THE GOSPEL IN ACTION: THE YMCA, SOCIAL EVANGELISM AND THE RELIGION OF THE BRITISH ARMY IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Kathryn Emily Mai White

Pembroke College

University of Oxford

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And now abide faith, hope, love, these three: but the greatest of these is love.

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Abstract

This thesis utilises the case study of the Young Men's Christian Association's (YMCA) First World War work to explore the process of social evangelism and the influence it had on wartime ministry and the religion of soldiers. The YMCA is a charity dedicated to providing social service and youth development with a Christian ethos. It was founded in Britain in 1844, quickly expanding through nineteenth-century missionary networks. While already garnering international support, the First World War provided it with an unprecedented opportunity for expansion, reaching new demographics of men and enabling a new contemplation of faith, against the context of the war's societal upheaval.

The wartime work of the YMCA primarily constituted a network of recreation huts in which their trifold mission to serve the 'body, mind and spirit' of soldiers could be enacted through a social space in which entertainment, education and fellowship could be cared for. These were established across the war's active fronts, extending from Salisbury to Sinai, following the soldiers of the British Army, from across the Empire, wherever they served. This work was led by the War Emergency Committee under the leadership of General Secretary Sir Arthur Keysall Yapp, developing a highly organised international network that earnt it support from military, political and religious authorities.

The existential questions posed by war opened up a new consideration of religion among soldiers and invoked a 'trench religion', which sought to support men through the spiritual challenges of conflict. The YMCA was uniquely positioned to support this, as a non-denominational and non-proselytising Christian body that welcomed those of all faiths and churches, alongside those of no belief. Through its open and

welcoming social support, its workers were able to share a pragmatic and inclusive presentation of Christianity that was rooted in morality, contributing to the developing conception of social evangelism and bringing together a coalition of faith backgrounds through common worship.

This thesis begins with an examination of the YMCA's hut network, its celebration of domesticity, and ability to overcome the logistical challenges of war. It then places the YMCA within the context of early-twentieth century mission and ecumenism, demonstrating the influences that guided its warwork, and the impact the Association had on Christianity both within and beyond Britain. Of particular note is the discussion of the YMCA's role in the development of ecumenism and inter-faith work, working through the overtones of imperialism. The thesis then moves to study the theology and liturgy of the YMCA and its presentation of a faith grounded in the face of Jesus Christ, recognisable and relatable, and comparisons to the experience of the soldiers. Finally, the post-war period will be considered; a time of challenge and introspection for the Association whose reintegration into civilian society mirrored the disjuncture felt by many returning servicemen.

Introduction

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) provided soldiers of the First World War with a consistent network of support that cared for their mind, body and spirit wherever they served. From the training camps to the trenches, the YMCA's recreation huts offered temporary homes for relaxation and refreshment: welcome respite amid the conflict. However, the significance of the Association lay not in mere social support, but in its holistic mission that integrated morale-boosting practices with education and above all a spirit of pragmatic, ecumenical Christianity that strove for the self-betterment of the men it served. The YMCA was not alone in any of its strands of work, yet it was the weaving of them together, along with the vast extent of its network, that gave the organisation its unique standing in the British armed forces.

It is not hyperbolic to state that every soldier serving in the British Army would have encountered the YMCA at some point in their service between 1914 and 1918. With recreation huts and leave hostels, as well as refreshment counters beside train stations and field ambulances, the YMCA sought to provide a continuous line of support. Its operations rapidly became known as 'hutwork', the pre-fabricated wooden hut becoming symbolic of its facilities. Under the management of the War Emergency Committee the Association ultimately spanned five continents, with work stretching from Canada and Australia, to Belgium, Mesopotamia and Sudan. Its work had not begun in war, but in the mid-nineteenth century urban missions of London, developing as a means of Christian social ministry that grew throughout the British Empire and the Anglophone missionary movements. Yet it was through the challenge of war and the mass-mobilisation of a civilian army that the Association was

transformed and energised, growing far more rapidly, engaging with far more people, and earning a far greater level of respect in society than it ever had before.

When George Williams first established the YMCA in 1844 he had Christian mission as its impulse. He started small, seeking to support 'the promotion of the spiritual welfare of Young Men engaged in the Drapery and other Trades'.[1] His focus was originally London, working from one premises near Blackfriars Bridge. This industrial mission was, in the words of William Creese and John C. Symons, the Association's original secretaries, a reaction to their 'deep concern and anxiety upon the almost totally-neglected spiritual condition of the mass of young men in the pursuits of business'.[2] In particular, they sought to 'discountenance immorality and vice, and to promote a spirit of serious enquiry', principles that would stay with the organisation throughout its history.[3] From the outset the YMCA's mission was one grounded in pragmatism, using the proliferation of the Christian message to attend to a perceived moral crisis. For Williams and the original twelve members of the YMCA, it was their founding compulsion that the benefits derived from self-discipline and moral virtue could improve the lives of the urban working classes and deter them from that which they considered sinful.

While Williams' initial priority was those working within the drapery industry, the YMCA soon expanded throughout London and then across the United Kingdom, in addition to the British Empire, serving men from all manner of industries, before also coming to support the British armed forces. As the nascent Association grew in size, it also diversified in operations. In the early days the focus had been on prayer meetings,

[1] William Creese and John C Symons, undated letter, reproduced in JE Hodder Williams, *The Father of the Red Triangle: The Life of Sir George Williams, Founder of the YMCA,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), p. 96.
[2] *ibid*
[3] *ibid*

but it was soon realised that more men would be encouraged to attend if social activities were also offered. The YMCA historian Clyde Binfield identifies that it was under the lead of Williams, who applied himself '*mutatis mutandis*, to the founding of a new YMCA', that the work was expanded and adapted to the presenting needs and challenges.[4] Refreshments and recreation would become mainstays of the YMCA's work and go on to shape much of its provision over the subsequent 150 years. The Association sought a balance that would encourage men through the door with comforts and entertainment but that, once inside, would support them through education of what it meant to live a Christian life. Soon, sports and games gained prominence in YMCA programmes which supported camaraderie and health for the men. Rambling clubs and football teams were formed, as well as activities such as dominoes and pool which could be played within the YMCA centres. It was through this effort that YMCA gymnasiums were first established, which have become an iconic part of the YMCA's work, particularly in the USA. These were not mere advertisements or fundraising schemes, however, but rather efforts by which the YMCA sought to improve the health and wellbeing of young men.

These social developments were central to the YMCA's mission and developed as the organisation found its feet in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was this holistic mission that came to characterise the YMCA's approach, considering the whole being of the men, not just spiritually but also physically and mentally. In 1891 this was codified into the association's red triangle emblem, consisting of three equally supporting sides, which were initially labelled with their representative foci of 'spirit', 'mind', and 'body'. Such a perspective saw the YMCA support the youth to become

[4] Clyde Binfield, *George Williams in Context: A Portrait of the Founder of the YMCA,* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), p. 17.

good workers and healthy men, as well as good Christians. By the time of its application in the First World War, the YMCA's Red Triangle emblem became an iconic signifier of cherished comfort and a familiar reassurance that accompanied them throughout their service. The value of the YMCA to soldiers is perhaps best described by Field Marshal Edmund Allenby who would have been familiar with the Association's work during his command both of the Western Front at Ypres and Arras, and also in the Palestine Campaign as the YMCA secretaries accompanied the advance from the desert. He celebrated how 'their labours have done much to keep up the morale, mental and physical efficiency of my troops', noting the holistic care provided by the Association's staff.[5] He commended in particular the 'broad-minded Christianity, self-regardless devotion to work, a spirit of daring enterprise and sound business guidance [that] have built up an organisation which has earned the gratitude of the Empire.'[6] Praise of this kind from figures of Allenby's seniority is as close to a measure of success for the YMCA's mission as is possible, indicating the high regard with which the military authorities viewed the Association's work. This level of recognition speaks to the value of the YMCA's recreation huts in providing holistic care and alludes to the centrality of the Association in soldiers' wartime experiences. Such a centrality has been thus far overlooked in the history of the First World War. This thesis readdresses the importance of the organisation, demonstrating its significance at the intersection of social and religious histories of the First World War.

The placement of this research across this distinction is necessary to gain a full understanding of the YMCA's work and the all-round care it delivered. The social, through support for morale, and the religious, through its delivery of a Christian

[5] Edmund Allenby, 'Appreciations', YMCA Archive, Cadbury Research Library (CRL), University of Birmingham, YMCA/K/5/1.
[6] *ibid*

mission, along with the theological analysis of its religious teachings, are each significant aspects of the YMCA story. This is not to say that they are discrete aspects of its work; it was in the nature of the YMCA's commitment to pragmatic Christianity – grounded in action and active principle – to contribute to a social ministry in which the recreational provisions were a vital tool. Under the strains of war it was said that the giving of a cup of tea could have as much power as a sermon, illustrating the spiritual power bound in temporal acts. It is therefore important for this study to be interdisciplinary, bringing together different aspects of the historiography under the example of the YMCA. Although the Association's huts were considered to be a "ubiquitous" feature of the First World War, their place in the written history has been comparatively marginal, often considered only partially in geography or provision. Specific partial studies include Ailsa Grant Ferguson's work on performance in the Shakespeare Hut for New Zealanders in London, Edmund King's analysis of the diary of writer-turned-hut library secretary Ernest Hornung, and Adam Park's research into the YMCA's boxing program.[7] Each of these make valuable contributions which I have incorporated, but in taking only a partial view are limited in any ability to assess the overall mission of the YMCA.

More thematic analyses include that of Peter Grant in his study of First World War philanthropy. He placed the YMCA's war work within the trend of 'late-Victorian concepts of educational improvement, manliness and athleticism', highlighting its development of 'the healthy body and mind'.[8] This is valuable context for the

[7] Ailsa Grant Ferguson, *The Shakespeare Hut: A Story of Performance, Memory and Identity, 1916-1923*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); Edmund GC King, 'EW Hornung's Unpublished Diary, the YMCA, and the Reading Soldier in the First World War', *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, 57 (3) (2013), pp. 361-388; Adam Park, 'Fighting Spirit: World War I and the YMCA's Allied Boxing Program', *Religion and American Culture* 29 (3) (2019), pp. 391-430.
[8] Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilising Charity,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 12.

Association's work, yet Grant primarily deals with the Association's charitable fundraising in terms of the impact of the given money and underestimates the size of the YMCA's operation, suggesting that there were 10 huts in the Ypres Salient, when at its peak there were closer to 80. Others have studied the YMCA's social impact and its role in supporting morale, although often based on its material provisions. Jeffrey Reznick has done this in the context of caregiving, citing the importance of Christian charities in particular as offering vital welfare support. Reznick utilises the same context of 'pre-war ideals of male paternal authority' as Grant, but to an increased level places the YMCA alongside the similar organisations of the Church Army and Salvation Army.[9] These charities provided comparable recreation huts and are useful contributions to the study, but by combining the three, Reznick loses the singularity of the YMCA's ecumenical position and the ethos of its work, instead focusing on the commonalities of the provisions of the recreation huts. Contrastingly, Emma Hanna has analysed the distinct role of the YMCA in incorporating a moralised education within its entertainment.[10] However, she has limited her evidence to the Association's cinema and music programmes, thereby neglecting the consideration of how this integrated into the wider support schemes. Perhaps the most complete attempt at writing the wartime history of the YMCA is Michael Snape's lengthy introduction to *The Back Parts of War,* the memoir of Barclay Baron, the YMCA's regional secretary in Ypres.[11] However, given its form as an introduction it gives only a brief overview, which is limited in its scope by the need to situate the narrative around Baron. This results in a weighting towards the Western Front and in particular the story of the

[9] Jeffrey S Reznick, *Healing the Nations: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain during the Great War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 5.
[10] Emma Hanna, 'Putting the Moral into Morale: YMCA Cinemas on the Western Front, 1914-1918', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35 (4) (2015), pp. 615-630.
[11] Michael Snape, 'Introduction', in Michael Snape (ed.), *The Back Parts of War,* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), pp. 3-100.

YMCA in Belgium in the final two years of the war. Both parts of this book – Snape's and Baron's – mark important contributions to YMCA scholarship, yet could not be considered exhaustive works. This thesis will build on the research of all these historians in order to provide for the first time an overview of the YMCA's work in the First World War.

In addition to providing an institutional history, this thesis will also situate the YMCA in the wider historiographies of the social and religious experiences of the First World War to demonstrate the importance of the Association in these narratives. This will utilise works such as Jessica Meyer's analysis of masculinities in soldiers' personal writing and JG Fuller's wide-reaching study of troop morale, relating their conclusions to the experience of the YMCA. These both investigate the culture collectively developed and experienced by soldiers in the British Army to determine the motivating mechanics of morale. At its most basic, Fuller has broken this down into a two-pronged focus on 'primary group' and 'legitimate demand' morale, the former sustained by the soldier's social connections and those to whom he felt loyalty fighting alongside him, and the latter the soldier's commitment to the cause of war. When using these lenses to assess morale the YMCA is observed to play a role in both, developing camaraderie in the huts and educating soldiers on the motivating causes, both patriotic and religious. It will also be acknowledged that the experience of these themes was not universal and could depend on the theatre of war. This has been demonstrated by James Kitchen through his focus on the Palestine Campaign which suffered considerable and specific challenges to the maintenance of morale. Kitchen particularly explains the relationship in morale between physical and psychological factors which is useful in understanding where and why the YMCA focused its efforts in different circumstances. Kitchen goes as far as to call the YMCA a 'vital prop' in

supporting soldiers' morale in Sinai and Palestine, but is comparatively critical of its religious mission, claiming that it lacked 'religious direction'.[12] This I contend is the limitation of viewing the YMCA's work from only one angle; in this case the structure of morale. It leaves a lack of understanding about why the Association operated in the way that it did, beyond and between churches, units and nations.

It therefore follows that it is limited to equate the impact of the YMCA's work merely with morale and it is this which the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis attempts to overcome. Although my work will demonstrate this for the first time as a study of the YMCA, I am by no means the first to connect the social and the religious as a basis for study. Keith Robbins has argued that 'churches do not exist in vacuo' and must be studied within the context of their 'culture and society'.[13] Dominic Erdozain has produced a comprehensive study of the rise of leisure in the Victorian era set against the perceived crisis of religion in Britain, arguing that 'social morality' became 'the salvation economy' of the late nineteenth century, fuelled by moral panics and polemic campaigns against a series of social vices.[14] He cites alcohol and gambling as two particular examples which came to be characterised as sin itself by the Christians who campaigned against them. This influence is explicitly observed in the YMCA's huts where both were prohibited. Morality was seen by the Association as the important caveat to recreation. It was not in its interests to provide entertainment for its own sake, but rather as a means through which men could be introduced to moral lessons and convinced of the value of following a moral code that could inspire self-improvement. Erdozain argues for the importance of the YMCA in his study,

[12] James E Kitchen, *The British Imperial Army in the Middle East: Morale and Military Identity in the Sinai and Palestine Campaigns, 1916-18*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 88.
[13] Keith Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: The Christian Church, 1900-2000,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 4.
[14] Dominic Erdozain, *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Religion,* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), p. 6.

acknowledging how it 'was an organisation poised between the rarefied atmosphere of the churches and an elemental world of popular leisure' as a 'dynamic example' of 'the engine-rooms of Victorian piety'.[15] This is essential context for the work the YMCA would go on to achieve in the First World War, developing its Victorian era urban missions into the network of huts that would sustain soldiers. Through Erdozain's analysis the connection is made between moralised recreation and the impact on religion, equating a life lived morally with Christian righteousness.

Erdozain's presentation of social vices as sin places the YMCA into the process of secularisation, a subject that has been under contentious debate for the last forty years. Callum Brown has identified this as a dual process by which society has become more secular since the mid-nineteenth century. The first of these is 'secularisation of the mind' which has been revealed by Enlightenment and science.[16] The second is the growing 'multiplicity of views of the world' through industrialisation, that alienated populations from the church.[17] This is not to align secularisation with modernisation, but to argue it is rather a separate process that has resulted from a culture that has increasingly turned away from God. Brown's focus is largely structural, emphasising the decline in church attendance and reliance on ecclesiastical authorities. Clive Field has also taken this approach, analysing the quantitative effects of a decline in church-going, which he argues were a 'perennial anxiety' among British churches, even within periods now considered to have been well-attended.[18] In framing secularisation in this way Brown and Field neglect to appreciate less measurable expressions of personal religion or organisations such as the YMCA that worked in support of Christian faith,

[15] Erdozain, *The Problem of Pleasure,* ps. 119 and 221.
[16] Callum G Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain,* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), p. 9.
[17] Brown, *Religion and Society,* p. 10.
[18] Clive D Field, '"The Faith Society?" Quantifying Religious Belonging in Edwardian Britain', *Journal of Religious History* 37 (2013), pp. 39-63, (p. 40.).

even through their study of the First World War. Jeffrey Cox, however, refutes that such emphasis on the concept of secularisation is necessary to understand religious change, arguing instead that it is wielded as a 'rhetorical weapon'.[19] His argument is more sympathetic to John Wolffe's, who asserts that there remained an 'underlying religiosity' in many, even those who rejected active church attendance.[20] It was this sense that the YMCA sought to develop, revealing to the men the extent of their own ingrained belief through 'the practical and the communal', rather than the formal church-going, which is in turn reinforced by JCD Clark who also stressed 'the persistence of religious belief' despite 'decreasing formal religious practice', which enabled him to identify that 'working-class participation could be substantially higher than was once thought', as in the YMCA.[21] This contradicts the bleak image of secularisation presented by Brown and offers a more useful presentation for religion through which the YMCA can be studied. Peter Catterall has taken this further in his characterisation of 'belief without belonging', a useful lens through which to see men's engagement with the YMCA as a place where Christianity operated beyond the bounds of the church.[22] This thesis will not seek to add directly to secularisation scholarship, instead utilising the arguments of both Erdozain and Catterall to consider the process as one by which secular morality was brought within Christian teaching and despite which religiosity did not necessarily decline, but rather was reframed away from regular church attendance. Although these historians largely deal with the pre-war

[19] Jeffrey Cox, 'Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularisation: A Progress Report', in Callum G Brown and Michael Snape (eds.), *Secularisation in the Christian World,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), pp. 13-26, (ps. 29 and 15).
[20] John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945,* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 92.
[21] JCD Clark, 'Secularisation and Modernisation: The Failure of a 'Grand Narrative'', *The Historical Journal* 55 (1) (2012), pp. 161-194, (ps. 183 and 166-167).
[22] Peter Catterall, 'Church Decline, Secularism and Ecumenism', *Contemporary Record* 5 (2) (1991), pp. 276-290, (p. 287).

period, this provides important context into which the YMCA worked in the First World War.

Another process that has been argued to be declinist is that of ecumenism, a developing trend in the early twentieth century. Catterall argues that in a trend away from formalised church-going, and thereby the 'increasing difficulty of achieving frontal growth', churches instead looked towards 'lateral growth' through inter-denominational development.[23] Paul Avis has identified the 1910 World Missionary Conference as the 'inauguration of the world-wide ecumenical movement', an event which will be studied in much more depth in this thesis as it provides many of the seeds which germinated during the First World War.[24] Brian Stanley has studied this period extensively, tracing the progression in inter-denominationalism as increasingly involving more churches in co-operation. The term ecumenism was in its infancy at this time, coming to represent both inter-denominationalism (organised churches working together) and non-denominationalism (Christianity without the bounds of specific churches). The YMCA embodied both, especially in its war work, when it came to involve more people from more denominations than it ever had before. Its non-denominational standpoint is what made the Association unique, setting itself as distinct from specific church authorities and engaging from across perceived divides. It did not, however, seek to replace the need for churches, instead positioning itself as an auxiliary to a man's own church, or, as in the wartime vernacular, a communication trench between a man's life and his church. Such a position was not without contention from the churches, yet through the years of the First World War in particular, greater support was given for its ability to cross the created divides to engage men with

[23] Catterall, 'Church Decline', p. 283.
[24] Paul Avis, 'Anglicanism and Christian Unity in the Twentieth Century', in Jeremy Morris (ed.), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism Volume IV: Global Western Anglicanism, c. 1910-present,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 186-213, (p. 187).

Christianity. This thesis will see co-existence and co-operation as major themes in the YMCA's work, offering a perspective of ecumenism that was not merely seeking lateral growth for Christian belief, but rather a new means by which to engage individuals with faith and the faithful with community.

The religious culture in which the YMCA developed in the United Kingdom overwhelmingly constituted of Nonconformist Protestant churches. Wolffe identifies the strength of 'Nonconformists in cities such as Birmingham', in the late nineteenth century, where they were able to establish a 'civic gospel', which saw the urban space 'as a large community fulfilling the Word of God'.[25] There are clear consistencies with the mission of the YMCA, suggesting a mutually fulfilling co-operation within British cities leading into the First World War. It is therefore understandable that the YMCA's leadership was dominated by Nonconformists, predominantly from the Congregational and various branches of the Methodist churches. Wolffe and Robbins have both observed the 'competing networks' between 'church and chapel' or Anglican and Nonconformist influences.[26] Robbins has rooted this in 'the desire to control space' which contributed to 'competitive church building'.[27] This tense context explains why the YMCA's inter-denominationalism was hampered as it came into the outbreak of war. It had gained a reputation as being Non-conformist or "low church" that was difficult to move past, perpetuated by its lack of Anglican ritual. However, this would be overcome throughout the years of war, by working to much better involve the Church of England in its work and to gain the support of the established church's hierarchy as a collaborator and not competitor of the Anglican Church Army, the Church's arm of social mission whose practice held much in common with the YMCA.

[25] Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain,* p. 57.
[26] Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain,* p, 96.
[27] Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales,* p. 25.

Restrictions still persisted to engaging the Roman Catholic church, but some level of collaboration was possible where it would have felt impossible in the pre-war years. Although church authorities did not approve of involvement, at a local level there is evidence of Catholic soldiers making regular use of the huts. This is a further indication of how it was the shifting culture during war and the increased work of the Association that enabled broad-based ecumenism for the first time, even if it was not comprehensive.

