/9/1918.

<sup>185</sup> Clark diaries, 7/9/1918. The Dean a member of the prominent naval and military Brownrigg family; he was clearly not alone in his opinion, though, since Clark received a leaflet elaborating the Navy’s role (Clark diaries, 12/9/1918).

<sup>186</sup> ERO Bull diary, 29/8/1918 and 10/9/1918.

<sup>187</sup> IWM, 96/3/1, letters from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 10/7/1918, 23/7/1918, 23/9/1918 and 1/10/1918, and from his father to Edwin Bennett, 25/6/1918.

<sup>188</sup> Clark diaries, 2/10/1918 and 19/10/1918.

largely successful, often spurred on by the visit of a tank or aeroplane and frequently aimed specifically at raising money to buy one of these weapons or a ship to be named after the town.<sup>189</sup>

### *Crisis of confidence*

Despondency over the course of the war arose primarily in the wake of the withdrawal at Cambrai, the shock of which compounded depressing news from other battlefields. The apparent strength of the German army and likelihood of a major assault by it on the Western Front required a reshaped narrative of the war's future course and the route to victory. This was done through newspaper reporting on a local and national level, and was apparently received and understood by Essex civilians. It was not a complete change: the coming German attack was quite obvious and that it might be the last gamble of a weakened nation meant that it could fit the wearing-out narrative. This narrative did not remove the anxiety felt after 21 March, especially for those with loved ones or relatives at the front; however, it framed the German attack within an understandable framework as one last gamble, the withstanding of which would hasten a victorious peace for the Allies.<sup>190</sup> Reporting and much of the private recording of the German Spring Offensive reflected this image, with German advances recognised but downplayed and German losses emphasised. As with the food crisis, the crisis of confidence could not be resolved solely at a local level but only rather as part of a reshaping of the national narrative. As the new narrative broadly reflected the events that

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<sup>189</sup> See Clark's comments about Chelmsford's 'Aeroplane Week' (Clark diaries 5-11/5/1918).

<sup>190</sup> Clark recorded people's faith in the predictions of *Old Moore's Almanack*: in September 1917 this was for difficulties in April 1918 but victory by the end of that year, (Clark diaries 18/9/1917).

actually took place – the withstanding of the German attack and its failure to spilt the Allied armies, followed by the advance to victory in the ‘hundred days’ campaign – it could be believed and no longer needed to be reshaped after the end of the early 1918 crisis.

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The crises in conditions and confidence in late 1917 and early 1918 were more severe than any others experienced in wartime Essex, and indeed any nationwide crises experienced in the UK. They did not, though, bring complete despair as people continued on the whole to believe in eventual victory; instead, for most, the image of peace seemed further away but still attainable and preferable to defeat. The combined effect of German strength at the close of 1917 and the glaring inequalities highlighted by the food shortages brought many close to wondering whether a compromise peace (or even defeat) could really be worse. The two crises highlighted shortcomings in both the gradual-wearing-out narrative of the war’s future course and the idea of equality of sacrifice that was central to home front consent. Neither could be resolved solely through local efforts: the new narrative was shaped and disseminated on a national scale, including through local newspapers, while the Food Control Committees’ centrally-granted powers only became truly successful in curbing the food crisis when compulsory rationing was introduced for London and the Home Counties. The middle years of the war had seen a shift from the narrative of break-through to one of wearing-out, and from the encouragement of voluntary sacrifice to the local management of (in)equality of sacrifice. The early months of 1918 saw another shift: a further important step along the management of sacrifice route in local affairs, with further compulsion and the

need for regional and national measures, and a reshaping of the war's narrative to cater for the looming German offensive. While concerns about inequality and varied expectations about the war's course continued in 1918, rationing and the progression of the war along roughly the lines given by the new narrative meant that both remained within the realms of acceptability.