Understanding the shift in societal understandings of the YMCA necessitates combining the Victorian and Edwardian histories of religion and society discussed above with those scholars of wartime religion. This is a field that has undergone considerable progression in recent decades, developing from the structural church histories of Albert Marrin, ER Norman and Alan Wilkinson, towards those like Adrian Gregory who have integrated religion into studies of British society during the war, and to those who have considered the impact of religion on individuals shaped by the conflict. This latter category is typified by Michael Snape, whose seminal work *God and the British Soldier* forms the basis for subsequent studies determining soldiers' religious reactions to war. Snape's placement of the focus onto the soldiers themselves is an important reorientation away from the ecclesiastical framework, which will be continued here in my study of how soldiers engaged with the YMCA. The impact of this, Snape argues, is the demonstration of 'the importance of religion and religious agencies in the all-important morale of the British soldier', working to help sustain him in the fight.[28] In prioritising the thematic impact of religion on soldiers Snape also diverts the historiographical focus away from contending whether the army at large

[28] Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 17.

won or lost faith as a result of war. Similarly, this thesis will make no attempt to quantify levels of belief. As with the secularisation debate, it is impossible to determine what definitively constitutes a religious person from the written record alone. There is also no strong evidence from the YMCA or the army chaplains claiming that men were turning away from Christianity in any measurable trends. My basis for the army's religiosity will therefore follow Richard Schweitzer who has argued that levels of belief could be placed on a 'spectrum model' which 'illuminates elements of … both true believers and pure atheists in the trenches'.[29] Some men did lose their faith as a result of the strains of conflict, yet others felt equally called to God by similar experiences. With this fundamental in place, this thesis will instead analyse the type of Christianity that was popular at the front.

Historians, including Snape, have observed the distinct character of religion during the First World War. The soldier's religion was simple and direct, equipping the men with lessons that related to their war experience. Religious figures sought to answer the pertinent questions of how God permitted war and what would happen to a soldier after death. In exploring this area, this thesis will follow those including Stuart Bell who have studied both the style and content of religious teachings at the front, determining especially which biblical passages and language were compelling. His precise analysis of terms, particularly around the 'God of Battles' and 'Lord of Hosts', bring theological understanding to clarify First World War intentions pertaining to the nature of God.[30] My thesis will develop this in relation to the liturgy as presented by the YMCA, using the same approach to determine not only what the Association was preaching, but also the meaning behind it. In weaving together theology and history

[29] Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt among British and American Great War Soldiers,* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), p. xxi.
[30] Stuart Bell, *Faith in Conflict: The Impact of the Great War on the Faith of the People of Britain,* (Solihull: Helion and Company, 2017), p. 49.

in this way, this thesis will move beyond the social histories to place the institutional narrative within the wider context of religious interpretation, demonstrating the distinct conceptualisation of Christianity that was favoured during the First World War.

To facilitate my assessments of the impact of the YMCA on religion the scope of the considered evidence will be limited to that of the YMCA in its work for soldiers of the British Army. This work, co-ordinated by the War Emergency Committee under the leadership of General Secretary Sir Arthur Keysall Yapp, formed the majority of the Association's work between the years of 1914 and 1918. To a lesser extent the YMCA also provided huts at naval bases and owing to the success of the war scheme, a parallel programme of recreation canteens for munitions workers was begun in June 1915. In support of soldiers, the YMCA also ran a relatives' scheme, whereby the families of hospitalised soldiers on the Western Front could travel under the organisation of the Association to the French base cities and be accommodated in the Association's dedicated hostels. These were all valuable contributions to the war effort, yet were subsidiary to the main army programme in terms of this thesis' themes. This study will also focus specifically on the British Army, consisting of soldiers from both the United Kingdom and the Empire. It will not, however, consider the sister organisation of the American YMCA who provided their own independent hut programme, initially supporting French soldiers before the United States' entry into the war. Jeffrey Copeland and Yan Xu's edited volume *The YMCA at War* covers this in some depth.[31] The contextual environment of Christianity in the USA, not to mention the racial segregation of its huts, means that the history of the American YMCA was distinct and

[31] Jeffrey Copeland and Yan Xu (eds.), *The YMCA at War: Collaboration and Conflict in the World Wars,* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018).

studying its impact requires use of a separate archive of sources. I am not best placed to achieve this, so will instead focus on the British perspective, dominated by concerns and themes developed through the imperial experience over the preceding century. My research will look collectively at the experiences of soldiers from Britain, as well as from the then-imperial dominions and colonies, acknowledging that these could at times be discrete and conflicting. There is a natural bias in the primary evidence towards accounts in English, both through translation limitations and archival access. Engaging with records from Indian soldiers has been a particular limitation, although this has been supplemented by the work of David Omissi in this area.[32] Historians such as Shrabani Basu are better placed than I to offer a full analysis of Indian soldiers' experiences of the war.

Understanding the work and the experience of the YMCA in the First World War utilises two perspectives of primary research: that of the Association itself and those who interacted with it. The YMCA's archive held at the Cadbury Research Library at the University of Birmingham holds a wealth of information produced by the Association, including the personal correspondence of its organisers and its publications. Tracking the YMCA's development throughout the war is best achieved through the *YM British Empire Weekly*, the Association's weekly newspaper which was produced from the start of 1915 for distribution in the huts. Its target audience was both the YMCA workers and the soldiers themselves, producing articles that appealed to both. In September 1917 this was replaced by the *Red Triangle*, a monthly journal that, given the war's increasing paper shortage, was not distributed in the huts free of charge, but only to subscribers. This shift meant that its articles became more

[32] David E. Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18,* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

targeted towards the YMCA staff and its members, many of whom were its middle-class donors who were often not those directly engaged in the military. The journal was supplemented by the smaller *Red Triangle Bulletin* which contained brief news articles, largely pertaining to where new huts were being opened alongside financial and organisational notices. An additional insight into the Association's development is also given in national newspapers and trench journals, notably the *Times* where advertisements and requests for funding were regularly printed. The operational side is therefore somewhat straightforward, even if it must be pieced together without the benefit of comprehensive lists of locations of work. The memoirs of regional secretaries, including Snape's publication of Baron's, in addition to those including General Secretary Yapp's *The Romance of the Red Triangle* and G Sherwood Eddy's *With Our Soldiers in France* help round this out. These are in turn supported by a number of diaries and manuscripts held in archives of those with oversight for both individual huts and entire regional sectors during the war.

More complicated and disparate, however, are the perspectives of the soldiers who used the huts. The reliance here is predominantly on letters and diaries, largely those held at the Imperial War Museum and the Australian War Memorial. These suffer a selection bias of being both in English and often from better educated men, who would write more often and more deeply of their experiences. A further bias stems from those who either donated the writing themselves, or from their families who did so, as only those preserved and made accessible in archives could be consulted. It is also important to note the works of chaplains, external to the YMCA but collaborators in its work, sharing the role of engaging soldiers with faith. It is through these perspectives, too, that the individuality of the YMCA's worship can be identified, through its liturgy and ecumenism. The memoirs and diaries of chaplains provide a

good intermediary perspective which illustrates the wider religious setting into which the YMCA fitted, noting both the compatibility and tensions the Association had with the churches.

This thesis takes a thematic approach, explaining the narrative story of the YMCA's hutwork through the various impacts it made on soldiers, churches, and society. Chapter one introduces the environment of the YMCA and the function of its recreation huts, placing the reader in the social experience of the soldier. It explains the main functions of the typical hut and the structure of the work, but does so through the lens of domesticity, highlighting the temporary homes created across the theatres of war. This social history focus looks at the physical hut space as a canteen and replacement living room, as well as the environment created by the hut staff, notably both male and female, to set the tone of an organisation that existed alongside yet distinct from the military structure. Through a focus on the ways the YMCA supported troop morale this chapter will also look at sports and games, theatre and cinema, showing the ways camaraderie was developed through social activities. These strands will then be brought together through the example of Christmas, illustrating the way the social and domestic could engage with the religious within the hut space.

Chapter two takes this further, investigating the ways the YMCA was able to overcome the challenges presented by the conflict and the different circumstances across the theatres of war. It demonstrates how there was no one singular experience of the YMCA, its provision evolving throughout the war and throughout the geographies in which it operated to suit the situations faced by soldiers. It deals with logistical challenges, but also auxiliary collaboration with the military, which progressed throughout the war both reacting to the Association's successes of the war, and facilitating further development. This chapter takes a chronological approach,

spotlighting five geographic examples from throughout the years of war, and connecting together the lessons learnt in the face of the various challenges with which the YMCA grappled. The journey is charted from the Salisbury Plain base camps, which were among the first established by the Association after the outbreak of war and which often constituted soldiers' first interactions with the YMCA. It then moves to Cairo, which was often the first city visited by Australian soldiers after they left their homeland, where the YMCA had to establish an exciting programme of entertainment that operated as counter-attractions to the domestically available recreation, which the Association often viewed as immoral, dominated as the city was by brothels. It then transfers across to Gallipoli, as many soldiers did. It was here that the YMCA first operated its huts under the active threat of artillery fire, thereby presenting significant challenges to the Association's capabilities. The lessons gained here became useful for those secretaries who were later serving in the Ypres Salient, finding ways to work both under fire and within the trench network, and bringing its service forward from the base camps. Finally, the chapter progresses to Palestine where, unlike on the Western Front, the army fought a campaign of movement, meaning that the YMCA had to reformulate its work to be mobile and flexible, as well as to operate amid severe supply constraints. In bringing these together, the development process of the YMCA can be charted, alongside the growing respect between the Association and the military authorities, indicating their increasing reliance on the organisation as it was given ever greater responsibility.

Chapters three and four change the perspective, exploring the YMCA's war work within longer narratives of British religious history. Together they analyse how the YMCA is placed in the broader context, through its ideology, motivations, and individuality as an organisation within the evolving religious and social developments

from the late Victorian era. Chapter three looks at the YMCA Christian mission, grounded in nineteenth-century missionary principles and working towards a presentation of practical Christianity that connected religious teachings with social morality. Although the YMCA took this to a greater audience through its war work and delivered its mission with a new sense of urgency, this chapter explains its progression through its first seven decades, engaging with the challenges and debates that shaped the Association's overarching mission as it was experienced by the time of the First World War. Having established the theoretical basis of the YMCA's missionary work, this chapter then focuses on two examples with which the Association battled throughout the war. The issues of alcohol and sexual morality were seen by the YMCA, in addition to many other largely Christian campaign groups, to be a direct threat to the efficacy and efficiency of soldiers at war. Beyond the social provision, the huts became spaces of moral ideals, aiming to introduce soldiers to a sober way of life, in both senses of the term.

Related to its mission and missionary influence, chapter four discusses the YMCA's pioneering position in the development of ecumenism in Britain. The Association was ecumenical in a dual inter-denominational and non-denominational sense, bringing together men from different church backgrounds in common worship without ascribing itself to any one allegiance. This was the unique characteristic of the YMCA that enabled it to have a much broader reach than the Anglican Church Army. The Association positioned itself as working with the churches and not seeking to replace them, a point that was not always without contention. Although the YMCA had a long-standing commitment to ecumenism that predated the term itself, in the pre-war years it had largely been constrained to the nonconformist churches, albeit with some more individualised connections including notably the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall

Davidson, who had served as a Vice-President of the YMCA in 1914. Through its involvement in the First World War this was broadened to encompass a far greater range, including much collaboration with the Church of England. In addition to discussing the successes of this work, this chapter will also acknowledge the persistent limitations, notably with Roman Catholicism. Finally, this chapter will also discuss the Association's inter-faith work, namely through engagement with Jewish and Muslim soldiers. This is a particular area of YMCA ingenuity where men from across the Empire could be involved in its work without threat of proselytisation.

Chapter five changes the lens again to study the theology and liturgy that guided the YMCA's war work. It looks at how missionary lessons were applied and ecumenism upheld, creating a presentation of religion that was welcoming, supportive, and tailored to the needs of soldiers. It will begin with an investigation of the way the huts' material provisions could connect with religious lessons of love and care, forming the foundation of the Association's formulation of social evangelism. The bringing together of official and unofficial religion in this way enabled a practical education in Christianity that did not rely on preaching so much as it did pragmatic lessons through active service. From this underpinning, the chapter then moves to scrutinise specific examples of religious teachings in the huts through the biblical teachings favoured in prayer services, hymn concerts, and conversations with hut workers. This will especially highlight presentations of Christianity that related directly to the lives of soldiers, first through the military metaphors as seen in Paul's letters to the early Christians, and then through the centrality of Jesus' sacrifice in soldiers' understanding of Christianity. Of specific interest, this illustrates the distinct focus on Jesus' death on Good Friday over his Easter Sunday resurrection, showing how it was

the soldiers' direct relation to the experiences and image of the human presentation of God in Christ that were pertinent at war.

Finally, chapter six brings together the themes explored in the war years to consider the immediate aftermath and the YMCA's adaptation to peace. It will first look at the practical continuity of services for those who remained on the battlefields and those who journeyed to the Front to pay homage to those they had lost. It will then move to those who returned home, especially those who needed additional support in rehabilitation to civilian life through training and new employment. These new schemes formed hutwork's reformulation, with the goal to have a Red Triangle on every village green in England. This desire did not come to fruition and this chapter finally progresses to determine how an organisation with such momentum and motivation at the end of the war suffered such limitations in the subsequent decade. The limitations of finance are clear in the 1920s, but so too were there restrictions in the extent to which churches were willing to participate in the YMCA's work and competing interests for those men finally free from the constrictions of the military.

Chapter One: "Tommy's Home"

Domesticity in the Huts



Figure 1 "Tommy's Home" hut sketch[33]

During the First World War, the YMCA's 4,000 centres sought to offer British soldiers a small oasis of home life. Arthur Keysall Yapp, the YMCA's General Secretary made a direct appeal for the hut programme to create spaces 'as much like a home as it is possible', establishing the hut as a place of comfort, familiarity and relaxation.[34] In creating these temporary homes for soldiers, the YMCA brought the domestic sphere into direct contact with the military, providing a space not only for escapism, but also for the influence of domestic ideals, and harnessing entertainments and recreation for the benefit of soldiers' well-being and morale. The hut was conceived as an idyll, a small taste of home to which soldiers could escape while in service. The YMCA was not alone in this work: the Church Army and the Salvation Army provided similar hut programmes throughout the war, as well a number which were organised by a range of smaller organisations. Caring for the recreation of soldiers was seen as an active issue of the war, with all the huts hoping to provide the men with an ethical space in

[33] *Told in the Huts: The YMCA Gift Book,* (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1916), p. 10.
[34] Arthur Keysall Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), p. 89.

which to spend their leisure time, distracting them from the readily available estaminets, bars and brothels which sprang up in an economy that sought to profit from men's boredom.

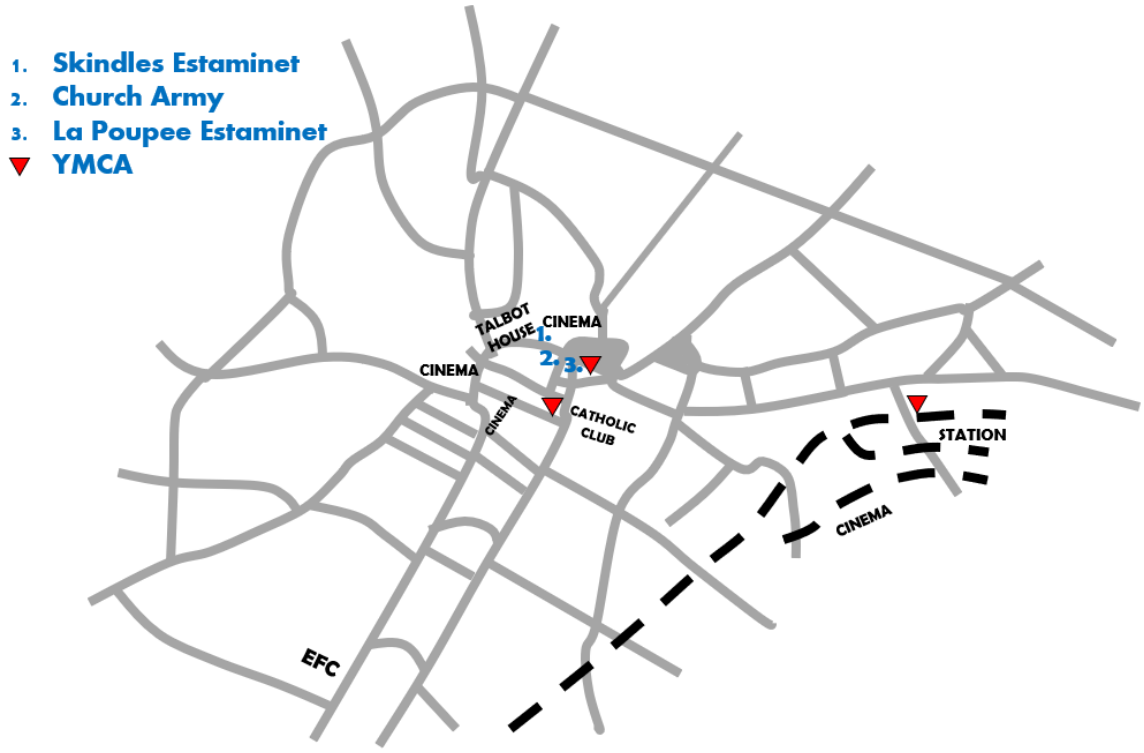


Figure 2 Poperinghe town sketch map

An example can be taken from Poperinghe in the Ypres Salient. During the war this town had a reputation as the leisure town for the British Army stationed in the Salient, close enough to the front lines to be accessed by soldiers on rest from the trenches, but far enough to provide relative safety from artillery for the majority of the war. This map of the town [fig. 2] shows the range of social provisions on offer for a soldier while on leave. To the south of the town centre was the Expeditionary Force Canteen (EFC), an army-run venue for the provision of cheap supplementary food. In the heart of town, there were estaminets such as Skindles and La Poupee, which were locally run bars where soldiers (particularly officers) could purchase meals and drinks, often accompanied by female entertainment. At the latter, the proprietor's daughter 'Ginger' was a particular hit with the soldiers. Moreover, there were at least four cinemas in

Poperinghe, and although it is not exactly clear who was running these, it is likely that the YMCA operated at least one. The YMCA itself had upwards of three huts in the town, expanding from its initial premises to larger sites in Grote Markt and beside the train station. This was also joined by further Christian organisations in the provision of recreation: the Catholic Church Club was established directly opposite the YMCA's first premises, and the Church Army, an Anglican organisation, also ran a club in an adapted house. Poperinghe is also notable for the presence of Talbot House, an individual Anglican home for soldiers, which operated in much the same way as the YMCA, but which thanks in large part to its permanent position and its enigmatic founder, Rev. Philip 'Tubby' Clayton, has garnered a large proportion of more recent attention into soldiers' recreation, becoming a fixture of battlefield tourism. The collective impulse of all these establishments demonstrates the need for recreational provision, whether as simple as the refreshment of the EFC, or the more developed care of Talbot House.

The range of social opportunities for soldiers indicates a dichotomy between the local estaminets, privately run, where alcohol was prevalent, and the counter attraction of the Christian charities who had a specific mission to serve the well-being of soldiers. Awareness of the first category is necessary to understand the full motivation of the second, although they operated on different principles, providing different forms of recreation. While the former was a hedonistic escape from a life cut adrift from normality, the latter sought to reconnect the men with their homes, reminding them of what they had left behind. The YMCA played a central role in the provision of this Christian care. In Poperinghe, as across the active fronts, the YMCA was the most prevalent provider of recreational facilities, their consistent provision marking them out as one of the most notable organisations for supporting soldiers throughout the

war. Through the lens of the YMCA, one can observe the wider trend of the creation of idealised Christian homes for soldiers at war.

The concept of home was an evocative one for soldiers, removed from the familiarity of their communities and deprived of many of their comforts. The YMCA believed that this was what brought the men to the huts, with an editorial in the *YM British Empire Weekly* claiming that 'the loss of home life, the strain of the military demands, drove them to the YM huts'.[35] Such a sentiment was not often directly communicated by the soldiers using the huts, yet it can be perceived in the ways that soldiers used the hut facilities. For example, Sergeant James Makin of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) was among the many soldiers who would retire to the YMCA in an evening while stationed in Cairo, coming "home" to the hut's comforting familiarity. The importance of home can also be seen in the way soldiers would come to the hut to write home to their loved ones, communicating directly with feelings of homesickness while in the hut space. This was actively encouraged by the Association, as they sought to provide a bridge between the soldiers and their families. Soldiers such as Percy Merriman recognised the homely benefit of the YMCA from early in the war. In March 1915 he published a poem, 'To the YMCA', in his brigade journal, heralding 'a touch of home – and not in vain, You opened with your halls of light' after his experience of the Association while training in Dorking.[36] The homeliness and domesticity of the YMCA can therefore be seen to have been a major attraction of the huts for soldiers, drawing them in to engage with the Association.

This chapter explores the centrality of home in the operations of the YMCA, demonstrating the influence of domesticity on the Association's care for soldiers. This

[35] 'From the Editor's Postbag: What Really Happens in a YMCA Hut', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 05/05/1916, p. 406.
[36] Percy Merriman, 'To the YMCA', *The Grey Brigade,* 19/03/1915, p. 4.

will initially be explained through an introduction to the hut space as a soldier's replacement living room, complete with soft furnishings and home-cooked food. It will then move on to explore the two-fold concept of home promoted in the huts, with domesticity serving both as an immediate comfort to soldiers and as a reminder of their home lives. The YMCA made considerable efforts to connect the men with their pre-war lives through their communication with their own homes. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the YMCA's staff, who are discussed in the next two sections. Here, the key themes of class and gender are introduced, which also influenced the Association's use of sports in entertaining the troops. In domesticating recreation the huts' sport and games will then be compared to the YMCA's theatre and cinema provisions which transformed the hut space into a haven of escapism, echoing homely ideals and forging community.

Inside the Hut

The provisions of the YMCA's huts were multi-faceted, intended to serve the needs and desires of those on service. One Australian even described the Association as 'a wonderful, friendly old octopus', with its many branches of service reaching out in different directions.[37] This is representative of the many different directions the YMCA reached into, while maintaining a familiar and endearing character. This is consistent with the account offered by Anglican clergyman and author George Birmingham, who described a typical hut as a wooden structure with a corrugated iron roof, in which 'hundreds of soldiers' could gather. Upon entering the huts, he would often find that 'the men are sitting, packed close together at small tables', 'reading, eating, drinking, writing, chatting, or playing draughts'.[38] In turn, this is a demonstration of the

[37] Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* p. 19.
[38] George A Birmingham, "Sweet Lavender", *Told in the Huts: The YMCA Gift Book,* (New York: Frederick A Stokes, 1916) pp. 19-23, (p. 20).

successful execution of Yapp's goal for the huts to serve as 'Tommy's tuck shop; his church … his post office, concert hall, social room, school': a one-stop for all their needs.[39] While this offered the men a significant amount of support and forged a reliance on the Association, Yapp held it most important that the huts were to serve as a soldier's 'home from home', where relaxation and comfort were at its heart. The hut was a convivial shared space, which could be used as each soldier's own temporary living room, but also a space for developing community. These ideas of the home were seen by YMCA organisers to influence all other provisions, including those highlighted by Birmingham, recognising that it was 'the loss of home life, the strain of the military demands, drove them to the YM huts'.[40] In order to convey this domesticity to the men, it was important for the huts to have an atmosphere of 'organised informality', which distinguished the space from the structure that dominated military life.[41] Yapp recognised that the 'majority of young men dislike anything in the way of formal meetings', further indicating the motivation behind the informal domesticity that characterised the work of the YMCA.[42] The huts were therefore designed to represent a clear distinction from the wider war that could support soldiers by connecting them with the informality of home.

This informal domesticity contributed to the YMCA's position as 'the chief centre of recreation' in the base camps from the beginning of the war; a reputation it sought to maintain throughout the development of its work.[43] Donald Hankey, a soldier in the Rifle Brigade and Christian writer, heralded the work of the YMCA as providing an alternative to the 'great deal of our leisure' which was spent 'bored and impecunious

[39] Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* ps. 167 and 19.
[40] 'From the Editor's Postbag: What Really Happens in a YMCA Hut', *The YM British Empire Weekly* 05/05/1916, p. 406.
[41] 'Our Outlook', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 09/07/1915, p. 615.
[42] *ibid*
[43] 'Life on Salisbury Plain', *The Times* 28/11/1914, p. 5.

"on the streets"'.[44] The YMCA provided soldiers with a consistent social hub, upon which they were able to rely wherever they served. For Hankey, the motivation behind his praise for the YMCA is clear. He was a devout Christian, who was considering a future in the clergy, and had attended Oxford and worked in the Bermondsey Mission alongside several of the YMCA's leading lights. However, his praise for the YMCA is reflected elsewhere, including by an Australian soldier, Robert WW Adam. He was very clear in a letter to his family that he was 'not a member of the YMCA' and was initially careful to distance himself from the organisation, yet simultaneously praised their 'very convenient and generous' work.[45] His letters show that he went on to become a regular hut user, indicating his enjoyment of the YMCA's facilities despite his not having any pre-existing affiliation to the Association. Soldiers of all backgrounds enjoyed the YMCA's provisions, with widespread support particularly for their material provisions. While few soldiers would state outright that they saw the YMCA as their home, they would often refer to it in domestic and familiar terms. For example, Hankey described the YMCA as the place where a soldier was most relaxed, spending his 'easiest moments' in the huts, a sentiment echoed in the letters of William Peach who would often drop into the YMCA whenever he had an 'afternoon off', spending his time playing games with friends.[46] The YMCA was therefore seen as a place designated for relaxation, which could be availed upon in a soldier's down time. Some huts even had a pet cat, bringing a further home comfort into the space.

Despite running the YMCA's wartime operations, Yapp admitted that their huts would always be 'a poor substitute for home'.[47] While the huts were used by soldiers in their

[44] Donald Hankey, *A Student in Arms: Second Series,* (New York: EP Dutton and Co, 1917), p. 55.
[45] Robert William Wylie Adam, letter, 10/02/1915, Australian War Memorial (AWM), RCDIG0000192.
[46] Hankey, *A Student in Arms,* pp. 160-161; William Peach, letter, 06/03/1917, AWM RCDIG0001561.
[47] Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* p. 156.

rest time and brought comfort to their war service, they were still incomparable to their actual homes. After all, the hut was not private, permanent, or filled with one's loved ones. Yet it remained Yapp's ambition to make the huts 'as much like home as it is possible', providing a worthy substitute for much-needed comfort and support.[48] Crucial to this was the decoration of the huts, giving 'the home touch … by pictures, decorations and flowers'.[49] It was the outright goal of the Association to use such decoration 'to make it more cheerful and comfortable', transforming the basic interior of the wooden hut into an inviting living room, enlivened by painted murals, decorative bunting, and soft furnishings.[50] Recognising the need for an organised effort to decorate the huts, the YMCA started a specific Art Department in 1917, with the responsibility for co-ordinating efforts across the different fronts. Within their first eighteen months of operation they sent 'some sixty thousand pictures' to the huts, depicting anything from landscapes to historical subjects, including images 'reproduced from those in the House of Lords and the Royal Exchange'.[51] The majority were distinctly British; familiar reminders of home amid the alien landscape of war. The prevalence of the pastoral landscape is particularly significant as a focal point for the imagined home of the soldier. This appeal to the idealised Blighty is seen widely in soldiers' poetry, including notably that of Ivor Gurney. Moreover, David Monger has investigated the significance of the 'rural idyll' in British propaganda and morale, arguing that it was often 'geographically unspecific' but reasserted 'the domestic idyll' for which soldiers were motivated to fight.[52] The decoration of the YMCA huts can be seen as part of this trend, providing a reminder of home through rural landscapes,

[48] *ibid*
[49] *ibid*
[50] F. Vigers, 'The Decoration of YMCA Huts', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 24/11/1916, p. 1096.
[51] LAH, 'The Hut of Many Colours', *The Red Triangle,* December 1918, pp. 143-149, (p. 144).
[52] David Monger, 'Soldiers, Propaganda and Ideas of Home and Community in First World War Britain', *Cultural and Social History* 8 (3) (2011), pp. 331-354, (ps. 337, 339 and 343).

which could work as a subtle reminder of the soldiers' motivations to fight. This also helped create a sense of familiarity within the huts, which set the YMCA space apart as separate from the foreign landscape in which soldiers were fighting.

The decoration of the huts certainly made them more welcoming, yet it was their provisions which really made them popular. Among the most celebrated of these were the canteen refreshments provided both free and cheaply by the YMCA. While it is a truism that an army marches on its stomach, the provision of supplementary food was crucial to supporting a soldier's morale. Food to a soldier meant a lot more than mere calorific value, with sentimentality inextricably linked. JG Fuller argues for this, noting the centrality of food to 'a soldier's physical and mental well-being'.[53] In the main, army rations were sufficient for serving soldiers' survival, yet the additional contributions from the YMCA helped alleviate the boredom of the same dietary routine. This is evidenced by YMCA secretary AH Griffiths who argued in a 1915 report into the Association's work in Egypt that 'change of food from army rations is a vital necessity' which could be fulfilled by the Association.[54] Although the YMCA was an important provider of food for soldiers, it never sought to operate as their primary source of nutrition. As Canadian soldier WL Wright noted, the value of the YMCA's food to himself and his comrades was that although they were fed in camp, 'they can top off at the Y', if they wanted something more.[55] Particularly in the base camps where food supply was consistent, this enabled the YMCA to offer soldiers something they wanted, rather than merely needed. The army took care of main provisions and the YMCA stood in as a cafe-type space for additional food, albeit one regularly relied upon

[53] JG Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 59.
[54] AH Griffiths, 'YMCA Work Among the Soldiers in Egypt', typed report 27/09/1915, Mansfield College Archive.
[55] WL Wright, letter, 04/07/1918, Imperial War Museum (IWM) D.20162.

by many soldiers. As the food was not essential, the YMCA did charge for it, although they were careful to pitch it at a reasonable rate which could undercut commercial offerings. Moreover, the sale of such food was a means through which the YMCA was able to derive an income from soldiers which it could then use for its other services, helping to make some of the huts self-sufficient.

Moreover, the YMCA's catering also meant that the YMCA served as much as a soldiers' dining room as it did a living room. It is these social bonds, observed in soldiers' writing, which Rachel Duffett has argued indicates 'the psychological comfort derived from, and the bonds forged by, the giving and receiving of food', contributing to a context in which 'physical hardship and emotional experience became inextricably linked'.[56] The presence, and indeed often focus, of food in letters and diaries indicates its significance to men, particularly through the comforts it could bring them. Food was, as Duffett has stated, 'a medium through which the social and emotional experiences of military service were expressed', with the immediacy of food connecting on a much wider scale to their overall well-being.[57] However, the limitations of letters remain, working as a filter through which criticisms were censored and discomforts minimised. While they can demonstrate the types of foods being offered, the letters themselves are a poor measure of how well-fed the soldiers were. No man would want to worry his mother that he was being underfed.

Praise, however, for the YMCA's refreshment provision was prevalent throughout soldiers' letters. Makin was one such soldier who described how he could 'enjoy good tea and coffee and good cake' at the YMCA's Ezbekiah Gardens, making it part of his

[56] Rachel Duffett, 'A War Unimagined: Food and the Rank and File Soldier of the First World War', in Jessica Meyer (ed.), *British Popular Culture and the First World War,* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 47-70, (pp. 47-48).
[57] Rachel Duffett, *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and the Soldiers of the Great War,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 2.

social routine while in Cairo.[58] Such a letter demonstrates the service the YMCA was providing, but the value Makin attributes to it could, given the source limitations of letters, either be from his genuine enjoyment or from his reassurance to his family that he was receiving good, comforting food. Most likely, there was an element of both, with soldiers readily heaping praise upon their free cups of tea and cheap cake and meals in their letters to family members. Other letters showed the necessities of the YMCA's work. Wilton Rix, the YMCA's secretary in Gallipoli, made requests to his wife back in England for 'sugar in tins, oxo cubes in tins … Toffee. Peppermints. Sardines' with which he could provide the men, indicating the sweet treats and long-life foods which were favoured.[59] His correspondence here is practical, detailing what was required to satisfy soldiers on one of the most difficult fronts to supply. Such things were in high demand, with Adam noting in a letter that in the days after Rix's hut at Cape Helles first opened one had to 'line up two or three hours before opening time' in order to purchase refreshments.[60] There was an evident striking level of demand, notable enough for Adam to inform his family. The circumstances of Gallipoli were specific and such queues were not a feature of YMCA work elsewhere, although their food service did appear to have a universal appeal. On other fronts soldiers praised the ability to purchase a treat from the YMCA, including Donald Price who later remembered how 'it was to us fantastic to get a bar of chocolate or anything like that'.[61] The enjoyment of food was a universal aspect of the war experience to which the YMCA was able to make a substantial contribution.

The food provided by the YMCA was designed to be simple yet substantial, making the best of what was available to create meals that were familiar to soldiers. This enabled

[58] James J Makin, letter, 11/03/1916, AWM RCDIG0001425.
[59] Wilton Rix, letter, 21/11/1915, Mansfield College Archive.
[60] Adam, letter, 29/10/1915.
[61] Donald Price, IWM Sound Archive, #10168.

them to tap into a food-based nostalgia, which Deborah Montgomerie has argued was of particular wartime value, using food as a vehicle through which 'memories of home' could be invoked, and utilising this nostalgia to 'bond men together'.[62] Although her evidence is based on the Second World War, the themes here are consistent with the First, in which the YMCA used their provision of food to comfort soldiers. This is demonstrated in the Association's publication of recipe suggestions in its weekly newspaper, for a variety of meals that were cheap and easy to prepare from accessible ingredients, yet which offered soldiers something new and interesting. Welsh rarebit, mock potted chicken sandwiches, cheese, and bread and butter pudding were among the meals, all considered to be familiar favourites for the men, who would be able to derive a sentimental comfort from the food.[63] This nostalgic comfort from food could also be more specifically applied, for instance in 1917 when the YMCA arranged for a bakery in Mesopotamia to supply soldiers stationed in Baghdad with hot cross buns for Easter. In this example, nostalgia also tapped into the tradition associated with the celebration of a Christian festival, further enhancing the argument for the importance of homely familiarity in the YMCA's war work.

The importance of homely familiarity can also be recognised in the YMCA's service of cups of tea. These were usually free of charge, seen as a crucial service for comforting soldiers. In areas where they were unable to establish a full hut, a tea counter was at least built, including beside field-dressing stations. Moreover, in more temporary situations the YMCA had motor-kitchens and tea-and-coffee trolleys which could supply the necessary refreshments to mobile troops. These were of particular use in support of the Middle East campaigns. Such flexible provision enabled the YMCA to

[62] Deborah Montgomerie, '"When in Doubt Brew Up": Food, Drink and the Writings of New Zealand's World War II Soldiers', *New Zealand Journal of History* 48 (2) (2014), pp. 3-26, (p. 7).
[63] Eustace Miles, 'War-time Meals: Some Suggestions for YMCA Workers, *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 30/03/1917, p. 271.

provide cups of tea to the wounded behind a battlefront and to soldiers on the move, greeting them at railheads and beside marching routes. Soldiers in the trenches would also be provided with cocoa on cold nights, passed up the lines from the YMCA's hut. Colonel Currie remarked on this in a letter of thanks to the Association, appreciative of the support it gave his men and the direct contribution to their morale, a sentiment widely echoed by a number of officers.[64] The soldier George Cole similarly complimented the 'free cocoa' the YMCA provided them with, about 'quarter of a mile' behind the line in Zonnebeke, near Ypres.[65] Such small-scale efforts may not have the same indicators of home life as the living-room-like hut space, yet the gesture of reaching out with a cup of tea – or other comforting beverage – was the Association's way of indicating their continued support for soldiers; a gesture indicative of care and affection. In this regard the cup of tea was a symbol of home, a reminder not only of the clichéd drink of Blighty but also of familiar reassurance. As Erika Rappaport has argued, tea became 'embedded in the sensual and social understandings of normalcy' that could provide a 'symbol of calm' in the upheaval of war.[66] Through its continual service of tea, the YMCA was thus providing soldiers with a crucial home comfort that could help foster an emotional connection to the Association. In this way the humble cup of tea is symbolic of the wider tone set by the YMCA in establishing an environment of informal and familiar domesticity that offered refreshment, both physically and emotionally.

Home away from Home

The YMCA's hut programme was a major contributor to the maintenance of soldiers' morale. To the historian Charles Messenger there were three 'tangible methods'

[64] Colonel Currie, unspecified letter in 'Appreciations', collected testimonies of the YMCA, undated, CRL, YMCA/K/5/1.
[65] George Cole, IWM sound archive, #9535, reel 11.
[66] Erika Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 305.

through which soldiers' morale could be maintained.[67] The supply of food was the first of these. Messenger's other two pivotal methods were the maintenance of mail and leave, both of which were also supported by the YMCA. However, where in the case of food the huts served as temporary homes for soldiers, in support of soldiers' letters and army leave the YMCA connected their created domestic space with the men's conceptions of their home lives and pre-war domesticity. This two-fold concept of the home not only used familial reminders to reinforce the hut as a homely space, but also reminded the men of the importance of their own domesticity, the families they fought for and their commitment to return home at the war's end. As Martin Francis has recognised, even amid the so-called 'flight from domesticity' in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods, there remained a deep 'desire' for the domestic life, which can be identified in the way ideas of home were so motivating for the soldiers of the First World War.[68] Removed from the comforts and familiarity of home this sense became heightened, not only in longing for their home as their domestic residence, but also as their homeland and heritage. The significance of this duality to soldiers was supported through the YMCA's hutwork, reinforced through the non-military identity of the space. Reminders of the peace and tranquility of home life were common, viewed as the idealised opposite to army life. Such reinforcement of ideas of the YMCA as a home away from home was achieved not only through the Art Department's idyllic imagery, but also through the provision of writing materials for connecting soldiers with their homes, and the provision of hostel beds for soldiers on leave, offering them a more literal home away from home. This, in turn, highlighted imperial conceptions of home through the YMCA's support for men on leave in London.

[67] Charles Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army, 1914-1918,* (London: Cassell, 2005), p. 452.
[68] Martin Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Masculinity', *Historical Journal* 45 (3) (2002), pp. 637-652, (p. 643).

For soldiers away at war, their only connection to their families was through letters and postcards. The YMCA facilitated this through its provision of free writing paper and envelopes, as well as through hut spaces where soldiers could sit and write, often also accompanied by postal facilities. Alongside food, this was one of the Association's greatest expenditures, and it was also one of the most appreciated areas of their work, with soldiers grateful for the opportunity to write and update loved ones. The evidence for this is somewhat self-selecting as it largely stems from the letters themselves, yet many soldiers reported how grateful they were for such facilities. Some, like William Peach, made it a regular feature of their weekly routine, attending the hut every Sunday afternoon to write to his mother.[69] John Hetherington also committed himself to Sunday letters, remarking in one that 'I always think Sunday was intended as a letter day'.[70] For him, and likely also for Peach, the tradition of Sunday as the day of rest with its inherent religious significance, also meant an important time for family, even if this could only be achieved through letter-writing. The uptake in soldiers using the YMCA's writing paper and envelopes was huge, with the Association estimating in April 1917 that it was spending £1,000 per week on the production of writing materials, distributing 'anything from fifteen to twenty million pieces of stationery every month'.[71] This presented a significant logistical undertaking, particularly as the paper was all headed with the YMCA's logo, headquarters address, and a phrase such as 'on active service'. There were innumerable different editions of this paper provided in different theatres, yet each were iconic of the YMCA as a brand: the red triangle was ever-present, standing out at the top of each page. The popularity of this paper meant that its provision had to be strictly controlled: Jessie Wilson, working in Le Havre,

[69] Peach, letters.
[70] JW Hetherington, letter, 09/01/1917, AWM, RCDIG0000260.
[71] YMCA advertisement, *The Times,* 26/04/1917, p. 10.

described how her first role in the hut was to 'hand out writing paper'.[72] With resources limited and demand high it made sense for the YMCA to prevent soldiers taking more than they needed, but this also meant that the men were brought into contact with a hut worker, thereby encouraging those who may have just been using the hut for the letter-writing facilities to engage with the YMCA's staff. It is evident that the writing facilities were one of the main attractions of the YMCA huts, with Hetherington noting that his closest YMCA in Gallipoli had a sign outside it calling on men to "write that letter home now", demonstrating the centrality of letter-writing in the YMCA's provisions.[73] The spirit of domestic connection was central to the huts, supporting soldiers as they sought to retain connection to their pre-war lives while on service.

Surviving archives of soldiers' letters demonstrate that most soldiers utilised the YMCA's headed paper at least at some point in their service, with many using it throughout the war. This suggests that a vast majority of soldiers both at least made contact with the Association during the war, and that they made use of the writing facilities. Of course, this is an insufficient metric for measuring the full use of the YMCA, yet it does contribute to an understanding of how widespread usage of the huts was among soldiers. Focusing on the paper usage rather than the letters' content gives a wider picture of how often soldiers were writing letters in the YMCA. Many soldiers rarely wrote about how they spent their free time, so it cannot always be discerned from the content of the letters alone as to whether they were visiting the YMCA. Despite this, there are still limitations to any conclusions here, such as through the limited and selective preservation of letters, in addition to instances in which the YMCA was not able to supply the specific headed paper, as was sometimes the case in

[72] Joan E Duncan (ed.), *Aunt J: Jessie Millar Wilson MBE, Wartime Memories of a Lady YMCA Volunteer in France, 1915-1918,* (Otley: Smith Settle, 1999), p. 15.
[73] Hetherington, letter, 07/11/1915.

the Middle East. Warrant Officer Hetherington was one such soldier who indicates the limits of any measure. He was an ardent supporter of the YMCA, writing in his letters about the huts while on service in Gallipoli, Lemnos and Belgium. Yet he never used the YMCA's headed paper, despite his explicit compliments of the letter-writing provision. Hetherington is something of an anomaly, yet his example is an indication that there is no definitive measure of YMCA support, although the headed paper does give us one of the best indications of just how widespread the YMCA's audience was, and just how many soldiers made use of its facilities in order to keep in contact with their families throughout the war. It is a telling mark of the impact of the YMCA's letter writing provision that the Association's only wartime appearance in the satirical *Punch* magazine took the form of a cartoon depicting a soldier posting letters in a hut. The soldiers' letters written in the YMCA's huts now serve as one of the most concrete pieces of evidence for the role the YMCA played in connecting the men to their families and fostering the bond between the domestic and war lives of the soldiers.

The maintenance of the soldiers' connections with loved ones was of important psychological benefit throughout the war, making the writing of letters a key feature of war experience. This is not unique to the First World War, with soldiers in the most recent conflicts valuing internet connection as a means to stay in touch with family, even when stationed in remote parts of the Middle East. This persistence of sentiment is demonstrative of the impact of familial separation on soldiers at war. This has been investigated by Jessica Meyer in her study of First World War soldiers' writing. She has identified that 'the home and its protection' were at the centre of a man's 'justifications for warfare', meaning that in connecting with his family through the page, the soldier was not only keeping in contact with home news, but also with the

emotions of domesticity and the continual reminder of the importance of home life.[74] The YMCA played a clear role in this, supporting what Francis has recognised as 'the masculine imagination' which was preoccupied by desires for domesticity, even when set against the 'self-identification' of male duty.[75] This was a well-established trend in the pre-war decades which formed the basis of Francis' study, yet it also correlates with many soldiers' war service and is also highlighted in Meyer's wartime study. Even during their commitment to their military responsibility, soldiers still longed for home and the return to domestic peace, as evidenced in both the content and regularity of their letters. This was recognised by the YMCA, who knew that soldiers were crying out for 'that home touch', which meant more to them than mere home comforts, but which connected them back to the perceived peacetime idyll of their domestic lives. This was not always an accurate representation of their lived experience, yet this idealised version played a pertinent role in men's minds. The complexity of ideas of home has been examined by Keith Grieves, who argues that homely belonging encompassed 'an intermediate patria, which embraced family, community and locality'.[76] The YMCA understood this, helping soldiers with these connections, while also supporting the immediate community of soldiers as comrades. The differences between home lives and war lives were starkly contrasted; one existed only on the page, the other in the flesh, yet through its provision of writing materials the YMCA sought to cross this divide.

The physical provision of paper was only a small part of the YMCA's support in this area, albeit the easiest to identify. Alongside the materials, the hut also provided the

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[74] Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 46.
[75] Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male', p. 643.
[76] Keith Grieves, 'The Propinquity of Place: Home, Landscape and Soldier Poets of the First World War', in Jessica Meyer (ed.), *British Popular Culture and the First World War,* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 21-46, (p. 32).

time and space to both write and read letters which further contributed to their support for morale, in giving the men the mental, as well as physical, space to think of home. Such '"mind-pictures" of home and loved ones' that could be created through letters were, as Michael Roper has argued, an important factor that 'helped to sustain their morale'.[77] This imagination of home was evidently fostered in the homely environment of the huts, generating a nostalgia which, while often reliant on 'idealisation', as Roper has identified, was incredibly important to soldiers, not only in their individual motivation but also in the creation of community ties as disparate soldiers could seek connections through shared nostalgia of 'lives they had left'.[78] The communal space of the YMCA was well-placed to facilitate this, with soldiers often sitting at communal tables in the Association's writing rooms and canteens, which were themselves home-like environments providing non-militarised havens of rest.