## Conclusion

Just as news of the declaration of war had spread out from London, so too did news of the Armistice of 11 November 1918. Essex diarists had noted great advances for the Allies and the collapse of Germany's allies in October and early November, events 'bewildering in their rapidity.'<sup>1</sup> News of the armistice was known early in London, marked with sirens and hooters; it reached Burnham at 10.30, while the people of Stondon Massey heard the victory bells at Brentwood before receiving definite tidings and ringing their own church bells.<sup>2</sup> 'Extraordinary enthusiasm prevailed at Colchester when it became known officially that the armistice had been signed. Crowds thronged through the streets with Union Jacks' and were addressed from the balcony of the town hall as the council emerged from their quarterly meeting on hearing the news. There and elsewhere, work ended for the day and bunting appeared in the streets.<sup>3</sup>

With the armistice came the first signs of the return of peacetime life as streetlights came back on and household lighting restrictions were removed.<sup>4</sup> Searchlights still swept the skies above the London defences, but they were no longer accompanied by patrolling aircraft. 'The Village folk [in Stondon Massey] miss the frequent circling of aeroplanes, and a brother-clergyman declared yesterday that after all our excitements, there is a certain flatness perceptible in the atmosphere of the Peace!

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<sup>1</sup> ERO, T/B 188/3, Stondon Massey, Materials for a history of the Parish (hereafter ERO Stondon diary), 1/11/1918. False rumour of an armistice appeared across Essex in early November (*ECS*, 16/11/1918; Clark diaries, 8/11/1918).

<sup>2</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 11/11/1918, ERO, T/B 245/3-4, microfilm of Robert Taylor Bull's diary, 11/11/1918.

<sup>3</sup> *ECS*, 16/11/1918; ERO, T/B 245/3-4, microfilm of Robert Taylor Bull's diary 11/11/1918; ERO Stondon diary, 11/11/1918 (re. bunting in Stratford). For those with loved ones on other fronts, the relief from anxiety came at different times, see IWM, 96/3/1, letter from Edith to Edwin Bennett, 5/11/1918.

<sup>4</sup> *ECS*, 16/11/1918; ERO Stondon diary, 13/11/1918.

But nevertheless we shall thankfully welcome Peace, and the prosperity which we trust it will bring.<sup>5</sup> Over the following months, servicemen began to return to their homes and civilian lives. Meanwhile, war memorial committees got down to work organising the setting in stone of their thanks to those who were never to return. With the return of the county's servicemen and its peacetime look, with additional landmarks in the near-ubiquitous war memorials,<sup>6</sup> came the gradual loss of the memory of the home front experience of the Great War in Essex, as predicted in 1917;<sup>7</sup> all too soon it was overtaken by the county's experience of the Second World War. This thesis has explored the experiences of 1914-18 and particularly the fundamental question of why Essex people continued to support the war.

Through the fifty-two months of the conflict and the various changes and themes traced in this thesis, there are three main facets that stand out as key: the war narratives, the evolving discourse of wartime sacrifice, and the role of local elites. The narrative of the war's purpose and the associated image of the enemy did not change greatly once they had been established in late 1914 and reinforced by proof of German 'frightfulness' in 1915. Britain's war aims were articulated slightly differently in 1917-18, but remained fundamentally centred on the defence of 'British values' of freedom, democracy, right, and liberty, the war being fought against German militarism and despotism and even war itself. The later Wilsonian language of war aims and specific ideas of international co-operation did not alter this narrative; indeed, the promotion of Britain's war aims was felt to be a

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<sup>5</sup> ERO Stondon diary, 14/11/1918.

<sup>6</sup> Not all built war memorials, and indeed not all needed them. Strethall, for example, lost none of its menfolk in the war ('Strethall – Thankful Village' [website]. < <http://www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/TV/strethall.htm> > accessed 6/9/2010.)

<sup>7</sup> See p. 1.

rearticulation and not a major change in policy. Meanwhile, suspicion and exclusion from Essex communities of those felt to be German or sympathetic to the enemy was widespread and occasionally violent, although it could overflow into targeting of existing (British) outsiders. This and the campaigns against naturalised citizens and in favour of reprisal air raids were developments of the public discourse beyond what many elites wanted, an uncalled-for extension of the narrative of a barbaric enemy rather than its rejection.

The public narrative of the war's course did change, but it was an evolution and accumulation rather than major changes of tack. As the hoped-for breakthrough in 1916 failed to materialise, a new precondition for the final successful offensive emerged in the form of a necessary wearing-down of the enemy, this was repeated through 1917 but often overlooked in anticipation over major offensives. When the Third Battle of Ypres failed similarly to defeat the Germans, followed by a high-profile reverse at Cambrai and the effective loss of Russia from the Allied war effort, there was an even greater crisis of confidence. The response was another altered narrative, with another hurdle coming between the current position and the successful assault: withstanding a major German offensive on the Western Front. The public were warned in advance of the strength and importance of the German attacks. When they came, the public narrative was of the crucial nature of the events but stressed Allied strength and German losses; in this account, it was a critical moment, but a step towards Allied victory so long as the nation kept its belief and effort intact. It did and the offensives eventually failed and were indeed reversed until a worn-out Germany was defeated in November 1918.