The YMCA's support for soldiers as communities was also important in the Association's response to the dilemma of army leave. The concept of home leave was a key motivator for soldiers, even if, as in the argument of Fuller, the actual offering of leave was 'likely to disturb soldiers' through the culture shock of the 'gulf in spirit' between the home and active fronts.[79] Home leave was incredibly limited and, crucially, only available to soldiers from Britain. For soldiers from the Empire, without the tantalising possibility of home leave, the YMCA's substitute domesticity was often all they had. The Association made a specific effort to provide entertainments and hostels for those on leave who could not return to their families, supporting them with an enjoyable alternative both to home and army life. Such institutional provisions could never truly replace soldiers' homes, yet they did go some way towards providing

[77] Michael Roper, 'Nostalgia as an Emotional Experience in the Great War', *The Historical Journal* 54 (2) (2011), pp. 421-451, (p. 449).
[78] Roper, 'Nostalgia as an Emotional Experience', p. 439.
[79] Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture,* p. 73.

comfort and entertainment while away from the front. It was in these times, without an immediate motivation or occupation for their time that soldiers were seen as most in need of home-like environments that could bring both security and a distraction from immorality. This was particularly the case in London, where imperial soldiers would often spend their leave, and which the YMCA viewed as 'a Mecca of interest and a centre of peril to every man in khaki'.[80] It was calculated that in 1917 alone 660,404 soldiers slept in the Association's 20 hostels in the city.[81] Among these were hostels located next to each of the rail termini, providing soldiers with a consistent support as they made their way to and from leave, as well as a number of others, like that on Horseferry Road which had 250 beds for soldiers staying in London. Despite their necessarily transient residents, the greater permanency of these home front huts meant that they were better able to emulate the home environment, with established living spaces, libraries and gardens. This meant that soldiers were able to enjoy the familiar environment of the YMCA, likely with better resources, in the unfamiliar big city.

For soldiers of the British Empire such an arrival into London would have been a homecoming of a different kind. The majority of dominion soldiers sent to France and Flanders would at some time have come to the UK, whether for leave, training or convalescence, usually encompassing at least a short time in London. For them, this was the opportunity to visit the much-imagined motherland of the empire, heralded in some letters as the "Great City", and evidently hyperbolised in their imperial imaginations.[82]Anna Maguire has studied this from the New Zealand perspective, arguing that 'both Pakeha and Māori' soldiers had a similar experience, equating their

[80] FJC, 'Some Notes on the Red Triangle Story of 1917', *The Red Triangle,* January 1918, pp. 177-181, (p. 178).
[81] *ibid*
[82] William Emmanuel Baker, typescript diary, 05/10/1917, AWM, RCDIG0001164.

coming to London with ‘’arriving’ in the metropolis’ and giving them ‘the opportunity to see in person sights made familiar to them … through postcards, films and magazines’.[83] Some arriving imperial soldiers viewed London with a kind of child-like wonder. The Australian William Emmanuel Baker wrote in his diary that although the exteriors of many buildings in London were dirty and marked by the fogs, ‘once inside my breath would almost be taken away in astonishment’.[84] Grandeur and history took precedence in his account, regaling significant facts about his visits to all the major London landmarks, including Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London and the Houses of Parliament. Soldiers’ accounts of their London visits read much like any tourist’s itinerary, covering the historic palaces, West End theatres, parks, and major shopping streets. The men were free to discover these places for themselves, but the YMCA also assisted them, publishing specialist leaflets to help them find their way, and even organising guided excursions for those wanting to learn more. The aim of this work was to make the soldiers of the Empire feel at home in London, which was often communicated as their capital, no matter how far away they had come from, yet also introduced them to the perceived desirable areas of the city. On one tour Australian soldier Peach was taken to a number of London landmarks over two days by YMCA guide Mr Stirling who ‘explained everything to us’.[85] His highlights were the Tower of London and St Paul’s Cathedral, where he saw ‘Wellington and Nelson’s tombs down in the crypt’.[86] This demonstrates the importance to him of the Empire’s history, that he felt a sense of wonder at the resting place of the two British heroes of

[83] Anna Maguire, ‘Looking for Home? New Zealand Soldiers Visiting London during the First World War’, *The London Journal* 41 (3) (2016), pp. 281-298, (p. 295).
[84] Baker, diary, 05/01/1917.
[85] Peach, letter, 14/12/1916.
[86] *ibid*

the Napoleonic wars. London was a place of stories come to life, a place of excitement even in the struggles of war.

The relationship between Britain and its dominions is a complex one, yet the resonance of London as the heart of the mother country appears to have been felt by visiting soldiers, including Peach. London, as the Empire's capital, was in this way a form of home with a perceived familiarity for imperial soldiers, albeit one often built on constructed images and stories. Maguire, in acknowledging that white New Zealanders and Māoris alike were similarly welcomed to London, argues that it was because they were seen 'as colonials as well as 'Britons' in the space'.[87] While they were certainly visitors to the city and made full use of the opportunity to act as tourists, they were also welcomed with a homely familiarity, one which the YMCA made use of in their creation of familial spaces within the city. An Anzac soldier arriving in London would have already visited either Egypt or France; in both places they were likely to have already encountered the YMCA huts, making the environment already a familiar one. This consistency helped support the soldiers, giving them a home base in a city that could be daunting to new arrivals, in both its physical and symbolic immensity. To facilitate this homely support the YMCA established specific huts for different nationalities of soldiers, although they were also permitted to use any of the Association's facilities in the city. For Canadian soldiers there was the Beaver Hut on the corner of Waterloo Bridge and the Strand. Less than 100 yards away Australian soldiers were given the Aldwych Theatre and an adjoining temporary hut across from the under-construction Australia House. The New Zealanders' temporary home was on Gower Street behind the British Museum. Each created a space in which the individual dominion identity could be celebrated, while being intertwined with both

[87] Maguire, 'Looking for Home?', p. 294.

Britishness and the war experience. This has been investigated by Ailsa Grant Ferguson, who identified the blending together of 'imperial and Antipodean identity and culture' for New Zealand soldiers in London, helping them to feel at home in what could have been 'an alien city'.[88] This was of great importance to imperial soldiers, who as Richard White has argued, had 'a staunch belief in their right to see England properly'.[89] They were able to exert a sense of ownership and belonging over London, believing it not to be a foreign city, but an emotional home, which could be supported by organisations such as the YMCA.

The most striking of all these huts was the Shakespeare Hut for New Zealand soldiers. The land on Gower Street had been purchased by the Shakespeare National Memorial Committee for the construction of a memorial theatre to mark the playwright's tercentenary, which was to occur in 1916. In the empty space was built an impressive YMCA hut, complete with mock-Tudor beams, creating a perception of heritage despite its temporary construction. The hut's visual appeal to historic Britain played into the traditional stories New Zealanders would have grown up with. The YMCA harnessed this Britishness in blending together the incongruous aims to both commemorate Shakespeare and provide a temporary home for New Zealand soldiers in London. Ferguson has studied this hut in depth, arguing that it was a 'microcosmic representation' of the intersecting imperial and Antipodean identities.[90] She argues that this 'idiosyncratic design … represented a form of cosy, utopian Englishness for the benefit of Anzacs', playing into ideas of what they thought England should be,

[88] Ailsa Grant Ferguson, 'Entertaining the Anzacs: Performances for Australian and New Zealand Troops on Leave in London, 1916-1919', in Andrew Maunder (ed.), *British Theatre and the Great War, 1914-1919: New Perspectives,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 234-250, (p. 237).
[89] Richard White, The Soldier as Tourist: The Australian Experience of the Great War', *Kunapipi* 18 (2) (1996), pp. 117-129, (p. 124).
[90] Ailsa Grant Ferguson, *The Shakespeare Hut: A Story of Performance, Memory and Identity, 1916-1923,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 88.

rather than replicating New Zealand on the other side of the world.[91] The soldiers who used the hut certainly appear to have connected with this idea. One anonymous soldier writing in the *Wellington Evening Post* remarked on 'what an experience it is for us who have left New Zealand to serve New Zealand's sons here in the Homeland' to have such a hut with 'an atmosphere that is redolent of home'.[92] Its soft furnishings and homely feel were widely praised, here as in other huts, demonstrating a further duality. The Shakespeare Hut, alongside the YMCA's other premises in London, were able to provide homely atmospheres for soldiers on leave that were also able to engage with conceptions of heritage and homeland, as multi-layered as they were for imperial soldiers.

Moreover, London was familiar to the dominion soldiers in that it was English-speaking. For soldiers fighting across the world, the Anglophone home that could be provided by the YMCA was of particular value, both to dominion and British soldiers. Charles Quinell, in a post-war interview for the Imperial War Museum's sound archive, praised the 'English workers' of the YMCA huts, explaining that 'you got tired of the French estaminets and so forth'.[93] It was important to him to be surrounded by the familiarity of the English language; a reminder of home, and not of the foreign land in which they were fighting. Familiarity was a powerful concept that could bring comfort and reassurance to soldiers. This was enhanced by the YMCA's bold red triangle emblem - which was a reassuring beacon of refreshment in much the same simple iconography as the McDonalds golden arches – and through their consistent service of huts, providing soldiers with familiar support throughout their war service, from the home camps to the active fronts. This enabled the men to be able to rely on the

[91] Ferguson, *The Shakespeare Hut*, p. 92.
[92] "Triangle", 'With the Troops in London: Shakespeare YMCA Hut', *Wellington Evening Post,* 09/10/1917, p. 2.
[93] Charles Robert Quinnell, IWM sound archive, #544, reel 11.

YMCA, whether they used the spaces to connect with loved ones by writing letters home, to access cheap refreshments, or for the comfort of the recreational space. Through such work the YMCA was able to exert itself both as a domestic space and a reminder of home, giving soldiers a consistent homely support that could keep them connected with their pre-war lives.

Staffing the Huts

None of this would have been possible if not for the dedicated service of the YMCA's secretaries and hut workers. In order for the Association to establish its desired tone within the huts, it was very specific in the staff it would employ. With the rapid expansion of the hut programme from the early days of the war, recruitment had to happen quickly, with the advertisements for vacancies being placed in national newspapers. From a historical perspective, these give a great insight into the YMCA's priorities for what was perceived to be the ideal candidate, with the advertisements imbued with highly gendered and class-specific language. Moreover, such ideals were reinforced throughout the war in the YMCA's newspaper and journal, where the respected and popular hut leaders were described as dedicated, friendly and conscientious. It was seen that such selection was important as the quality of the hut leader could make or break a hut's popularity, and along with it the YMCA's reputation with the soldiers. However, above all a male volunteer had to be ineligible for military service, whether they were 'not physically fit, … over-age, or ordained'.[94] This stipulation, pre-dating compulsory service, prevented the Association from coming under criticism for why their workers were shirking their military duty by taking a non-combatant role. This is not to say hutwork was easy: YMCA Secretary Arthur Westall Neal later recalled in his unpublished memoir how he rarely had time off while

[94] 'YMCA', *The Times* 09/11/1916, p. 1.

working for the YMCA at the Etaples base camp, with many of his days being a cycle of 'cut and spread' in the canteen.[95] Yet such work evidently did not compare to the experience of the soldiers, despite the risk of shellfire to which the hut workers were subjected. YMCA workers were subsidiary to the war effort, but their influence was one that could collectively improve the war experience of British soldiers across the world.

The YMCA archive contains a list of all the Association's workers from the First World War. The information given for each worker is limited and inconsistent. For some, it simply gives their names, addresses and the regions in which they worked. However, for others a few further specifics are detailed, including their denomination and occupation. This information about their previous employment is perhaps the most interesting. Although there were a farmer and a market gardener among the workers, the overwhelming majority were previously engaged in white-collar, skilled jobs, indicating that those employed by the YMCA were largely from the middle classes. A number of chemists, schoolmasters and clerks are listed, alongside a marine engineer, architect and railway manager. A further contingent consisted of clergymen and divinity students, those also of the educated middle classes whose Christian commitment had evidently drawn them to the work of the YMCA. Critics of the Association have long accused it of being paternalistic, using its middle-class staff to moralise and restrain its working-class hut users. To an extent, the YMCA did not shy away from this; its staff was overwhelmingly recruited from the educated classes, with the intention of disseminating Christian morality. As Gerard De Groot has identified, 'Christian manliness was supposed to be an antidote to hooliganism' and this was

[95] Arthur Westall Neal, unpublished memoir, IWM, D.16507.

certainly engaged by the YMCA in its work for soldiers.[96] The huts were actively intended to work as a counter-attraction which could bring the soldiers into a moralistic form of home, offering an almost parental form of teaching by example. Jeffrey Reznick has taken this further, identifying not only the YMCA's established reputation for drawing its leadership 'from the respectable middle classes', but also arguing that this was because they 'held to the conviction that only educated men could properly interpret and spread the word of God'.[97] While the YMCA's nonconformist influence and democratising principles of religion discussed elsewhere do not fully support his claim, the demographics of the YMCA's staff do nonetheless support his argument for the 'middle-class domestic ideology' it perpetuated during the war.[98] Through their careful selection of wartime staff, the Association's leaders were thereby able to maintain their desire for the YMCA to represent a good moral home for soldiers that could encourage Christian values.

Such values of Christian manliness had become codified as part of the respectable middle classes from the late-Victorian period. This, John Tosh has argued, was part of 'a determined effort … to remoralise manhood' in light of the commitment to the British Empire.[99] This moral code was distinctly class-based, formed, as Tosh has investigated, in the British public school system. While the YMCA had long upheld a clear moral mission, Michael Snape argues that it was not until the First World War that it was recast 'as a repository of those virtues long associated with Christian manliness', bringing its influence clearly in line with the Victorian moral code.[100] The

[96] Gerard J De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War,* (London: Longman, 1996) p. 42.
[97] Jeffrey Reznick, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain during the Great War,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 18.
[98] Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 21.
[99] John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain,* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2005), p. 209.
[100] Michael Snape, Introduction', in Michael Snape (ed.), *The Back Parts of War,* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), pp. 3-100, (p. 96).

urgency of the war situation reasserted the YMCA's moral mission, as it rapidly expanded its services to the benefit of tens of thousands of men who had not previously had contact with the Association. In order to have an effective impact on these men, the YMCA had to ensure that its staff could uphold those key Christian values which Snape identified as 'courage, stoicism, determination and self-sacrifice'.[101] The importance of these qualities is reflected in the way hut workers were praised during the war. One particularly celebrated figure of the YMCA's war work was Dr Charles J Magrath, who ran the hut under the Lille Gate in Ypres. His superior, regional secretary Barclay Baron, praised his commitment to his role, particularly his dogged persistence in remaining in the bombarded city in early 1918, as well as the friendly welcome with which he greeted all visiting soldiers. Magrath was almost certainly an eccentric; Baron also noted the signature cocktail he served made of SRD rum and Ypres moat water. This was, of course, against the YMCA's rules prohibiting the sale of alcohol, defying its principles of self-control and temperance. However, this was not mentioned or condemned by Baron, as he chose to instead focus his praise of Magrath on his determination and good nature, highlighting what he viewed as the most valuable qualities for a YMCA secretary as well as a tacit acknowledgement that not all staff would follow every prescribed rule. Magrath was also held in high regard by Rev. Philip 'Tubby' Clayton of nearby Talbot House, with whom he was eventually evacuated from the Ypres Salient during the 1918 German Spring Offensive. Clayton stated in his memoir that Magrath 'survived residence in that amazing city' and that 'he managed to live longer than even Town-Major Scott', indicating Magrath's courageous commitment to Ypres and the resulting sustained presence of the YMCA

[101] *ibid*

in the city as long as possible.[102] His bravery was later commended with the Belgian Croix de Guerre for service to the city. Although Magrath was just one of thousands of secretaries, and certainly a far from typical figure, his example is nonetheless valuable for demonstrating the Association's commitment to principles of Christian manliness, which it was hoped would be reflected throughout the YMCA's operations. These virtues could then be passed on to the soldiers who attended the huts, thereby spreading the YMCA's moralising mission.

At the start of the First World War the YMCA's staff were non-uniformed, contributing to the deliberate distinction of the Association as a non-military body. Its volunteers were untrained and non-combatant; they served an organisation independent from the military, although in support of it. The plain-clothed workers could further indicate to soldiers that by coming into the hut they were entering a non-militarised space, a home away from the army's work space. However, the conditions of military life, whereby identification was of serious importance, dictated by mid-1916 that it was necessary for YMCA workers to be given their own khaki uniforms. Association worker Rix noted that this was standard practice throughout Egypt and Gallipoli in 1915, but the standardised outfit was not confirmed across all fronts until September 1916. Akin to the officers' uniforms, complete with khaki caps and puttees, the YMCA workers now blended into the army, distinguished only by their triangle cap badges. While this was a practical move, it is also symbolic of how the YMCA's workers made themselves an integral part of the war effort, providing a crucial service for soldiers. These civilians in uniform further served to blur the boundaries of military and non-military experiences, adding to Grieves' argument that 'binary opposites of soldier and civilian'

[102] Philip Clayton, *Tales of Talbot House in Poeringhe and Ypres,* (London: G Marshall, 1928), ps. 109 and 139.

are increasingly seen as 'monolithic and narrowly defined representations of war experience'.[103] The YMCA's staff were providing an important military service, even if they themselves were considered civilian.

The focus on the YMCA's male workers as representatives of Christian virtue and imperial masculinity is, however, only half of the story. Up to 40% of the YMCA's staff on the Western Front were female, a figure quoted by the American evangelist for the YMCA, Gipsy Smith. A greater proportion still worked for the Association within the UK and a smaller, yet still significant, number worked on the southern fronts and in the Middle East. Smith's figure appears strikingly high. He referenced it in his notes collated for a lecture tour he was to give in 1917 on the value of the YMCA's war work, but did not offer any citation.[104] Yet, it can broadly be corroborated with other YMCA statistics. For example, in 1917 the YMCA cited in its own promotional material that it had 468 women working in France, compared with 844 men, with women therefore constituting 35.4% of the workforce.[105] The YMCA created one of the largest opportunities for British women to work on the war's active fronts, perhaps second only to nursing. Although they worked alongside male workers, including in running some of the huts, their role was notably different, particularly in the way it was described by YMCA leaders. The women's position was highly gendered, representative of domesticity, purity and care, seen to provide a comforting softness that men could not.

The importance of women in the YMCA is multi-layered. Primarily, to a soldier visiting the hut, the involvement of female workers was a clear signifier of the hut as a non-

[103] Grieves, 'The Propinquity of Place', p. 40.
[104] Gipsy Smith, 'Facts and Figures about YMCA Work', handwritten memorandum, 08/01/1918, CRL YMCA/ACC2.
[105] *The YMCA and the Red Triangle: A* Red Triangle *Supplement,* (London: Red Triangle Press, 1918), pp. 4-6.

military space, removed from the male hierarchy of the army. Female workers did not blur the divide between civilian and military in the way that their male counterparts were increasingly seen to do, in representing a gender entirely other than the military structure. Secondly, the presence of women was key to the huts as domestic spaces. This is evident in the ladies' duties, which General Secretary Yapp described as 'games, music, decorations, and flowers' which all came 'within their domain' in providing 'that home touch that means so much to men'.[106] These were all traditional women's responsibilities, implying that their hutwork existed within the private, as opposed to public, sphere and that the hut itself was therefore an extension of the home. Although the practicalities of women's responsibilities within the huts were largely the same as the male workers, this mindset appears to have been ingrained in the female workers, with one writing anonymously in the YMCA's newspaper that 'we represent their homes to them' while they 'are suffering keenly from separation from their womenfolk'.[107] This directly echoes what regional secretary Baron complimented as the value of women being 'beyond price' for men 'long separated from their homes'.[108] Given the rhetoric which surrounded the women's service it is understandable that the women saw themselves in this way. While supporting duty and camaraderie were largely seen as the focuses of the male workers' responsibilities, for women this was often phrased as a need to care for and nourish the soldiers, reinforcing gender roles through the repetition of distinct masculine and feminine duties. These qualities were widely seen as valuable to the war effort, but, as De Groot has observed, women's involvement throughout the war was 'in ways strictly confined to their own sphere'.[109] This is observable in the work of the female YMCA workers, who were viewed at least

[106] Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* p. 65.
[107] 'To Women Workers in the Huts – By One of Themselves', *The Red Triangle,* 01/06/1917, p. 470.
[108] Barclay Baron, 'Memoirs', in Michael Snape (ed.), *The Back Parts of War,* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), pp. 101-213, (p. 131).
[109] De Groot, *Blighty,* p. 67.

by their superiors as living representations of the home to soldiers. The YMCA did subvert some of these expectations, for example allowing 'either lady or gentlemen' motor-car drivers. One female driver, Betty Stevenson, noted the novelty of this in a letter, remarking 'everyone stared at me because they never see a girl driving'.[110] Women like Stevenson also risked their lives for the Association. She was killed in an air raid on 30th May 1918 driving near Paris-Plage, demonstrating the danger to which female workers were exposed. However, Stevenson was in the minority, as she herself acknowledged, with the majority of women, and most of the focus on their work, being centred around their domestic role in the huts.

Women's domesticity was further reinforced by the characteristics prioritised in volunteers. Advertisements for the Ladies' Auxiliary stated they must be 'prepared to pay their own expenses' – a requirement not necessary for male workers – with priority given to those 'whose husbands have fallen on the field of honour'.[111] As a result of this, the YMCA prioritised middle-class women with experience of running a home. Moreover, unmarried women under 30 (later lowered to 28) and above 48 were not considered. The exclusion of younger women removed many of those who would be considered either immature or of sexual interest to the soldiers, and the omission of older women prevented those who would be seen by younger soldiers as too matronly, or those not able to keep up with the demands of hut work. Such a specific selection has contributed to what Reznick has described as the presentation of female hut workers 'as a "sister" and/ or "mother", as opposed to "wife"', thereby removing any sexualised element.[112] While sexuality was certainly downplayed in the women workers, the specific request for women whose husbands had died in the war

[110] Betty Stevenson, letter, May 1917, in CGRS and AGS (eds.), *Betty Stevenson: Croix de Guerre Avec Palme,* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1920), p. 123.
[111] 'YMCA Base Camps in France', *The Times,* 20/11/1916, p. 11.
[112] Reznick, *Healing the Nations,* p. 23.

somewhat comes into contention with Reznick's characterisation. Nonetheless, the stricter parameters put in place for women rather than men indicates the unsubstantiated fear that the "wrong" sorts of women could influence soldiers. In particular, the desexualisation of female workers both reinforced their domesticated caring role and created a further distinction between the YMCA and the local bars and estaminets, which the Association considered to be disreputable.

Moreover, through this recruitment of predominantly middle-class, middle-aged women, the YMCA was creating not only a homely environment, but also one in which the workers represented an aspirational domesticity: moralised, respectable and representative of ideals of British Christian womanhood. The purity of women was here seen as crucial, with a list of idealised qualities for female workers being published in the *Red Triangle* Journal by the novelist Louis Golding. He stated that those 'ideally suited' to the work would be 'gracious, kindly, serious, and tactful', who would help with 'the establishment of a refinement, a faint, chaste atmosphere of English womanhood, a fragrance which permeates through the hut more subtly, no less surely, than the smell of meadow-sweet'.[113] To Golding, this was evidently something he saw the soldiers as missing on the battlefield, with the sickly scent of 'meadow-sweet' being the antithesis of the typical descriptions of the sensory experience of war. He describes what Callum Brown has referred to as the societal fear of immorality in the military which was seen to have stemmed from an environment 'cut adrift from femininity' and the 'natural goodness' perceived to be inherent in women.[114] This feeds into what Tosh has referred to as the 'cult of female purity'.[115] As

[113] Louis Golding, 'Jessamine – The Perfect Hut', *The Red Triangle* June 1918, pp. 402-404, (p. 404).
[114] Callum G Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain,* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), pp. 98-99.
[115] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England,* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 107.

part of the same context which created the constructs of Christian masculinity, this presented women as the purer sex, having an intrinsic morality with which they could influence men. The middle- and upper-class women employed by the YMCA were therefore seen to uphold this moral code and provide the huts with this positive influence. The recruitment of these women was organised by the Ladies' Auxiliary Committee, headed by HRH Princess Victoria. This committee of aristocratic women were able to put the wealth of their resources and connections into fundraising for the YMCA, as well as encouraging a number of society ladies to volunteer their time for the Association. Among them, Lady Olave Baden-Powell organised the establishment of huts in France, manning the Mercers' Hut in Calais during 1915, and Lady Henry Grosvenor canteens in south-east England.

Jonathan Ebel has established the dichotomy of "altars" upon which men and women were expected to make sacrifices for the war effort. He argues that while men were expected to make their sacrifice on the altar of the 'battlefield', women's sacrifice was to come at the 'hearth'.[116] To him, these were 'symbolic antipodes', representing the opposites of comfort and struggle; nurture and violence.[117] Such a dedication to the hearth was symptomatic of the idealised cult of domesticity, yet the work of the YMCA and women's presence within it, certainly blurs this clear divide, in much the same way as Susan Grayzel suggests there is no clear divide between the home and active fronts of war. While the place of women was unquestionably seen to be within the domestic sphere, and the YMCA's female workers were representative of the homes soldiers were missing, their presence on the active fronts (albeit behind the lines) and

[116] Jonathan H Ebel, 'At Home at War for Christ: Domesticity and American Christianity in Europe's Great War', in Tine Van Osselaer and Patrick Pasture (eds.), *Christian Homes: Religion, Family and Domesticity in the 19th and 20th Centuries,* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), pp. 127-141, (p. 128).
[117] Ebel, 'At Home at War for Christ', p. 127.

in support of soldiers can be identified as moving beyond the hearth. Moreover, the establishment of the YMCA's huts as havens of domesticity on the battlefield further disrupts Ebel's antipodes through the provision of home comforts and a nurturing space in the huts across the active fronts. Women were able to play a significant role in the YMCA's war work and while this was encoded in highly gendered language that made them representatives of idealised domesticity, by their very presence on the active fronts of the war the women of the YMCA were working beyond the perceived limitations of their perceived societal position.

Sports and Games

The gendered space of the hut is also highlighted in the sports and games organised for soldiers by the YMCA. Within the huts it was common for soldiers to play board games, draughts and dominoes, and where the space was available, they would play host to cricket and football tournaments, boxing matches, and badminton games. The YMCA's central base in Cairo, the Ezbekiah Gardens, even had a much-loved skating rink at its centre. The provision of sports and games was central to the YMCA's recreation programme, creating opportunities which could divert both men's minds and bodies from war, while supporting ideals of masculinity and patriotic gamesmanship. Away from the front line, sports enabled soldiers to channel their energies into competition, harnessing their determination and competitiveness. On a smaller scale, the same ethos applied to indoor games; these focused more on mental stimulation, but were nonetheless beneficial to soldiers where sports were not available, particularly closer to the front lines and on dark winter evenings. The use of sports was not unique to the YMCA: battalions and divisions often organised both friendly games and tournaments throughout the war as a means of developing camaraderie within units, as well as giving the men a means of proving their manliness or strength within the perceived safe environment of sport. Fuller has identified this

importance of sport in soldiers' entertainment, noting that even under the risk of shell-fire on Gallipoli, 'a Corps [Football] tournament was organised and played out', and cricket was played on Shell Green on the eve of the evacuation.[118] The significance, he argues, was in the 'esprit de corps' that it could create, especially in units containing new replacements, but 'above all' sport allowed for 'a brief mental escape', providing 'the required relaxation' from the 'stress and horror' of war.[119] Sport and games were a respite for soldiers, harnessing the men's familiarity with the different sets of rules from their youths and peace lives to benefit their war service.

While the use of sport was an integral part of military life, the YMCA was in an ideal position to contribute its own programmes for two primary reasons. First, it was logistically well-positioned with its network of huts to organise such events, hosting both spectator and participatory sports. Throughout the base camps and rest areas it was able to provide the space and equipment for sports to be held, as well as serving as the organising body for competitions. This is most evident in the boxing competitions arranged by the YMCA. Peach described one such contest he attended in Harfleur in June 1918 where competitors were sought from the locally stationed units to fight in the YMCA's boxing ring at their gymnasium with an independent 'Yank officer' serving as a referee.[120] He was pleased to see 'Aussies well among the winners', indicating how soldiers liked to back a home competitor, either from their country or their regiment. The boxing competitions were spectator sports, organised to draw large crowds, but participatory sports were also popular, none more so than the roller skating at Ezbekiah. Makin described how 'there are always dozens of brawny sun-tanned Australians flying round playing hockey'.[121] This common ground at the heart

[118] Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture,* pp. 85-87.
[119] Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture,* pp. 90-91.
[120] Peach, diary, 24/06/1918.
[121] Makin, letter, 11/03/1916.

of the YMCA's social space indicates the centrality of active recreation in the Association's work. Secondly, the YMCA's sporting mission fed into their commitment to provide recreation and comfort for soldiers that was seen to be morally good. The YMCA was the social home for soldiers during their leisure time, but it was also one that sought to uphold a moral code. For early-twentieth century liberal Protestants there was no clearer moral code than that found in sports, with their simple frameworks of rules and penalties. Concepts of sportsmanship were here literal, but their moral implications could be extrapolated to a life of service, as was central to the YMCA's mission. Secretary Rix wrote to his wife about the value of being 'a sportsman', particularly of games that taught self-control, helping young men to develop a discipline for life.[122] Nowhere was such a connection more apparent than within the military, where the sporting lessons could be more or less directly applied.

Hugh McLeod has dated the YMCA's involvement in sport back to the 1890s, placing it firmly in line with the emergence of British 'muscular Christianity'.[123] It was also in this decade that Henry Newbolt's poem 'Vitae Lampada' was published, in which he made a direct comparison between school sports and the army, with men being encouraged to 'Play up! Play up! And play the game!'[124] This poem has been given a central role in the explanation of muscular Christianity as a phenomenon, with Andrew Horrall arguing that it was the best 'parable' for expressing the 'ideals of Muscular Christianity'.[125] The movement developed in the late nineteenth century against the backdrop of imperialism and argued that a sporting education could also

[122] Rix, letter, 24/10/1915, Mansfield College Archive.
[123] Hugh McLeod, 'Muscular Christianity: American and European', in David Hempton and Hugh McLeod (eds.), *Secularisation and Religious Innovation in the North Atlantic World,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 195-213, (p. 198).
[124] Henry Newbolt, 'Vitae Lampada', 1892.
[125] Andrew Horrall, '"Keep-A-Fighting! Play the Game!", Baseball and the Canadian Forces during the First World War', *Canadian Military History* 10 (2) (2001), pp. 27-41, (p. 28).

aid men's character development, inculcating particularly young wealthy men with an ideology which stressed 'a mixture of character-building, religion, patriotism and the cult of discipline', as argued by McLeod.[126] There was here a blending together of sports and religion as, according to Horrall, 'games became allegories for spiritual virtue'.[127] This games ethic had become well-established in the public school system in the two decades preceding the First World War, although it was also diffused through society by organisations like the Boy Scouts, whose founder Robert Baden Powell was also actively involved with the YMCA. As McLeod has described, it 'answered to contemporary anxieties about the nation's health and the capacity of its young men to defend their island'.[128] It therefore fed the burgeoning movement of para-militarism, which included the establishment of the Scouts and the Salvation Army, which Olive Anderson has identified as developing from the 1880s in a growing culture of military metaphor.[129] As Simon John has identified in his study of the societal position of cricket during the First World War, 'cricket phraseology' and sporting metaphors were being used 'to comment on the war', creating a linguistic connection between the traits of 'sportsmanship and fair play' both on the sports field and the battlefield.[130] The pre-war work of the YMCA fits into the concurrent trends of Muscular Christianity and para-militarism in its commitment to the wellbeing and development of young men. Neil Garnham has observed that it was even known in some areas 'as the "Young Muscular Christians"' through its relationship with sport, fostered through its urban

[126] Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914,* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 153.
[127] Horrall, "Keep-A-Fighting!", p. 27.
[128] McLeod, 'Muscular Christianity: American and European', p. 196.
[129] Olive Anderson, 'The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain', *The English Historical Review* 86 (1971), pp. 46-72, (p. 66).
[130] Simon John, "A Different Kind of Test Match': Cricket, English Society and the First World War', *Sport in History* 33 (1) (2013), pp. 19-48.

gyms and sports clubs.[131] This was a Muscular Christianity that was democratised and targeted at the urban poor, yet nonetheless upheld the public-school ideals of gamesmanship and morality.

The idea of sport as having moral value was particularly appealing to the YMCA as it could use sporting activities to attract men to its establishments and then use them as a distraction from other, less desirable social activities. While muscular Christianity's imperial motivations do not necessarily harmonise with male domesticity, in the case of the YMCA's war work the Association can be seen to represent the soldiers' home as a place of leisure, removed from the formality of military life. This can certainly be seen at Ezbekiah Gardens, the largest of the YMCA's centres in Egypt, where the motto was 'something doing every night'. The skating rink, symbolising the centrality of sports in the YMCA's commitments, was widely enjoyed by soldiers, taking a prominent place in their letters and diaries about their visits. In the dull periods of time spent in Egypt, such games provided them with much needed excitement. One such Australian soldier, Sgt Makin, placed the rink at the centre of his description of the Gardens. He described how there were 'always dozens' on the rink, but that it also had a role for those who did not wish to participate, with the 'writing place' and 'good tea rooms' being built alongside, from where they could spectate.[132] His description of the skaters is also interesting, in that he referred to them as 'brawny sun-tanned Australians', playing into the stereotype of the Australian soldier as the strong, healthy sportsman.[133] It is certainly the case that the Australians in particular did enjoy recreational sport, with Peach also describing how they would 'try our luck at skating', as one of the things the soldier must do while in Cairo, putting it on the same level as

[131] Neil Garnham, 'Both Praying and Playing: "Muscular Christianity" and the YMCA in North-East County Durham', *Journal of Social History* 35 (2) (2001), pp. 397-407, (p. 397).
[132] Makin, letter, 11/03/1916.
[133] *ibid*

the cultural and historical highlights of the city.[134] Sport was an intrinsic part of their wartime leisure experience, which was facilitated by the YMCA in the base camps.

This was similarly identified in British soldiers by Christian writer and soldier Hankey, who talked of the 'sporting instinct which is in every healthy British boy'.[135] Here health equated not only to a soldier's fitness, but also their moral strength and military effectiveness. Nonetheless, regional and cultural differences did differently colour soldiers' understanding and enjoyment of sports, even within the British Army. For soldiers from across the British Empire, it was important for them to be able to enjoy the sports of their youth, promulgating their national identity within a largely homogenised army. For instance, Canadian soldiers found it an important part of their war experience to practice baseball, a sport not widely played outside North America. Horrall has investigated the Canadian Forces' enjoyment of baseball throughout the war, presenting the YMCA as central to their experiences, through the matches they organised. He has identified May 1916 as the earliest date for '"professional" or spectator baseball' at the front, when the YMCA staged a game as part of the Empire Day Sports Meeting in Flanders.[136] The YMCA played an important role in supporting soldiers through sport, in this case providing Canadian soldiers with a homely familiarity for a sport that they enjoyed, but that was not widely known in Europe. Ian Syson has studied the converse side of this, noting that where Australian soldiers were not able to play Australian Rules football, they would be frustrated by the imposition of soccer as an unsatisfactory replacement that they considered to be 'unestablished, minor, [and] foreign'.[137] These soldiers would play soccer if Australian football was

[134] Peach, letter, 23/02/1916.
[135] Hankey, *A Student in Arms,* p. 97.
[136] Horrall, "Keep-a-fighting!", p. 32.
[137] Ian Syson, 'Fronting Up: Australian Soccer and the First World War', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31 (2014), pp. 2345-2361, (p. 2346).

unavailable, as it often was, indicating the overall importance to them of sport, but such participation was described begrudgingly in their correspondence as it was perceived to be alienating of their Australian identity. From this, alongside the Canadian baseball evidence, it can be seen that home sports played an important role in soldiers' morale, which could be supported by the YMCA, although in the case of Australian football it appears that this was not always accommodated.

Moreover, the use of sports could also help the YMCA celebrate special occasions. A cartoon ran in the *Red Triangle* on 8th June 1917 illustrating the traditional sports day events held to celebrate Whit Monday at a place 'within three miles of the front line'.[138] Although the location is not specified and the events are removed from their context, one can see the sorts of events held, including a pillow fight, running races, and 'the good old sack race'.[139] A similar cartoon, also by YMCA artist W. Cecil Dunford, depicts the sort of hut games with which Christmas was celebrated. Dunford was the Association's artist with the Second Army in Belgium, so it is likely that both of these cartoons were drawn from activities in the YMCA's huts in the Ypres Salient. As befitting Christmas games, these were largely indoors with activities such as the 'string and toffee competition' and 'putting the missing moustache on the Kaiser' (a wartime take on pin the tail on the donkey).[140] Here the overlap between organised sport and informal games can be seen, working both to provide active recreation for soldiers and a distraction from war service for the mind and body. Competition, whether large or small, was part of a soldier's routine, whether it was a football match to celebrate an

[138] W. Cecil Dunford, 'Whit Monday with the Boys at the Front', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 08/06/1917, p. 511.
[139] ibid
[140] W. Cecil Dunford, 'Xmas Fun at the Front', *The Red Triangle* 05/01/1917, p. 1269.

occasion, or an evening card game. The YMCA helped facilitate all of this, from its Whitsun festivals down to whist games in the huts.

Theatre and Cinema



Figure 3 "The Great Push" by Bert Wardle[141]

Alongside sports and games, the other main form of recreation for soldiers in the YMCA huts took the form of concerts and cinema shows. Especially in camp, the evening's focus would often turn to the YMCA, where most nights a concert would be held or a film shown in one of the cinemas. As Emma Hanna has argued, cinema and theatre provisions for soldiers 'were seen to perform a similar function to sports', namely that they 'brought the ranks together in a spirit of community, gave rest from autonomy and obedience, and helped to displace anxiety'.[142] Like sport, these communal entertainments encouraged opportunities for homosocial bonding and camaraderie between soldiers, but also provided escapism for the men, entertaining their imaginations with commercial films, comedy sketches, and light-hearted songs. In keeping with the ethics derived from its Christian inspiration, the YMCA refused to show anything it would consider vulgar, yet comedy was still the dominant form of

[141] *Told in the Huts,* p. 146.
[142] Emma Hanna, 'British Cinema, Regulation and the War Effort, 1914-1918', in Andrew Maunder (ed.), *British Theatre and the Great War, 1914-1919: New Perspectives,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 195-214, (p. 207).

entertainment, often making light of soldiers' frustrations. This comic stoicism has been identified by Fuller, who noted that there were often 'jabs at the Home Front, at the support troops, at the scarcity of leave and of real rest, and at the endlessness of the war'.[143] The entertainments therefore gave soldiers an outlet for these frustrations, helping to defuse tensions that may have otherwise become overwhelming. These theatre and cinemas shows are among the most celebrated aspects of the YMCA's recreational work, meaning there is a wealth of descriptions of the shows hosted in the huts across soldiers' writing. It is quite typical for a soldier's diary entry to conclude with the line 'went to concert in hut in evening'. The YMCA was not always cited, and indeed was just one of a number of organisations producing shows, yet it was undoubtedly a leader in this field, both in terms of its pioneering work and the scale of productions it organised throughout the war.

In the rest camps, the YMCA endeavoured to host a different show every night, whether it was a film, lantern show, play, or concert. This was certainly the case at the Ezbekiah Gardens and in Le Havre, where Peach wrote to his mother that 'there is something on every night in one or other of the YMCA huts in camp', for there were several across the Havre base camps, 'so a fellow cannot complain of lack of amusement'.[144] Boredom was the enemy of the soldier, often seen to be responsible for the lowering of morals and the destruction of morale, both of which the YMCA hoped to counter through its entertainment provision. It is also important to note that YMCA shows were often free, removing a potential barrier to soldiers who did not have money for, or did not wish to spend it on, entertainments, and undercutting many other commercial offerings. Usually these shows were the only entertainment available to

[143] Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture,* p. 101.
[144] Letter from William E Peach to his mother, 25/06/1918, AWM2016.30.81.

soldiers in the dreary routine of camp life. Herbert Howard Cooper commented in a post-war interview with the Imperial War Museum that 'outside the concert party there was nothing to go to for amusement'; a sentiment widely shared among fellow soldiers.[145] The YMCA was therefore providing them with a valuable service that was a key feature of their wartime recreation.

The hut concerts could take two forms. The first of these was the divisional concert party, consisting of soldier musicians who would rehearse and perform during their rest periods. This appealed to troops as it was a shared experience with their fellow comrades. The second form was the touring concert party, consisting of professional performers who were employed by organisations like the YMCA to travel between the different huts. The most popular of these were the Lena Ashwell groups, named after their leader, a notable West End performer, producer and theatre manager. Lady Rodney, of the YMCA's Ladies' Auxiliary Committee, first asked Ashwell to send a party to Havre base camp in early 1915, with the first concert taking place at Harfleur on 8th February. This was deemed an immediate success and the programme grew rapidly from there, with Margaret Leask calculating that 'more than 600 actors, musicians and entertainers' were engaged in it throughout the war.[146] Ashwell described in a YMCA publication that her parties consisted of 'six artistes as a rule – soprano, contralto, tenor, bass, violinist or cellist, and entertainer, often a conjuror or ventriloquist'.[147] They would perform a variety show, very much in the style of the music hall. Each group would tour for up to six months at a time, often performing up to three concerts a day in the base camps, hospitals and 'Firing Lines'. It is not clear

[145] Herbert Howard Cooper, IWM Sound Archive, #9424.
[146] Margaret Leask, 'Lena Ashwell: Touring Concert Parties and Arts Advocacy, 1914-1919', in Andrew Maunder (ed.), *British Theatre and the Great War, 1914-1919: New Perspectives,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 251-268, (p. 261).
[147] Lena Ashwell, 'Concerts at the Front', in *Told in the Huts: The YMCA Gift Book,* (New York: Frederick A Stokes, 1916), pp. 146-150, (p. 147).

quite how close to the actual front these parties performed, although they were active in the Ypres Salient throughout 1917. The popularity of Ashwell's troupes and similar groups was widespread, with many YMCA cartoons depicting the crush of soldiers attending the concerts. The YMCA's Director of Music in Salonica, the famed composer Gustav Holst, described it similarly, writing to his wife after one concert that 'we had a big and unexpected audience in the theatre and an equally big one outside'. Here, canvas huts were used so those outside 'heard quite well', but still 'so many people had to be refused that we were forced to repeat the concert'.[148] This was typical of the popular reception received by the concerts which became a treasured part of many soldiers' war experience.

The success of the concerts meant that the YMCA could use them to attract men to the huts. YMCA secretary and American evangelist G Sherwood Eddy described in his 1917 promotional memoir how the Association could catch the attention of soldiers through music and use it to draw them into their hut mission.[149] Certainly where 'things are very monotonous in camp', as in Wilbert Berg's description of Salisbury Plain, the concerts were a clear draw as they could 'liven us up'.[150] Yet the benefit to morale of these performances went further than the immediate escapism and entertainment they provided. As Christopher Burns has argued, 'the singing and dancing of the concert party … responded to soldiers' desire to hold onto their connections with home' in much the same way as the sending and receiving of letters.[151] This was recognised by Ashwell at the time, as she described how soldiers regarded the concerts 'as a loving gift from those at home', emphasising the particular importance of the

[148] Gustav Holst, letter, 25/02/1919, Britten-Pears Foundation, HOL/1/5/1/8/25.
[149] G Sherwood Eddy, *With our Soldiers in France,* (New York: Association Press, 1917), p. 37.
[150] Wilbert Berg, letter, 22/10/1916, AWM, RCDIG0000244.
[151] Christopher Burns, 'A Taste of Civvy Street: Heroic Adventure and Domesticity in the Soldier Concert Parties of the First and Second World Wars', *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 13 (2012), pp. 115-127, (p. 122).

civilian concert troupe as a travelling sample of home life.[152] Music, by nature, connected with soldiers' sense of nostalgia as reminders of peacetime and civilian comforts. This was noted by YMCA worker Rev. Lauchlan MacLean Watt who wrote in the YMCA's newspaper that the favourite songs of soldiers were those 'deeply charged with sentimentality'.[153] Thus, it can be seen that the YMCA's concert program contributed to what Eddy referred to as the Association's 'strong homing instinct', in which domestic pre-war comfort was imparted to soldiers for the benefit of their morale.[154]

This enjoyment of music was spread beyond the concert parties to be a near-permanent feature of life in the YMCA huts through gramophones and impromptu sing-songs round the piano. Cpl Johnson William Double described discovering the recently established YMCA hut in Sliema, Malta while convalescing from wounds in February 1916. The immediate appeal to him was the piano, around which a group of them 'had about 1 ½ hours music and songs'.[155] The music of the YMCA soon became a regular fixture in his life and he played piano there most days during his convalescence. Very soon he joked in his diary that he was 'think[ing] of adding OTHMF to my name, this does not stand for Only Tommy Mad with Fright, but Organist to His Majesty's Forces', because of how often he played.[156] His experience was echoed by Granville Hampson who remarked that 'being a pianist made you almost very popular'.[157] After the war he recalled how whenever he went into the YMCA hut he would hear "Come on Hampson, let's have a tune!", with his comrades always

[152] Ashwell, 'Concerts at the Front', p. 149.
[153] Lachlan MacLean Watt, 'Pen Pictures from the Front: a Vivid Impression of the Association's Work in France', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 19/02/1915, p. 128.
[154] Eddy, *With our Soldiers in France,* p. 63.
[155] Johnson William Double, transcribed diary, 09/02/1916, IWM, 09/79/1.
[156] Double, diary, 13/02/1916.
[157] Granville Hampson, IWM Sound Archive, #100670.

keen to hear music.[158] Numerous requests for donations of pianos and gramophones were made by the YMCA throughout the war, indicating the demand for them across the huts. The music could help the atmosphere of the huts, providing a positive escape from the usual sounds of war and setting the relaxed mood for the soldiers. This worked in the same way as the huts' furnishings, indicating the space as a place of homely leisure, removed from the military environment. It marked them as places of relaxation and enjoyment, away from the seriousness of life elsewhere at war. YMCA worker EW Hornung even claimed that the set concert was 'not a patch on these unpremeditated recitals' for the uplift they could give soldiers.[159] Live music was most favoured as it was interactive and fostered camaraderie, but where this was not available, recorded tunes played through a gramophone had a similar effect. This relatively modern technology enabled the YMCA to play music even under shellfire in Gallipoli, expanding the provision of such entertainments to where they were needed most.