While the war's narratives remained largely consistent, if not static, the role of local elites and the ideas of wartime sacrifice underwent more fundamental changes.

These were the areas in which actions at home really came into their own as a facet of the war experience, built atop a substructure of believable war narratives. Local elites and the populace reacted similarly to the outbreak of war in 1914, increasingly accepting the war narratives while devoting their efforts to voluntary efforts to alleviate distress (for local people, soldiers and refugees) and raise a large army. When it emerged that distress was less than expected (with some exceptions, particularly on the coast), the key role for local elites was to promote willing sacrifice, whether in terms of enlistment in the armed forces or local Volunteers and Special Constabulary, or in household economy. Army recruitment was the most high-profile part of this role, and the first in which this conception of willing sacrifice for the war effort broke down; the limited capacity of public discourse and elite leadership to provide the desired numbers of recruits led to the build up of a form of 'moral compulsion' from mid-1915, followed by legal compulsion in early 1916.

With compulsory military service came a major change in the role of local elites as some of their number were entrusted with deciding whether particular men should have to serve. The military service tribunals were a paradigmatic example of the shift from encouraging willing sacrifice to the management of equal sacrifice, with perceived equality and fairness being key factors in maintaining local consent. The tribunals had to weigh up the needs of the nation, the community and the appellant's family; their role was both the local embodiment of conscription and the community's buttress against overwhelming and insensitive state power. Similarly,

state-granted powers were used by War Agricultural Executive Committees and Food Control Committees in order to organise more efficient food production and distribution in the area; these bodies dealt with both national and local conditions in the attempt to support the national effort but also maintain local fairness and consent. These changes came as the war took away increasing local manpower, in terms of men enlisted and those killed, and made greater inroads into everyday civilian life; they were resolved by evolving narratives and local powers brought about by national legislation. In the final and most severe crisis in Essex, a combination of local and national narrative-construction helped to alleviate worries about the battlefield situation, while the food distribution crisis showed the limited effectiveness of local bodies as only regional and national rationing systems could restore an image of equality and fairness.

While equality of (often unwilling) sacrifice was increasingly important, there were still calls for voluntary efforts: local Volunteer units, allotments, war savings, and indeed the tribunals and food-related committees themselves were all run by volunteers giving their time and effort to support the local and national war effort. Voluntary and managed sacrifice co-existed, another wartime evolution and accumulation. The discourse of sacrifice evolved alongside the war narratives: with conscription and increasing losses, the image of those serving and killed evolved and the ideals the war embodied were rearticulated; war savings called for voluntary participation but not an outright sacrifice, overtaking charity as the elite-led use of private funds; meanwhile, leisure proved to be an essential aspect of civilian life, even in wartime.

Throughout the war, national and local elites promoted a believable set of narratives of the war's purpose and course, and of the evils of the nation's enemy, that enabled the public to understand the war as necessary and victory as both essential and likely. These narratives evolved over time to remain realistic; importantly, the meaning of wartime sacrifice underwent greater changes and local elites took on a greater role in ensuring equality of sacrifice. Beginning as the promoters of willing sacrifice, tapping into consent born of the war's narratives, these elites became increasingly responsible for maintaining equality and fairness in sacrifice as consent became more dependent on the 'economy of sacrifice'. The changes were often gradual, but could also be forged in moments of crisis; either way they saw accumulations in the roles of elites and the contents of some of the narratives. By November 1918, the war's purpose could be couched in apocalyptic or more Wilsonian language, the course of the war appeared to be fulfilling the narrative forged the previous winter, and numerous bodies formed of broadly representative local elites sought to ensure fairness in home front sacrifices. Each of these served to buttress support for the war and to maintain popular consent.