In a similar vein, technology was harnessed by the YMCA to expand the impact of theatre shows. The First World War was the first cinematic war, in which films could be used both to inform and entertain civilians and servicemen. At the outbreak of the war in 1914, cinema-going was already a popular pastime in Britain, albeit one that was seen as a 'cheap imitation of the theatre', as De Groot has observed.[160] Hanna has agreed with this, arguing that it was the war itself that 'served to validate both the popularity and effectiveness of cinema', giving it its place in popular entertainment.[161] In her investigation of wartime cinema, Hanna has argued that the war was 'a catalyst

[158] *ibid*
[159] EW Hornung, *Notes of a Camp Follower on the Western Front,* (New York City: EP Dutton and Company, 1919), p. 12.
[160] De Groot, *Blighty,* p. 239.
[161] Emma Hanna, 'Putting the Moral into Morale: YMCA Cinemas on the Western Front, 1914-1918', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35 (4) (2015), pp. 615-630, (p. 619).

for the development of British cinema', namely through the 'new market' it created.[162] The YMCA was part of this new market, providing soldiers with cinema shows. This work began in the Spring of 1915, under sponsorship from the Cavendish Club, a London private members' club whose mission sought to include a level of social service to the typical educated men's recreation. 200,000ft of film was initially obtained, with both British and American film companies donating some free of charge. These were then distributed among the three initial YMCA cinemas, which included a 1,200 seat cinema at Le Havre.[163] The programme was an immediate success and was soon rolled out across the YMCA's huts. By the end of 1916 Yapp noted that they had 30 or 40 cinemas in France and Flanders, but appealed in *The Times* for donations to expand provision to at least another 50 or 60.[164] By 1918, the YMCA even had a 1,000 seat cinema at the base camp in Jaffa, Palestine which was in daily use.[165] Supplying the base camps with cinemas was relatively straightforward, but the YMCA also made arrangements to supply forward areas with films, through the use of portable projectors. Association secretary A Cecil Dixon described one such 'portable cinema' they used in the Libyan Desert in October 1917.[166] At Makina Camp in Mesopotamia Chaplain J Gordon Bennett was impressed with the 'cinema, which turns its own little dynamo'.[167] As these examples show, the YMCA was able to use its cinemas to bring entertainment to the troops on hard-to-reach fronts, where it was not practical to have a travelling concert group. Moreover, in these places the YMCA huts themselves were often temporary, moving with the advancing troops. As a result, it was often difficult

[162] Hanna, 'British Cinema, Regulation and the War Effort', ps. 209 and 199.
[163] 'Cinemas at the Front', *The Times,* 12/04/1915, p. 5.
[164] 'The Work of the YMCA at the Front', *The Times,* 12/12/1916, p. 5.
[165] RBH, 'The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt and Palestine', *The Red Triangle,* May 1919, pp. 345-349, (p. 349).
[166] A Cecil Dixon, 'On the Libyan Desert', *The Red Triangle,* October 1917, pp. 67-70, (p. 67).
[167] J Gordon Bennett, diary, 20/12/1916, IWM 97/33/1.

to have many of the typical home comforts and so the work could be complemented by the portable cinemas.

There were both factual and entertainment films shown to soldiers in these cinemas, although the entertainment ones were by far the most popular. Unlike the newsreels, these provided soldiers with the escapism they craved, and it is for this reason that comedy films most appealed. Michael Hammond has identified that it was typical of cinema at the time to incorporate 'comic devices drawn from the music hall sketch', indicating the connection between the theatre and cinema in soldiers' entertainment.[168] This influence can be seen in particular in the films of Charlie Chaplin, the most popular of all shown by the YMCA. It is widely accepted, including by Amanda Laugesen, that 'cinema did not relate much to the reality of war', instead providing soldiers with a window to the most pleasurable aspects of civilian life.[169] Humour was the greatest distraction from the strains of war, with the simple slapstick of Chaplin, the Keystone Cops and Lieutenant Pimple providing light relief. Double described how 'exhilarating' the laughter from a YMCA show was, particularly while he was in hospital in Malta, giving them a reason to smile and something to look forward to.[170] The escape of a comedy film was not necessarily domestic in nature and nor did it always serve as a reminder of home. Laugesen has considered the Australian experience in particular, arguing that it was rare for an Anzac soldier to see their home reflected on the screen with them instead enjoying a more generic portrayal of 'Anglophone' life on screen.[171] To a lesser extent this was also experienced by British

[168] Michael Hammond, *The Big Show: British Cinema Culture and the Great War, 1914-1918*,(Exeter: University of Exeter press, 2006), p. 246.
[169] Amanda Laugesen, 'Forgetting their Troubles for a While: Australian Soldiers' Experiences of Cinema during the First World War', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35 (4) (2015), pp. 596-614, (p. 607).
[170] Double, diary, 10/02/1916.
[171] Laugesen, 'Forgetting their Troubles for a While', p. 596.

soldiers, who would happily consume both British and American commercial films. However, this is not to say that the enjoyment of films was a flight from domesticity. Instead, it can be observed in much the same way as Burns has understood the concert party, as providing a model of masculinity that fitted 'homosocial camaraderie' comfortably alongside the heroic adventure of the soldier.[172] Conceptions of peacetime pleasure were near universal. Each soldier could tap into that nostalgic sense of fun, shaping it to their own reminiscences, re-engaging with films familiar from their pre-war lives as well as partaking in the culture of new releases, just as their families were back home. Cinema was therefore a comforting escapism, providing alongside theatre a familiar and fun entertainment that both reminded soldiers of home and created a new domesticity with their comrades.

Christmas

There is no better example for the bringing together of homely ideals and social activities under the banner of Christianity than Christmas. The YMCA made every effort possible to provide soldiers with the best Christmas under the circumstances, enlivening the lonely time with reminders of home and the bringing together of soldierly communities. Christmas within the YMCA can therefore be seen as a case study for the culmination of the different strands of the Association's work, representing soldiers' homes and providing them with an alternative domesticity through which the Christian festival could be celebrated. This work was seen to be more important than ever at Christmas, not only because of its religious significance, but also as this was a time of increased homesickness for soldiers as their minds turned to the traditions they were missing out on. The YMCA sought to make every home comfort possible available to the soldiers from decorating the huts with festive

[172] Burns, 'A Taste of Civvy Street', p. 115.

garlands and Christmas trees to serving special Christmas lunches as a replacement for that which they would have usually enjoyed at home. Moreover, Dunford's cartoon of 'Xmas Fun at the Front' illustrated party games like a 'string and toffee competition' and special concerts, indicating how the YMCA went to great lengths to make Christmas a day of celebration despite the circumstances.[173] This was certainly reflected in the enjoyment experienced by the soldiers who attended the hut Christmas, for instance Canadian soldier Harold Simpson, who wrote to his mother after Christmas 1915 that while 'in one sense it wasn't Christmas at all … thanks largely to the YMCA, it was far more than one could expect'.[174] This was the epitome of the YMCA's work as a counter-attraction, working to fill in what soldiers were missing while at war.

'The chief festival of the home' was how Rev William Temple, later Archbishop of Canterbury, described Christmas in a 1916 article for the YMCA's newspaper, and this can certainly be seen in the way the YMCA transformed its huts for the festive season, reinforcing their characterisation as the soldiers' temporary living rooms.[175] Moreover, the wartime Christmas connected with the nostalgia of home, as shown through the singing of Christmas songs and the sharing of traditional Christmas tales. For example, Association worker A Gordon Hamlyn described how it was tradition at his hut in Flanders for there to be a lantern show on Christmas Eve to tell the story of A Christmas Carol as 'for good British men Christmas without Dickens was impossible'.[176] Furthermore, this is indicative of how the YMCA utilised its recreation provision, including shows and sports, to enhance its domestic provision for soldiers.

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[173] Dunford, 'Xmas Fun at the Front'.
[174] Harold Henry Simpson, letter, 31/12/1915, http://ww1.canada.com/faces-of-war/christmas-letters-from-the-front-remain-poignant-a-century-later on 27/04/2020.
[175] William Temple, 'Christmas and War', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 15/12/1916, p. 1182.
[176] A Gordon Hamlyn, 'Christmas at the Back of the Front', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 15/12/1916, p. 1169.

The YMCA's 'strong homing instinct', as Eddy referred to it, was clearest in the way Christmas was celebrated, but was an integral theme throughout the Association's war service.[177]

The example of Christmas brought together the YMCA's multi-level approach to domesticity and the homeliness it represented to soldiers. While it was important for the huts to be a living and dining room at the front, representing a homely place of relaxation and refreshment, it also engaged with soldiers' more emotional understanding of home, engaging the men with their families. Yet, perhaps most significantly, the YMCA demonstrated that it understood what men valued from their domestic lives, be it camaraderie or informality, supported through its range of provisions from sports and theatre to canteen refreshments. While it was the attraction of these material provisions which drew men to the huts, it was the YMCA staff, both male and female, who fostered the spirit of ideal domesticity that connected emotionally with soldiers, providing for them in the temporary home of the hut, as well as reminding them of their personal homes and, crucially, in representing the wider home, symbolically Britain, to those both raised there and those from across the Empire. This multi-level approach directly engaged with the motivators of morale to simultaneously support immediate comfort and longer-term conviction to fight.

[177] Eddy, 'With our Soldiers in France', p. 63.

Chapter Two: 'A Spirit of Daring Enterprise'

The YMCA's Response to the Challenges of War



Figure 4 The YMCA at Suvla Bay, Gallipoli[178]

Seizing the unprecedented opportunities of the First World War required the YMCA to negotiate numerous logistical challenges, adapting and expanding its work to serve the military at war. While the Association's intentions for serving the minds, bodies and souls of soldiers were clearly apparent, the practicalities of delivering such work were complex, requiring facilitation by the British Army and collaboration with other charitable bodies, including the Red Cross. There was no instantaneous solution, but rather the five years of conflict presented an evolving process of adaptation for the YMCA, supplying soldiers with physical and spiritual refreshment across all theatres of the war. This required a complete transformation of the YMCA's military work, developing from the Territorial camps of England to work across five continents, from

[178] 'Sulva Bay [sic] with YMCA Tent at Anzac', YMCA Archives, Cadbury Research Library (CRL), University of Birmingham, YMCA/K/1/8/43.

the Sinai desert to the dugouts of Ypres. These challenges were not unique to the YMCA, but it was the organisation that tackled them most comprehensively, grappling to adapt to the changing circumstances of war.

This chapter will investigate the push and pull forces that directed the YMCA's ministry throughout the First World War. The growth of the Association's work was a two-way operation, driven through its own desire to expand its work to serve alongside soldiers, wherever that may be, while also being moved at the military authorities' request to provide additional support to units. This was an evolving process throughout the war, as logistical challenges were overcome and new opportunities uncovered, which meant that the work of the YMCA was never stationary but always progressing. This will be demonstrated through a number of geographical case studies, further highlighting the myriad ways in which the Association adapted to the immediate challenges it faced. For while on the surface, the YMCA's growth from 140 army huts in August 1914 to more than 2,000 in September 1917 is remarkable, the variety within these numbers is yet more significant, from the dugouts within range of fire in ANZAC Cove, Gallipoli to the skating rink and concert venue of Ezbekiah Gardens, Cairo.

The YMCA's adaptation to the challenges of war can be considered a broad success. Field Marshal Edmund Allenby certainly considered it so, contributing the preface to *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt,* in which he said that 'no one has more reason than I to be grateful to the YMCA for its work in connection with the army'.[179] He attributed a direct contribution of the Association to the health and wellbeing of his soldiers, asserting that 'broad-minded Christianity, self-regardless devotion to work,

[179] Edmund Allenby, 'Preface', in James W Barrett, *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt,* (London: HK Lewis and Co, 1919), pp. vii-viii, (p. vii).

a spirit of daring enterprise, and sound business guidance have built up an organisation which has earned the gratitude of the Empire'.[180] This ringing endorsement indicates the value the YMCA's work was seen to hold among military commanders and thereby the impact of its work on the lower ranks.

As the war developed and expanded, so too did the YMCA. It is therefore important to acknowledge the timeline of progress made by the Association when determining its impact for soldiers. A key example of this is the level of support offered during the Third Battle of Ypres in the late Summer of 1917 when the YMCA operated refreshment dugouts and mobile aid posts for the wounded and those coming out of the line. Comparatively, a year earlier at the Battle of the Somme, this had not been possible; soldiers then would not have had contact with the YMCA until they arrived back at rear positions such as Albert. General Secretary Sir Arthur Keysall Yapp offered an anecdote of a conversation with an officer cadet to illustrate the development.

> ''In the early days of the war,' said he, 'men on arriving in new billets at the Front would say, "Is there no Y.M.C.A. in the village?" Later on they took it for granted that the Red Triangle was there and asked, "Where is the Y.M.C.A.?" Now they always say, "Where is it?" and every one knows to what they refer."[181]

Through its vast network of huts the YMCA was able to assert itself as a key support for soldiers. This will be further explored in the subsequent case studies which cover both a spatial and temporal range in order to demonstrate how the Association went from supporting soldiers in training on Salisbury Plain to advancing across Palestine in the campaign for Jerusalem, via the crucial decisions made on either side of the

[180] *ibid*
[181] Arthur Keysall Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), p. 28.

Association and the War Office to facilitate this progress. The other examples will each explore steps along this way: Cairo, where the need for moralised entertainment made the YMCA a necessity; Gallipoli, where huts were first established within reach of artillery and which represented a major logistical challenge; and Ypres, where the YMCA embedded itself into the trench system, supplying troops on a stagnant, and then rapidly mobile, front.

Salisbury Plain

From the outbreak of the First World War, Salisbury Plain served as one of the principal training centres for the rapidly expanding British Army. Newly recruited men, often still adapting to the abrupt end to civilian life spent their initial training period in the region, which had been a centre of army training since 1897. As such, the population of the plain expanded rapidly with the arrival of war, and even 'within a few days of the opening of hostilities, thirty-four thousand men were dumped down in the immediate vicinity', as recalled the YMCA's general secretary.[182] He went on to acknowledge the logistical strain this immediately caused with 'no tents, no uniforms, no rifles, nowhere to go, and nothing to do'.[183] For the YMCA, the need was obvious and marquee recreation centres were quickly erected. As the Army learnt, so too did the YMCA, understanding both the material and spiritual needs of soldiers and how best to respond to them. The early marquees dispensed refreshments and served as gathering spaces for soldiers, providing them with a central socialising space. But as the organisation of war developed, so too did that of the camps. There were clear limitations to the marquees, temporary and exposed to the weather as they were. The mechanics of need and opportunity soon progressed, transforming support for soldiers. It will therefore be seen that Salisbury Camp was a training centre not only

[182] Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle*, p. 5.
[183] *ibid*

for the army but also for the YMCA, developing together the lessons that would underpin the war.

It was amid the training camps of Salisbury Plain that the iconic YMCA hut was born. The first winter on the plain saw storms and heavy rain, which destroyed many of the marquees. The one at West Down North came down in a gale in December 1914, leaving soldiers not only lacking in a social space, but also with nowhere to attend church.[184] Soldiers were issued with permits to attend the local church in Tilshead, but this was not ideal as it necessitated them leaving the Army environment. The challenge faced by both the YMCA and military authorities as to how to weatherproof this work is indicative of how early in the war the Association had demonstrated its significance in the lives of soldiers. It had, even by this time, exerted its position as a key provider in the welfare of soldiers, which once experienced could not be easily foregone. It therefore followed that the army were willing to co-operate with the YMCA, helping their charitable partner to cement its place in camp through more permanent buildings. Moreover, it was also recognised that the men sought a warmth that the tents could not provide, both in the YMCA and in their living quarters. Yapp bemoaned that 'no tent could weather the gales of Salisbury Plain in winter', indicating the active urgency with which they were pressed to develop the camps in the war's first winter. Camp logistics progressed as quickly as supplies would allow, and soon prefabricated wooden huts took over from the tents, offering warmer and drier spaces that also opened the door to a much wider range of YMCA activities, notably through the provision of kitchens for the canteens and spaces to accommodate camp libraries.

[184] TS Crawford, *The Canadian Army on Salisbury Plain: The First Canadian Contingent October 1914-February 1915,* (Wellington: Halsgrove, 2012), p. 64.

These were supplied by the same companies providing wooden huts to the army, enabling a consistency and sharing of resources in the development of camps.

However, for all the benefits of the wooden huts, they also presented a specific challenge to the YMCA. For them, the transition to wooden structures, while transformative, necessitated an increased demand on fundraising. It now cost significantly more to establish each centre, for which the charity was reliant on public donations. The early fundraising advertisements in national newspapers appealed for £300 per hut, for both the structure and equipment.[185] The first mention of these in *The Times* came in October 1914 with a small appeal for funds, but this was soon succeeded by large pictorial advertisements, such was the urgency of the appeals. The tone of such advertisements was somewhat desperate, under headlines such as 'An Unprecedented Social Emergency', encouraging donations to be made.[186] This advertisement, like many of them, was illustrated with a sketch drawing of a long wooden hut, splashed with the association's large triangle emblem across its roof. It is simple yet striking in design, but it is perhaps most striking in its pleas for large donations of £300 to fund each hut, with the keen insistence that '109 new buildings [are] urgently needed to replace the marquees' given that 'the cold winter weather is being keenly felt by our troops in camp'.[187] The clear implication is that it was only through donations towards huts that the soldiers, with whom the reader is reminded of a personal connection, could be saved from the perils of the season.

The determination with which the YMCA approached its fundraising is understandable, given the numerous simultaneous appeals for donations to various worthy war causes, from the Red Cross to the government's own War Bonds. It is

[185] YMCA advertisement, *The Times,* 12/11/1914.
[186] 'An Unprecedented Social Emergency', *The Times,* 30/11/1914, p. 4.
[187] *ibid*

understandable that these requests would have felt near constant to those on the home front. Yet, they were nonetheless necessary to raise the voluntary funds through which the Association, alongside other charities, depended. In addition to the advertisements in national newspapers, a similar style of personal appeals was adopted through direct mail advertisements sent to potential donors, a tactic Peter Grant identifies as being used for the first time in the First World War.[188] With such competition and demand for funds to support the war effort from so many charities, innovation of this kind was required to be successful. That is not to say that defining success for the YMCA is straightforward. It was certainly fortunate in the support it received and the initial goal of 109 huts was, like many subsequent targets, achieved, but in its expansion from Salisbury Plain and the home front to the active theatres, there were always further opportunities or additional avenues of support that could be offered and more funds were always required.

One particular way the YMCA bolstered its support during the war was through the famous patrons who endorsed its work, with royalty including Princess Helena Victoria being actively involved in the effort. As an independent charity, the support from the public was vital in ensuring its work could be consistently delivered. Society patronage reinforced this, as well as helping to assert the importance of the YMCA's work. This was most commonly seen with the grand openings of new huts, for example the hut at Grosvenor Gardens in London which was opened by Queen Alexandra in January 1916, supported by Princess Helena Victoria and the Grand Duchess George of Russia who operated the tea counter at the event.[189] Such an occasion created great excitement among the soldiers, encouraging them to try out the new facility, while

[188] Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilising Charity,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 47.
[189] 'Queen Alexandra's Interest in the Soldiers', *The Times,* 18/01/1916, p. 5.

simultaneously reinforcing the significance of the hut cause to current and potential donors. These events generated extensive press coverage in the Court Circular and in articles in the national newspapers, further highlighting the YMCA's work and offering advertisement for its services. Royal patronage also played a direct role in YMCA fundraising, as through an early *Times* advertisement which bore the banner 'Queen Alexandra herself gives a building'.[190] The sub-caption 'Will you also give one?' demonstrates the role the Queen's name played in the appeal, noting that if the queen herself was able to have 'sent a cheque' then so could the reader, given the importance with which she must view the work.

There was also some more tangible work done by patrons, utilising their influence for the benefit of the YMCA. In the early months of the war Princess Helena Victoria used her position to communicate with the Adjutant General to secure his permission through the Army Council for the support of military transport to mobilise the hut supplies and staff.[191] This was a crucial intervention that enabled much of the YMCA's work throughout the war and likely allowed support that would not have been possible, at least so early in the war, without it. This is just one example of Princess Helena's active involvement. She also took up a position as President of the Women's Auxiliary Committee of the YMCA, which, through its own headquarters at 23 Bruton St, Mayfair, worked to keep the increasing number of huts supplied. Appeals for items, often books and cricket sets, in addition to monetary support, were frequent in *The Times,* the committee responding to requests for resources from regional secretaries both in the UK and overseas. It is notable that the women involved in the organisation of this committee included Lady Bessborough, Lady Edgerton and Lady De Ramsey,

[190] 'Queen Alexandra Herself Gives a Building'
[191] Arthur Keysall Yapp, letter to Oliver McCowen, 24/11/1914, CRL YMCA/2/3/19.

all upper-class society women for whom it was a tangible way they could support the war effort, using their wealthy contacts to solicit donations, while remaining in what they perceived as their respectable realm removed from the real horrors of war. This is not to diminish the importance or seriousness of these women's work. Princess Helena did travel to France in 1916 to help co-ordinate for the YMCA in Boulogne, taking an active involvement in the running of the Association, but theirs was a specific role that brought both funds and acclaim from society figures, allowing the YMCA to expand from its rugged early days on Salisbury Plain.

The value of this great fundraising effort was in the homes created for soldiers. The support of its patrons helped develop the image of the YMCA centres as respectable domestic spaces, comforting and supporting soldiers. It was this characterisation that enabled the Association to become cherished by soldiers and their families alike and for this, the groundwork was laid at training camps like those on Salisbury Plain. Demonstrating how quickly the wooden structures took over as the preferred means of building, the term "hutwork" became the accepted phrasing for all the YMCA's work, regardless of the actual premises. They became the iconic symbol of the Association's work, even featuring on its fundraising pins. Arguably, by 1918 the simple outline of the prefabricated hut was as symbolic of its work as the bold red triangle emblem. But also of great value was what the YMCA organisers referred to as the 'hut habit', which would form a consistent source of support and comfort throughout the war. The huts on Salisbury Plain were therefore significant in setting the tone and basis for the rest of a soldier's service. As such, it was important to the YMCA for its huts in the training camps to be the best possible attractions to soldiers in order to establish the huts in their routines as a source of comfort on which they could depend. The hut habit, it was

hoped, would introduce the men to new, wholesome means of recreation, allowing them to socialise and make best use of their newly realised free time.