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Having looked at the importance of narratives and ideas of sacrifice, and the broader experience of the people of Essex in the Great War, it is worth taking a few final paragraphs to consider why this part of the war has disappeared from popular memory.<sup>8</sup> Fundamental to this process of forgetting is the way in which the war has been commemorated, which focuses on the war dead to the exclusion of other war

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<sup>8</sup> Equally, the Western Front is remembered to the exclusion of other theatres of war, see Eugene Michail, "'A Sting of Remembrance!': Collective memory and its forgotten armies' in Jessica Meyer (ed.), *British Popular Culture and the First World War*, History of Warfare, 48 (Leiden, 2008)

stories. Annette Becker has commented upon the semantic differences between the Anglophone ‘war memorial’ and francophone ‘*monument aux morts*’, stating that the former has a broader meaning that incorporates ‘both the memories of war and memories of the dead.’<sup>9</sup> Extending this idea, Jay Winter identifies Great War commemoration as a way for communities to tell and retell the story of the war ‘in its local, particular, parochial, familial form’.<sup>10</sup> In fact, only part of the local story of the war is represented in the ways that most local communities sought to remember the war in perpetuity. Looking at the war as experienced on the levels of personal or familial, local or communal, and national or imperial, it is primarily local and familial loss that is presented, sometimes alongside aspects of the national cause and usually accompanied by the language of Christian salvation, to the exclusion of other experiences.

That personal stories of the war were not widely displayed in public is not surprising as there were as many of them as there were people who lived through it. Just telling the personal stories of the individual war dead would have been overwhelming, but their individual positions as members of families and servicemen are publicly represented in the addition of the names of men who died overseas on the gravestones of other family members who died before, during and after the war. In this way, men like Frederick Knight from Galleywood or the Black brothers from Buckhurst Hill are commemorated alongside their families although

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<sup>9</sup> Annette Becker, ‘War memorials: a legacy of Total War?’ in Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler (ed), *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861–1871* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 657. This refers to the US Civil War and contemporaneous European wars, but the semantic distinction remained in the twentieth century.

<sup>10</sup> Jay Winter, ‘Forms of kinship and remembrance in the aftermath of the Great War’ in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 40.

buried overseas; many families who could afford to buy plots and gravestones remembered their dead sons, husbands and brothers this way, making a 'surrogate grave'<sup>11</sup> of an actual grave and adding the war dead into an existing site of mourning. Within the home, the memory of the war lived on in each survivor, whether they served or not, while its physical presence could come in war wounds brought home by survivors (or actions brought on by psychological wounds) and reminders of it in service medals, relics of war service or life on the home front, mementos of those killed, or wartime letters and diaries.

The local story of the war might be seen as represented by war memorials, but this is to reduce local war experience to loss alone. Some war memorials, following the precedent of war shrines, record the names of those who served as well; this tells a broader story and continues the wartime mounting of servicemen on a pedestal as exemplars of sacrifice and honour, but still marks only absence, whether temporary or permanent. What of those who remained? That there was a broader local story is clear not only from this thesis, others like it, and the increasing number of books on Britain in the Great War, but also from contemporary representations. In Colchester, aspects of the local story were told in a *War Memorial Souvenir* volume, while Hornchurch historian Charles Perfect published a book on that town in the war years and East Ham's civic memoir, covering a longer period, included chapters on the war.<sup>12</sup> These devoted attention to home front activities and events such as

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<sup>11</sup> The phrase is commonly used in reference to war memorials, for example, Angela Gaffney, *Aftermath: remembering the Great War in Wales*, (Cardiff, 1998), p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> E. A Hunt (ed.), *Colchester War Memorial Souvenir* (Colchester, 1923); Charles T. Perfect, *Hornchurch during the Great War* (Colchester, 1920); Alfred Stokes *East Ham: from Village to Corporate Town* (East Ham, 1920 enlarged edn.), pp. 234-45. Other towns simply produced rolls of honour, such as *Roll of Men from Southend-on-Sea and District who Fell in the Great War, 1914-1919* (Southend,

charitable work, the presence of soldiers in the towns, German air raids, and food crises, as well as loss and commemoration. The story they told was of local sacrifice, but also of local voluntary civilian efforts and the effects of the war. Applying for war trophies in the first postwar months, other towns and large villages gave descriptions of their war stories; most could list the (requested) numbers of men killed from the area, but others went on to mention what were clearly felt to be key aspects of the local story of the war, ranging from munitions and recruiting achievements to the perils of life beneath the guns of the anti-aircraft defences of London and Harwich.<sup>13</sup> During the war and in its aftermath, Essex people knew that they were living through historic times at home as well as at the front.<sup>14</sup>

When communities, whether towns, villages or other bodies, came to produce war memorials they largely chose not to relate the story of their war. Some local memorials and publicly-displayed artifacts did recollect aspects of wartime life, such as the plaque in Ugley commemorating evacuation routes and the pieces of Zeppelin in Little Wigborough church, but most did not tell home front stories. Instead they presented lists of the men who gave the greatest sacrifice, those who did not return to tell their own stories. Some gave inscriptions recalling a wider war effort in broad terms and expressed the key words of the war's purpose and the

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1925), and an unpublished roll of all who served and those who died from Walthamstow.

<sup>13</sup> ERO, L/P 3/93, Material relating to war trophies.

<sup>14</sup> This was the reason for war diaries like Clark's and Reeve's (quoted above). In 1916, one local paper urged people to keep such diaries (*ECS*, 19/8/1916).

nation's cause: liberty, freedom, democracy.<sup>15</sup> Few explicitly stated what these were to be defended from: only one memorial mentions the enemy by name in its roll of men 'WHO FELL IN THE WAR AGAINST GERMAN AGGRESSION 1914 - 1918.'<sup>16</sup> At Great Holland, a memorial window commemorates those who died and 'HELPED SAVE THIS COUNTRY / FROM RUIN AND DESOLATION',<sup>17</sup> but such language is rare despite its prominence during the war. Religious language of redemption and sacrifice played a larger part: the dead 'MADE THE SUPREME SACRIFICE [...] THAT WE MIGHT LIVE IN PEACE AND FREEDOM'.<sup>18</sup>

Memorials sought to remind survivors and future generations not to forget the war and the local war dead. This had its starkest articulation at Arkesden, where a monument in the churchyard exhorts passers-by to:

REMEMBER!  
THE GREAT WAR 1914-1918  
AND THE MEN OF ARKESDEN  
WHO WENT  
AND WHO RETURNED NOT.<sup>19</sup>

On the county's war memorials, it is primarily those 'who returned not' who were commemorated, seldom those who returned and almost never those who saw out the war at home.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For example: *UK National Inventory of War Memorials* [website]. <<http://www.ukniwm.org.uk/>> (hereafter UKNIWM) records for 'Colchester', 'Grays', 'Men of Barking' and 'Brightlingsea', accessed 15/3/2010.

<sup>16</sup> UKNIWM, 'St John the Baptist Church Tablet WW1 and WW2', accessed 12/3/2010.

<sup>17</sup> UKNIWM, 'All Saints Church Windows – WW1', accessed 16/3/2010.

<sup>18</sup> UKNIWM, 'Little Burstead', accessed 15/3/2010.

<sup>19</sup> 'Roll of Honour – Essex' [website]. <<http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Essex/>> accessed 6/9/2010.

<sup>20</sup> Colchester was an exception in this, with those who did not fight also mentioned on the borough memorial.

With remembrance a key part of Britain's collective consciousness of the Great War and local war memorials people's first point of contact with their communities' experiences of the war, it is not surprising that this message of loss is the main facet of local memory of the conflict, especially as it slips out of the range of living memory. Perhaps that is right and it is the dead whom we should remember; the danger is, though, that the knowledge of war deaths without any contextual understanding makes those losses appear futile. Without a sense of why they fought and died, and why civilians continued to support the war, the losses and continuation of the war appear pointless or baffling.<sup>21</sup> This was not how it was seen at the time; perhaps the meaning of the war was self-evident enough to Essex men and women in 1919 to need no explicit recitation and recording. That is certainly not the case today and this thesis seeks to fill in some of the gaps and to make sense of why people continued to support the war despite increasing hardships and the growing death-toll of names that now appear on the county's war memorials.

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<sup>21</sup> This is certainly the implication of Stephen Kull and Clay Ramsey's finding that casualty figures divorced from a clearly stated and successful mission are viewed negatively, whereas with these two factors casualties are acceptable to US civilians, see their 'The myth of the reactive public: American public attitudes on military fatalities in the post-Cold War period' in Philip Everts and Pierangelo Isernia (eds), *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force* (London, 2001), pp. 222-3. John Horne has noted the difficulty even those who lived through it had in remembering why the Great War had seemed such as existential contest, 'Introduction' in his (ed.) *A Companion to the First World War* (Oxford, 2010), pp. xxiv.

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