Much of this time was in the evenings. Wilbert Berg, of the Australian Imperial Force, complained in a letter to his parents that 'things are very monotonous in camp', with one of the few respites being the concerts and bands run by organisations like the YMCA.[192] The development of the YMCA's entertainments programme was crucial to its overall success in the war, making it shine as a light in the dullness of camp. Establishing this connection in the soldiers' minds was vital at Salisbury, but the specific conditions of the Plain also meant that the men needed to rely heavily on the Association's entertainments. Access to the villages beyond the perimeters of camp was severely restricted, as observed by TS Crawford, unless explicit and often time-restricted permission was granted, and even then it was quite some distance with limited transport options into an actual town.[193] The closest camp was 13 miles from Salisbury itself, although it was acknowledged in the press that this was only 'by a road which is largely a river of mud'.[194] Aware of the risk of ill-discipline from bored soldiers and unaccustomed recruits, there were additional limitations surrounding civilian public houses, including a local ruling that all must close by 9pm. This, Crawford argues, meant 'soldiers quickly came to appreciate the YMCA' and the entertainments it offered.[195] This is evident in a contemporary report from 1914 which noted that 'cases of drunkenness are few, for the men are fairly removed from the temptations of a large town'.[196] The risk of boredom was nonetheless prevalent, countered by what the same report described as 'the chief centre of recreation' which 'is in the YMCA tents, where

[192] Wilbert Berg, letter, 22/10/1916, Australian War Memorial (AWM), RCDIG0000244.
[193] Crawford, *The Canadian Army on Salisbury Plain,* p. 107.
[194] 'Life on Salisbury Plain', *The Times,* 28/11/1914, p. 5.
[195] Crawford, *The Canadian Army on Salisbury Plain,* p. 107.
[196] 'Life on Salisbury Plain', *The Times,* 28/11/1914, p. 5.

there are great sing-songs of an evening'.[197] It can therefore be seen that the YMCA was an important attraction in the otherwise boring environment of camp.

Beyond its primary provisions, the YMCA had a particular strength in its role of developing community bonds among the soldiers. In camp, this was especially valued, developing the cohesion that would stand the men in good stead throughout their service. Much of this social work was achieved through sports, with space in camp put over for football, cricket and athletics. Sports were an important part of YMCA work before the war for the benefits they could provide men not only in health but also in morality and community. Adam Park has identified that the YMCA's role in this, while specific and significant, was part of a wider 'military-sports complex' that supported soldiers' morale and improved their abilities on the battlefield.[198] On Salisbury Plain this went one step further, being utilised by the YMCA in convalescent camps to benefit soldiers' recovery, alleviate boredom and develop community. At times this was humorous, for instance with one cricket match played at Fovant Convalescent Camp in which the two sides were determined by those who had measles against those suffering from mumps. In order to stop cross-contamination the game had to be adapted to be played 'long-distance', although was swiftly abandoned by the mumps team 'owing to a suggestion that some of their opponents were suspected of German measles'.[199] While this is a comedic example, it is just one instance of sports being used to entertain and support soldiers in wartime camps.

The value of the YMCA's work on Salisbury Plain was rewarded in the permissions granted to the Association to proceed with the army to the Western Front. Such an

[197] 'Life on Salisbury Plain', *The Times,* 28/11/1914, p. 5.
[198] Adam Park, '"Fighting Spirit": World War I and the YMCA's Allied Boxing Program', *Religion and American Culture* 29 (3) (2019), pp. 391-430, (p. 40).
[199] 'Measles versus Mumps', *Hurdcott Herald,* 22/09/1917, p. 50.

invitation was not automatic and there was initial War Office reluctance to permit them. However, as observed by Crawford, it was through an intervention by the commanding officers of the First Canadian Contingent (the precursor to the 1st Canadian Division) that the agreement was made; four honorary officers travelled with the division to France in February 1915. It is significant that this decision was made by those commanders who had active experience of the YMCA's work and how it supported the men, demonstrating how the Association was able to demonstrate the value of its work through its camp operations. The extent to which the 'hut habit' was developed among ordinary soldiers is more difficult to determine, but the Association was nonetheless able to exert its importance on the commanders, thereby opening the door to its wider work as the war progressed.

Cairo

As the camps in the United Kingdom expanded, so too did those in the imperial base camps, mobilising to receive soldiers from around the world as they progressed towards battle. If the home camps were seen as environments desperately in need of moralised entertainment, this was nothing in comparison to the challenges faced in Cairo, where vice was believed to lie around every street corner. For many Australian and New Zealand soldiers, Cairo was their first experience of overseas service, freshly trained and with a sense of adventure. Cairo was an exciting destination in which there were numerous temptations, none more so than at Haret el Wasser, the street at the heart of the city's prosperous red-light district. This became the focus of the YMCA's work in the region, which sought to overcome the challenges of vice through replacement entertainments that were implicitly moralised. Chapter 4 will focus more closely on the YMCA's ideological reasoning for its work against prostitution, but here the example of Cairo will serve to demonstrate how the Association pragmatically addressed the challenge and overcame the threat it posed to soldiers' welfare.

The YMCA's work in Cairo began in 1909 as a product of the British protectorate, with participation initially limited to British people, alongside Americans who were in Africa as Christian missionaries. This Anglocentricism was widened in 1913 when subsequent funding enabled the employment of permanent secretary William Jessop, and through the organisation of the International Committee, an Arabic branch was established alongside the Anglo-American.[200] Jessop transformed the work of the YMCA in Egypt and was instrumental in the Association's success in the Egyptian and Ottoman theatres throughout the First World War. Although born in Bolton, his workers often described him as American, his accent no doubt shaped by his years of Christian missionary work in the United States, before his postings to India and Egypt. His was a traditional YMCA background and he arrived in Cairo well-experienced in its international work. However, with the arrival of war his remit was transformed in ways not even he could have foreseen a year previously upon his arrival in the city. It was reconstituted from that of a city in an imperial outpost to the centre of a major military logistics and training base, with operations eventually encompassing the majority of north-eastern Africa and the Middle East. The city itself was also transformed, with the introduction of martial law in addition to the arrival of tens of thousands of international soldiers. Cairo was now actively run by the British as a garrison for their forces, an arrangement that fostered tensions with both the local populations and arriving troops. The YMCA moved in step with 'the Egypt General Mission, the Church Missionary Society, and the American Mission', developing the missionary work that had come before and capitalising upon the logistical organisation they had already established.[201] These early beginnings to war work were described by

[200] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *World Service: A History of the Foreign Work and World Service of the Young Men's Christian Associations of the United States and Canada,* (New York: Association Press, 1957), p. 346.
[201] James W Barrett, *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt,* (London: HK Lewis and Co, 1919), p. 34.

James Barrett, who represented the Australian Red Cross in generating 'a practical alliance with the YMCA', indicating the extent of charitable co-ordination on the ground to react and respond to the challenges of war.[202] Co-ordination, particularly of funds, was pivotal given the challenges to both morals and morale that persisted in Cairo, and through collaborative work the YMCA was able to establish more than 50 centres across Egypt throughout the course of the war, with a concentration of 14 in Cairo.

With the arrival of so many soldiers in the city came fears for their health, morality and respectability. This was especially the case given what Sarah Shepherd has observed as the troops arriving in Cairo 'having plenty of spare time' which 'provided the opportunity for sightseeing and travel', as well as seeking 'entertainment as a form of escape'.[203] This perspective for soldiers, coupled with Cairo's thriving red-light district conspired to cause a crisis of venereal disease that posed a challenge to the whole efficiency of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. Such was the seriousness of the crisis that Mario M Ruiz has identified that 'the average incidence of venereal disease was 12 per cent' across the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, although it could be 'as high as 25 per cent in some army units', making it an important concern for the army not just in terms of morals but also in terms of ensuring the forces were physically fit to serve.[204] James Kitchen corroborates this, arguing that 'no other cause of illness came close to this level of admissions'.[205] When these findings are combined with the perspectives of the YMCA leaders at the time, the extent of the problem is

[202] Barrett, *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt,* p. vii.
[203] Sarah Shepherd, 'Soldiering in Egypt', in Neil Cooke (ed.), *Journeys Erased by Time: The Rediscovered Footprints of Travellers in Egypt and the Near East,* (Archaeopress, 2019), pp. 59-69, (ps. 59 and 62).
[204] Mario M Ruiz, 'Manly Spectacles and Imperial Soldiers in Wartime Egypt, 1914-19', *Middle Eastern Studies* 45 (3) (2009), pp. 351-371, (p. 358).
[205] James E Kitchen, *The British Imperial Army in the Middle East: Morale and Military Identity in the Sinai and Palestine Campaigns, 1916-18,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 58.

understandable. For instance, G Sherwood Eddy described how 'vice does not lurk in secret' in Cairo, 'but flaunts itself, in open effrontery'.[206] However, there was no clear solution for how to deter soldiers from prostitution, with debates continuing throughout the war between the military, the local authorities, and health and religious figures to determine the most effective course of action. The focus of these, Ruiz argues, was not on the soldier 'as a sexual subject', but rather on him being 'capable of exercising self control'.[207] The crisis came to a head at the so-called "Battle of the Wozzer", a riot on 2nd April 1915 sparked amid the brothels, which came to be the overspill of much dissatisfaction around poor provisions of recreation for soldiers, venereal disease rates, and drunkenness. This was the tipping point: something had to be done to satisfy soldiers in Cairo.

The riot brought into sharp focus the material threat to military efficiency that derived not only from prostitution, but also from attempts to control soldiers' behaviour. This, Ruiz argues, was coupled with the fact that 'absence without leave, drunkenness and physical assaults were common offences among the Australian forces in Egypt' in 1915.[208] These were symptoms of a particular sense of adolescent freedom observable in soldiers' behaviour in Egypt, driven by the excitement and novelty of overseas service for Anzac soldiers for whom it was their first time abroad. To co-ordinate the authorities' response, the Cairo Purification Committee was appointed, 'whose remit', Mark Harrison has analysed, 'was to examine the working of existing regulations and to suggest other means for preventing infection of the troops'.[209] Its impact was as bureaucratic as its mission sounds, setting out all the reasons prostitution was not to

[206] G Sherwood Eddy, *With our Soldiers in France,* (New York: Association Press, 1917), p. 76.
[207] Ruiz, 'Manly Spectacles and Imperial Soldiers', p. 367.
[208] Ruiz, 'Manly Spectacles and Imperial Soldiers', p. 360.
[209] Mark Harrison, 'The British Army and the Problem of Venereal Disease in France and Egypt during the First World War', *Medical History* 39 (1995), pp. 133-158, (p. 152).

be supported, without major advancements in control or containment. Harrison has concluded as much, in that while there was 'great enthusiasm' for purification, 'there were clearly limits to its effectiveness'.[210] Regulation alone was insufficient and attention turned to encouragement, motivating soldiers to avoid the Wassir district. One of these strands was led by the army chaplains, including New Zealand Baptist minister Guy Thornton, who would spend his evenings 'seeking to stem the foul tide of immorality that threatened to overwhelm so many of our soldiers'.[211] This involved talking with soldiers and encouraging them towards other pursuits; an endeavour that, while honourable, is not recorded to have been particularly effective. Instead the YMCA set about leading by example and using the challenges presented by the 'appalling state of things' to 'undertake quite a new work', 'with the co-operation of a Colonial Red Cross Society'.[212] The new work YMCA secretary AH Griffiths was describing was an extensive remodelling of its recreation facilities, which placed the focus firmly on counter-attractions and offering a better alternative for recreation.

The immediate consequence of this was that on 17th August 1915, just months after the Battle of the Wozzer, the largest of the YMCA's Cairo centres was opened at the Ezbekiah Gardens. This example is a brilliant illustration of the priorities of the Association in the Egyptian capital. Located on edge of the Wassir, but also in the vicinity of the Kasr el-Nil barracks, it was clearly placed to draw men towards its moralised conception of entertainment. It was an endeavour supported by the local authorities, with permission granted by the Minister of Public Works. The focus was firmly on recreation, with the slogan above the entry way reading 'something doing

[210] Harrison, 'The British Army and the Problem of Venereal Disease', p. 155.
[211] Guy Thornton, *With the ANZACs in Cairo,* (London: Allenson, 1917), no page numbers.
[212] quoted in James W Barrett, *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt,* (London: HK Lewis and Co, 1919).

every night'.[213] Unusually for the YMCA, Ezbekiah was not just one hut structure but rather a whole park consisting of a range of different entertainments. There were the ubiquitous concert hall and tea rooms, but the attention was also on the value of outdoor recreation, encompassing an entire park full of green spaces, a swimming pool, and, at the centre, a roller-skating rink. This rink became the heart of the Gardens, with visiting soldiers strapping wheels to their army boots to skate with friends, or to participate in hockey. Of particular delight would have been the skating evenings with orchestra accompaniment – an elaborate precursor to roller disco. In an evening the rink could be transformed into an outside theatre, where soldiers regularly enjoyed entertainment from concert parties, including the famed Lena Ashwell's Concert Troupes. Swimming and cinema shows were also highly celebrated, alongside more intellectual pursuits which included French classes as well as those in both colloquial and classic Arabic. [214] Descriptions of Cairo sing the praises of the Gardens' success, which averaged 1,600 visitors per day in the middle of the war.[215] Maintaining such a large operation was far from easy but with a combination of funding from the YMCA, Christian missions, and the Red Cross the Ezbekiah secretary James Lawrence Hay, a presbyterian from Otago, New Zealand, ably co-ordinated a large staff to support the immense demand from the soldiers. The YMCA itself estimated that 'a hundred' women were 'serving in rotation' to keep the men in refreshments, with volunteers sourced from Britain, Australia and New Zealand.[216] The deployment of women from the home countries was a major undertaking, but one which was deemed worthwhile in the moralisation of Cairo, helping create an atmosphere at Ezbekiah of

[213] *Summary of the World War Work of the American YMCA* (International Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association, 1920), P. 81.
[214] Barrett, *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt,* pp. 56-7.
[215] Barrett, *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt,* p. 61.
[216] RBH, 'The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt and Palestine', The *Red Triangle,* May 1919, pp. 345-349, (p. 346).

homely comfort - a clear counter-attraction from the Wozzer and a break from military life.

The effectiveness of the Ezbekiah Gardens as a counter-attraction can be observed in the way that it became a central beacon of entertainment for soldiers. It is frequently described in soldiers' letters home as a place where they were accessing refreshment and comfort, and in their diaries as a place they would frequently return to, in a way that indicates that Ezbekiah was able to exert itself as the centre of the Cairo social scene for soldiers. Sgt James J Makin of 21st battalion, Australian Imperial Force illustrated as much in his diary when he called the gardens 'a rendez-vous for Australian soldiers', where 'there are always plenty of ways of filling an hour or so'.[217] His diary also recalls how he and his friends would go into the city by tram when they could, specifically to go to Ezbekiah, such was its appeal. His particular favourite appears to have been at the canteen beside the skating rink, from where he would write to his family while watching chums skate.[218] There is a clear sense of relaxation and enjoyment in depictions of Ezbekiah, which is far from unique to Makin, demonstrating its broad success. This has also been recognised at a broader level. Kitchen, in his study of soldiering in the region, has argued what a commendable job was done by the Association for providing 'an important welfare network', that moved them towards more moralised pursuits that they 'could easily access' across Cairo.[219] It would be too simplistic to argue that the establishment of the Ezbekiah Gardens prevented any further riots in Cairo, yet the counter-attractions for which it was most notable certainly contributed to turning the tide towards a more settled military population in the city in which morale could be more consistently supported.

[217] James J Makin, diary, 10/03/1916, AWM RCDIG0001463.
[218] James J Makin, letter, 11/03/1916, AWM RCDIG0001425.
[219] Kitchen, *The British Imperial Army in the Middle East,* p. 87.

Gallipoli

Jessop's work, however, was not only limited to Egypt. Although he had spent the initial months of the war developing work for the base camps, with the outbreak of the Gallipoli Campaign in April 1915, the YMCA's Cairo headquarters needed to reorientate its work to support the campaign. The Gallipoli Peninsula was 600 miles from Egypt, yet for the YMCA as for the army, it remained the closest major garrison and resource depot from which the Dardanelles offensive could be organised and supplied. Initially, it was taken almost as a foregone conclusion that it was impossible for the YMCA to operate in the battle zone. However, through the many specific factors in Gallipoli it was found that not only was the YMCA's presence possible, but it was also necessary to sustain an army whose morale was consistently near breaking point. Gallipoli is therefore an important case study for how the YMCA overcame the challenges of working in an active war zone, where supplies were constrained and within range of the artillery.

In early 1915 the YMCA was beginning the advance of its work across the Western Front. It was learning adaptability and understanding risk, gradually establishing its place in soldiers' lives and the army's work. It was these developments that first made it seem possible for the Association to advance beyond Egypt towards Gallipoli. However, this early into the war, there had been no major offensives on the Western Front and permissions had not yet been given for the YMCA to approach the trenches themselves. It was therefore Gallipoli that became the testing ground for the Association's battle support, it falling to Jessop to take full advantage of the opportunities while navigating the many challenges presented by such work. Gallipoli then, through the small number of huts able to be established, would become the model across the world for how support could be provided, even in the most challenging circumstances.

When soldiers landed on the beaches of Gallipoli on 25th April 1915 the plan had been for a battle of movement, that would drive the Ottoman forces inland and ultimately capture Constantinople. With no established precedent for YMCA work in such conditions, there was no plan for its secretaries to follow the advance, as would later happen in Palestine. Indeed, it was not until the Gallipoli Offensive became entrenched in stalemate that the potential of YMCA support was discussed. As with all the YMCA's wartime innovation, however, progress was more gradual. It was not until three months into the offensive that Jessop first went on a scoping mission aboard the RMS Scotian, following what was described in missionary terms as 'the call' to proceed to the Dardanelles.[220] The exact origin of this request is not included in the Association report but it is clear that it originated from the military authorities in Gallipoli as it was through them that the logistics were organised. In the initial August visit, Jessop went to the neighbouring islands of Lemnos and Imbros where he inspected the camps and scoped the logistics to establish centres in the harbour camps of Mudros and Kephalos on the respective islands. Within two days, Jessop had opened a temporary marquee at Kephalos, in the heart of the camp. He remarked in his report of the work that 'it was almost pathetic to see the eagerness with which the men viewed our preparations and the way they came to the tent', such was the desperation of the soldiers for the YMCA's light relief.[221] The jubilation with which the YMCA was received was a clear indicator of the extent to which the Association was appreciated by the men in Egypt, and their desire for light relief in the supply and convalescent camps in the Dardanelles.

[220] AH Griffiths, 'YMCA Work among the Soldiers in Egypt', report, 27/09/1915, Mansfield College Archive.
[221] William Jessop, *Report on YMCA Work with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force – September 1917-1918*, Mansfield College Archive, p. 69.

However, the establishment of these centres was far from straightforward. The major problem that would become a constant headache in Turkey was that of how to maintain supplies. Prices on Imbros, Jessop estimated, were 'abnormally high' at an estimated 'two or three times Cairo prices', yet still resources were 'very limited in both quality and variety'.[222] This was only when resources of some kind could be acquired; often supplies were severely constrained regardless of price offered. Jessop made the best of local amenities, taking over 'the entire output of a bakery' on Imbros to supply its refreshment counters.[223] The problems of supply and logistics had been, in the YMCA's own attribution, the primary factor in the delay for the YMCA initiating its work in Gallipoli. Barrett acknowledged that it was 'exceedingly difficult to secure transport' in order to bring in supplies from Egypt and further afield, making them more reliant on the expensive and limited resources of the islands.[224] This, he noted, became somewhat easier by August which is what had first enabled Jessop to begin his work. In part, this was the result of improved army co-ordination, but Yapp also thanked 'the kindness of Lord Nunburnholme', a retired major from the Boer War and Lord Lieutenant of the East Riding of Yorkshire, who loaned the SS Nero from his shipping company Wilson Line to bring YMCA supplies into Mudros.[225] Without these sorts of arrangements the YMCA's work would have been impossible.

The severe constraints on supply also necessitated an increased reliance on the army authorities, as not only did the Association need the permissions to work, but also the logistical support, namely with additional transport provision. In the initial months of the campaign it appears as though this was not possible, although corroborating evidence from the army's perspective is not available. However, the experience from

[222] Jessop, *Report on YMCA Work with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force,* p. 69.
[223] *Summary of the World War Work of the American YMCA,* p. 82.
[224] Barrett, *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt,* p. 68.
[225] Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* p. 170.

the beginning of August demonstrates the situation shifting in favour of the YMCA. It is valuable to consider the wider context of the offensive at this time to understand how the Association was considered and supported. The summer of 1915 was as much a moment of reorientation for the military commanders as it was for the YMCA. The consolidation of Helles and the renewal of the battle with the August Offensive, focusing around Anzac Cove, were moments of renewed hope. However, yet again no advance was made and the sudden collapse of the attack – for a second time – only hardened the impact on soldiers' morale. David Cameron argues that although the scale of the front in Gallipoli was much smaller than the Western Front, this did not lessen the impact of the 'horrific casualties and lack of progress', but rather make them 'much more personal'.[226] These were now 'meaningless horrors' and additional support for morale was crucial.[227] Following both the attempts of the April and August landings, any prospect of breakthrough seemed futile. The commanders were therefore shifting the focus of the operation towards survival; both in terms of the physical and the morale. Into this context the YMCA was brought, developing its role in supporting soldiers under active fire; a circumstance which required different priorities than those it had in Cairo.

While logistics were pivotal to the YMCA's work, so was collaboration with the commanders. From the moment he arrived on Imbros, Jessop was joined and supported by Colonel Hawker, Camp Commandant at Kephalos, who helped the YMCA navigate everything from permissions, supplies and finances to enable the camp hut to be established.[228] Relationships such as these became all the more important on the Peninsula itself, as demonstrated by the Rev. Wilton Rix, the YMCA

[226] David Cameron, *Sorry Lads, but the Order is to Go: The August Offensive, Gallipoli, 1915,* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2009), p. 338.
[227] *ibid*
[228] Barrett, p. 69.

secretary assigned to Cape Helles, who credited Lt Col Watson, the Base Commandant at Lancashire Landing for taking 'the greatest interest in the work'.[229] Ultimately, it was Sir Ian Hamilton, commander of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, who facilitated the YMCA's work, permitting it to use a daily trawler service to bring supplies from Imbros to Anzac Cove.[230] This was a significant endorsement for the Association, in recognition of the benefit it delivered to soldiers. Support of this kind from the top of the military hierarchy opened many doors, notably with Colonel Howse who was Assistant Director of Medical Services to 1st Australian Division. In his station at Anzac Cove he requested the YMCA establish a centre for 'the health of his men'.[231] This is a clear endorsement of the benefits of hutwork, but is also indicative of the position the YMCA had in the minds of commanders in which the charity could be instructed to work, bringing in its largely independent organisation in to support soldiers' morale. While logistical support was required to initiate the huts, the Association was largely self-sustaining and, importantly for the army, self-funding. In this way the YMCA can be described in more contemporary military terms as a contractor to the army, providing essential services to the men.

Necessities were the focus of YMCA provision on Gallipoli. Alison Wishart has argued that soldiers on Gallipoli were constrained not only by limited rations but also by an inability to supplement them, leading to a decline in both morale and physical health.[232] While there were severe limitations throughout the campaign, Wishart directly neglects the role of the YMCA canteens that were able to make provisions of cakes, biscuits and cocoa, claiming that this did not happen as it did on the Western

[229] Wilton Rix, 'YMCA Quarters – Lancashire Landing, Cape Helles, Report', December 1915, Mansfield College Archive.
[230] Barrett, p. 73.
[231] Barrett, p. 74.
[232] Alison Wishart, '"As Fit as Fiddles" and "as Weak as Kittens": The Importance of Food, Water and Diet to the Anzac Campaign at Gallipoli', *First World War Studies* 7 (2) (2016), pp. 131-164, (p. 149).

Front and in Egypt. Its provisions were certainly not as extensive as they were elsewhere, but they were no less important, potentially becoming even more valued given the scarcity of comforts. Although they arrived late in the overall campaign, the work of Donald McDonald at Anzac and Wilton Rix at Helles was of immense significance to the soldiers, making the best of the conditions. In his scoping visit, Jessop had attempted to find a location at Helles that was 'free from shrapnel fire of the enemy'.[233] However, he was soon 'compelled to admit that no place … would be out of the range of the Turkish guns'.[234] This was a turning-point in the parameters of YMCA work, in which Jessop promised the army that 'we were quite prepared to go where the men had to go, and would run the risk'.[235] In the event, it was not Jessop but Rix who ran the risk, ably operating a marquee, albeit in a 'somewhat exposed position'.[236] Rix built a small dugout below the marquee for his own protection – and for the boiling of water to keep the YMCA in its all-important supply of tea – but this was of scant comfort given the risks he was facing. Yet the Association's willingness to serve under such conditions is a testament to its secretaries' commitment to soldiers and the seriousness with which it took its work. It was also work that was clearly craved by soldiers. Robert Adam, who served with the 11th battalion of the Australian Imperial Force, described in a letter home how the men would, soon after its opening, 'line up two or three hours before opening time', such was the demand for supplies, but that even then 'you are lucky if you get anything', given the supply shortages.[237] The YMCA was running a vital service, but one which continually battled its own limitations.

[233] Barrett, p. 69.
[234] Barrett, pp. 69-70.
[235] Barrett, p. 70.
[236] Rix, 'YMCA Quarters'.
[237] Robert William Wylie Adam, letter, 29/10/15, AWM RCDIG0000192.

Concerns about safety and the range of artillery were not merely academic. On 10th December Rix's Helles marquee was destroyed by shellfire, the 8" high explosive exploding in the central space which was usually overfilled with soldiers. Fortunately, however, there were only two men present at the time and neither was seriously wounded. In typical YMCA style, Rix appeared rather unfazed by the incident. Upon attending the hut to inspect the damage the officer in charge was pleased to be greeted by 'the smiling face of the YMCA man behind the counter'.[238] It was Rix, continuing to serve coffee and buns outside the destroyed tent that evening. His handwritten note apologising for the temporary inconvenience survives in his archive, almost as a trophy of keeping calm and carrying on. Similarly, in his report back to the YMCA headquarters Rix was pleased to note that 'it didn't harm the gramophone' – an expensive and difficult to replace piece of technology – but also that even amid all the chaos of the explosion 'it kept on playing until it had finished the last note of the tune!'[239] Within 36 hours the marquee was replaced and Rix could continue, despite the up to six shells per day falling within 30 yards of them. While in his correspondence with his boss Yapp Rix certainly presented a confidence of courage, yet his decision not to renew his YMCA contract in late December 1915 and to return almost immediately to his home congregation appears in correspondence with his wife Mary to have been influenced by the understandable strains of his experience.

Once supply lines to the Peninsula were established with relative regularity, it was the frequency of shellfire, accompanied by the continuing shortage of fresh water that served to limit the YMCA's capabilities in Gallipoli. These were continual constraints for the whole military endeavour, becoming near-constants in soldiers' experience.

[238] Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* p. 171.
[239] *ibid*

Water was of serious concern to the men and their commanders alike, both in terms of supplying sufficient to prevent dehydration but also ensuring that it was clean enough to prevent men from getting sick. Peter Hart argues through extensive use of oral and personal histories that dehydration was 'a curse that would eventually hollow men out from within', making it one of the biggest threats simultaneously to morale and physical fitness.[240] With a lack of infrastructure on the peninsula and in an era before desalination processes for sea water the vast majority of the army's water supply had to be transported by boat and extensively rationed. Surgeon-Captain A Gaskell, Principal Medical Officer to the Royal Naval Division in the offensive, later wrote a medical article on the problems of water supply, noting that what was available on land could not be relied upon as it came from inconsistent wells that were often shallow, unclean and of worsening quality the longer fighting continued.[241] Purifying water was also a process in development, which often produced water that, while technically drinkable, was pragmatically unpalatable. However, given the heat in Turkey, hydration was of utmost importance. The YMCA's coffee and Kia Ora lime juice provisions were therefore significant provisions, albeit hampered by the shortages. This was noted by Jessop, who complained of how they 'could not get enough water', meaning that the canteens had to be frequently closed.[242] Yet, the real damage of this was not in the lack of hydration for the men, but rather in the lack of social engagement that resulted, hampering wider support through the limitation of the Association's most essential provision.

[240] Peter Hart, *Gallipoli,* (London: Profile Books, 2011), p. 230.
[241] A Gaskell, 'Water Supplies with Reference to those in the Gallipoli Campaign', *The Journal of State Medicine* 31 (1) (1923), pp. 15-27, (p. 17).
[242] Barrett, *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt,* p. 76.

The Ypres Salient

There was no landscape in the First World War that was as iconic to the British Forces as that of the Ypres Salient in Belgium. The cloth town was staunchly defended throughout the five years of war, despite four major battles as the last city before the channel ports came under threat. Few cities came under such prolonged bombardment, its historic centre largely destroyed and surrounding Salient devastated by artillery craters and entrenchments. Between the shell holes and rubble of buildings, soldiers fought to defend the Channel ports and to prevent a defeat that would have shaken the morale of the entire army. Alongside them, the YMCA sought to provide a steadying hand to guide them through.

In the continual rotation of front-line service, infantry soldiers sought a consistency of comfort, in sentiment if not in physical space. The YMCA's huts were therefore vital sources of respite, where comfort could be readily and reliably sought. Tim Cook has identified this instinctive desire for soldiers to 'create and consume culture' in such spaces as a means to cope, helping to develop 'a community of men who were finding ways to cling to life and make new narratives of their soldiering experience'.[243] Although he lists the sharing stories, performing songs, writing letters, and reading novels among activities that fostered this culture within huts and dugouts, Cook fails to acknowledge the YMCA's role in underpinning this work. Such an omission is not grounds to claim that the YMCA was unimportant to his case study of Canadian man, for this can clearly be identified in the writings of soldiers, such as those Cook also uses. Robert Gordon Brown of the 6th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery, for example, wrote frequently in his diary of making use of the YMCA throughout his service in

[243] Tim Cook, 'Spatial Sanctuaries and Normalising Violence: The Canadian Soldier on the Western Front during the Great War', *Journal of Canadian Studies* 49 (3) (2015), pp. 5-22, (ps. 5 and 18).

Belgium, indicating the consistency of support.[244] Rather, Cook's argument is indicative of a historiographical neglect of support networks, such as that of the YMCA for whom the creation of a supportive culture was its day-to-day priority. This is better demonstrated by Arthur Copping, who described the familiar scene in entering a YMCA hut to see a soldier who 'hugged his warm mug and peered around at the home-like haven that was affording him so soothing a respite and rest'.[245] The previous chapter has discussed in more depth the value of the YMCA as a beacon of temporary domesticity, yet it is important to recall this in emphasising the significance of the YMCA's role in providing battlefield respite. Context is naturally required in framing why Copping presents the binary opposite view to Cook's in presenting the YMCA as essential to soldiers' service. Copping was a pre-war member of the Salvation Army, familiar with paramilitary religion, and employed by the YMCA through his work as a journalist during the war to write *Tommy's Triangle,* a memoir of the Association's war work for the purposes of fundraising. His perspective is therefore one influenced by the organisers of the YMCA and placed its work at the centre of wartime experience. Yet, this is not to discredit Copping as disingenuous as his work summarises themes observed elsewhere in soldiers' writing and speaks to the presence of the YMCA's frontline support which is ignored in the later analysis of Cook.

The progress of the YMCA from the coastal camps to the trenches was gradual but continuous, developing in collaboration with the military authorities. The YMCA's first eight huts in the Salient were established in late 1915 at sites near to the army's rear positions, including Busseboom, Dickebusch, and Proven. These were villages occupied by small rest camps and serving soldiers who were on rotations out of the

[244] Robert Gordon Brown, unpublished diary, The Canadian Letters and Images Project, https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20584/doc/222.
[245] Arthur Copping, *Tommy's Triangle,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), p. 48.

trenches. Oliver McCowen, one of the regional secretaries with responsibility for Ypres, described the purpose of these to 'cater for the men literally as they come back from the trenches'.[246] Of note is the hut at Ploegsteert, known as Threapwood after the community in Wales who donated the funds. This was amid what was widely known as the "nursery sector" where newly deployed units would receive their first experience of trench life, developing the tactical skills necessary for the rest of the war. It therefore makes sense that it was here too that the YMCA learnt the tactics of providing for soldiers on the Western Front, adapting the work it had begun in the base camps. The main adaptation was necessarily coping with the proximity to fire, something which the military authorities were particularly concerned about. YMCA secretary PH Sitters reflected that his first suggestion for YMCA huts at Reninghelst and Ouderdom 'was not at first received with a great deal of enthusiasm, because of the great danger attending the positions'.[247] However, Sitters was able to press the YMCA's case, 'assuring Col McHardy that YMCA workers were prepared to share the same dangers as the men', a clear demonstration of the YMCA's commitment.[248] To this, McHardy is said to have 'heartily agreed', thereby authorising a great development in YMCA work across the Western Front.[249] Wherever the YMCA could prove they could work safely and effectively, the army were willing to support it, recognising the support offered by the YMCA and building on the Association's experience under fire in Gallipoli.

As funding and staff became available the YMCA continually opened new huts, working ever closer towards the trenches. This progress, while ongoing, was slower than that at Gallipoli. Although the Western Front secretaries were building on the

[246] Oliver McCowen, letter to AK Yapp, 16/10/1915, CRL YMCA/K/2/3/83.
[247] PH Sitters, letter in Calais 2/11/15, CRL, YMCA/K/2/3/83.
[248] *ibid*
[249] *ibid*

experience of those who had come under Ottoman fire, the different conditions of France and Belgium, with battalions kept more in rotation between the trenches and reserve positions, meant that there were many sites where the YMCA could provide support while removed from imminent danger. Throughout 1916 these grew in number but it was not until the end of the Battle of the Somme that the YMCA was given permission to fully proceed forward and play a role in future battles. It is through the experience of battle that opportunities came to be understood and challenges confronted. This makes the Ypres Salient an ideal case study as not only was it one of the areas with the highest density of British soldiers, but it was also an environment that came under direct conditions of battle throughout the latter half of 1917.

The conditions, and therefore the challenges, of the Ypres Salient were vastly different from those at Gallipoli, not least given the far greater logistical support available. The region was very much a military metropolis, thronging with people and, for the YMCA, potential. Yet here they were not alone. In the Salient the Association was just one among many comparative organisations from expeditionary force canteens to the Church Army. Poperinghe was also home to the famous Talbot House, with which the YMCA frequently collaborated. Other chapters discuss in more detail the singularity of the YMCA, its atmosphere and organisation, which contributed to it becoming the largest organisation of its type on the Western Front. But it is important to note the landscape in which it operated as one among many bodies offering support to soldiers as this developed mutual assistance to overcome many of the problems encountered on other fronts, namely in logistics and reach. Access to soldiers was therefore greatly simplified, aided also by the protracted stagnation of the front line that enabled the construction of a more complex military presence. Of course, this is not to say that service in the Ypres Salient was at all straightforward. Much of the region was within

range of fire and this, coupled with their high demand, meant that it was often impractical to erect wooden huts. Instead, cellars were often utilised, including that at the Lille Gate in Ypres, described by one YMCA worker Harold Ashford Down as a 'quaint little system of dug-outs in the bowels of the earth', which became 'the centre of the social life of the stricken town'.[250] Another at La Laiterie constituted a ruined house with a large cellar on the site of a pre-war dairy near Kemmel. It was later developed to include a sandbagged temporary chapel in what had been the front garden, becoming a focus for religious and social life at the conjunction of the main Kemmel road and the entrance to the trenches. YMCA sketch artist W Cecil Dunford admitted that it was only a 'gloomy old cellar', but that given the conditions of war, this did not matter for 'the cheerful fire and the effect of the glow of the light upon the faces in contrast' were enough to send an artist like himself 'into ecstasies', such was the beauty and value of the scene.[251] The YMCA establishments may have been rustic, but in their simplicity they were still effective in providing refreshment and comfort to soldiers and were adaptable enough to work right where soldiers needed them.

The gradual development of the YMCA in the Ypres Salient had reached its zenith by early 1918, shortly before the German Army launched the Kaiserschlacht, rapidly disrupting the stability of the Western Front. The hard work of the YMCA had to be quickly dismantled as it was evacuated from the advancing forces alongside the rest of the British military infrastructure. Descriptions of those panicked spring days tell us much about the extent of YMCA organisation and the scale of its work. Regional secretary Barclay Baron recounted at length the provisions put in with the YMCA's motor vehicles to evacuate all of its workers, along with as many of their resources as

[250] Harold Ashford Down, *Pioneering on the Western Front: 3 ½ Years with the YMCA,* unpublished memoir, October 1918, CRL, YMCA/K.2.3.120, p. 22; Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* p. 128.
[251] W Cecil Dunford, 'With the YMCA in the Trenches', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 30/03/1917, p. 284.

possible. But most indicative of the level of collaboration in Ypres was Baron's visit to Talbot House on the eve of the German advance when he asked its leader the Rev. Philip 'Tubby' Clayton if there was anything he and his YMCA staff could do. Clayton replied 'you can save some of the stuff. It would be a pity of it all went west'.[252] The "stuff" in question were the treasures of the Upper Room chapel – the memorials and contributions of the House's three years of soldier-communicants. Baron loaded what he could into the YMCA's Ford van and took it to a safer location. In the following days Clayton himself evacuated and 'joined forces' with Dr CJ Magrath, who up until that point had run the YMCA in the basement of the Lille Gate.[253] The two began a joint ministry, with Clayton describing his new comrade as 'a veritable godsend to me, in every way' as 'Christian, cheery, brave and wise'.[254] With integration such as this, the organisations no longer appeared as separate entities, but rather as co-operating branches of the same body, all working to the same ends. The YMCA was not operating in isolation but in collaboration. The Association's role in the ministry of social religion will be addressed more closely in a later chapter, but it is these on-the-ground examples, particularly in the Ypres Salient, that the YMCA's commitment is most apparent, working jointly with other organisations to overcome the challenges of war.

Palestine

Where the YMCA's provisions in the Ypres Salient had developed over a long period of stagnation, its work on the Palestine front was characterised by rapidity of movement. As the offensive progressed from Egypt to eventually capture Jerusalem in late 1917, the YMCA moved alongside it. Adapting to this mobile form of war necessitated new practices for the Association; gone were the permanent wooden huts of the Western

[252] Barclay Baron, 'Memoirs', in Michael Snape, (ed.), *The Back Parts of War,* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), pp. 101-213, p. 185.
[253] Philip Clayton, Tales of Talbot House in Poperinghe and Ypres, (London: G Marshall, 1928), p. 109.
[254] Philip Clayton, *Letters From Flanders: Some War-time Letters of the Rev. PB Clayton (Tubby) to his Mother,* (London: The Centenary Press, 1932), p. 139.

Front, replaced by larger marquees and temporary refreshment canteens. Like the Army, the YMCA underwent its own learning process throughout the war to grapple with the problems of climate and supply, of establishing effective recreation, and surviving under risk of fire. Egypt and Gallipoli had been particular training grounds. Yet, in Palestine all these elements conspired to create an inhospitable environment in which the soldiers often found themselves battling to stay alive as much as to fight. While this made the YMCA's support difficult, it also made it all the more important to soldiers. The desert was no place for recreation or refreshment and so the supplies brought by the YMCA were essential to the campaign. In the narrative development of the YMCA's war work, Palestine can very much be viewed as the culmination of experience gained. This is not only through the way in which its secretaries drew on their gained experience and the institutional knowledge developed, but also in the trust fostered with the military, that enabled the essential collaboration of resources. In Palestine, the YMCA moved as part of the army, exerting its key role in soldierly survival. As will be seen, the Association treated this position as an honour, only heightened by the fact this work was being carried out in the Holy Land itself, contributing to its perceived significance in the broader lives of the men it supported, not merely in the necessities of their war service.

As at Gallipoli, the YMCA's work in the Palestine campaign was organised under the auspices of the Cairo office. Here, Jessop appointed Stanley Barling in charge. However, this was a different system of organisation than had been the case previously. Owing to the rapid movement of troops as they advanced across Sinai and into Palestine, the YMCA had to be more adaptable and able to move quickly. It was therefore decided that 'one representative' of the Association would be placed to

accompany 'each brigade'.[255] This meant that although there could be no familiarity of space in the YMCA's work, the soldiers would always be greeted with the familiar face of their own secretary who would offer as much consistency of support as possible. The temporary facilities erected in the advance often centred 'around a dump of stores with perhaps a bell tent' in place of a recreation room, the simplicity of the set-up enabling the YMCA to open in as short a time as possible. One hut worker recorded that 'the marquees had to be ready to move at an hour's notice', always being prepared to move with the army whenever necessary.[256] This flexibility demanded a simplicity to the work that centred on what soldiers needed most. With no access for soldiers to shops or external supplies, the priority in the temporary YMCAs was the refreshments it provided, the dumps of stores arguably more important than the marquees. Recreation was also provided for where feasible – often outdoors given the conditions – but it was the regularity of supply which was really the priority, stripping the Association's work back to the basics of a reassuring cup of tea, or much savoured sweet treat.

The conditions on the Sinai and Palestine front were, in the argument of Edward Woodfin, 'some of the most extreme physical conditions of the war'.[257] Owens described the challenge faced by the YMCA as it accompanied the army 'across the scorching sands of Sinai into the waste plains of the Promised Land'.[258] Given the geographic complexities, the military was consistently challenged to supply water. Its scarcity repeatedly threatened to undermine the entire offensive. Whereas at Gallipoli fresh supplies could be shipped in in tankers, albeit often unsatisfactorily, in Palestine

[255] Stanley Barling, typewriter report, CRL YMCA/K/1/8/185-204.
[256] RBH, 'The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt and Palestine', *The Red Triangle,* May 1919, pp. 345-349, (p. 348).
[257] Edward C Woodfin, *Camp and Combat on the Sinai and Palestine Front: the Experience of the British Empire Soldier, 1916-1918,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 11.
[258] William Owens, in Barrett, *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt*, p. 133.

the land crossing took far longer. The water problem was partially resolved in late 1916 with the laying of miles of water pipes, but this was not without problems. Woodfin described how in Autumn 1916 a pipeline from Romani to Bir el Abd – both locations of permanent YMCA huts – that took three months to lay failed at 'nearly every section' when it was first used as a result of heat and sand damage, causing immense delays and making the problem of thirst 'endemic'.[259] The problem of water, Woodfin argues, was a severe restriction on military capability, but it also 'undermined discipline, promoted defiance and anger toward officers, and sapped morale'.[260] There was no possibility of the YMCA counter-attracting away from these problems; they too had to address the issue of hydration. Throughout the YMCA's work in the offensive, hot cocoa and cold lime juice were provided free of charge, providing soldiers with an enjoyable and accessible source of clean drinks that were far preferable to the army-issued water. Of course, in order to provide these, the YMCA itself needed access to water for which it was reliant on military provision.

Indeed, the YMCA's mobile workforce would not have been possible without the support of the military authorities, who Barling considered to have rendered 'help in every way possible', including 'giving all available transport'.[261] Given the terrain the army were fighting over, no supplies could have been brought forwards without the use of motor transport, for which the YMCA needed support and permission. The extent of the army's support and the sharing of their precious resources is indicative of the trust the authorities put in the Association and the value they perceived in its services for troops. William Owens described how collaborative this process was, being

[259] Woodfin, *Camp and Combat,* p. 23.
[260] Woodfin, *Camp and Combat,* p. 30.
[261] Barling, report.

'asked by General Military HQ' to support the offensive.[262] It was mutually agreed that the YMCA workers would be placed at 'every casualty clearing station', thereby providing important support for the wounded at a position close to the battle.[263] The formalisation of the YMCA's work in this way embedded its provision within that of the army structure, while also providing a consistency to its locations that reassured soldiers of continued support.

The Sinai and Palestine front had been occupied to some extent by the British Army throughout the war, with a heavier representation in 1916 after the collapse of the Gallipoli campaign. The Sinai Peninsula was slowly gained in 1916, but it was not until 1917 that the campaign to drive the Ottomans out of Palestine truly began. As Woodfin argues, it was not until General Allenby arrived on the front in the summer of 1917 that the British really put attention and resources into the attack, increasing the regularity of transport and turning rations 'from dismal to abundant'.[264] Such a transformation enabled the YMCA to take on a greater support role, and it was in this moment, through harnessing its developments in Egypt, that Jessop and Barling invested more of their resources ahead of the army's concerted advance towards Jerusalem. This enabled a close co-operation of provision which progressed alongside the army, meaning that, for example, at the capture of Nazareth on 20th September 1917 the YMCA 'served the troops directly behind the front line'.[265] Ultimately, the YMCA was present at the ceremonial capture of Jerusalem, with Lena Ashwell noting that one of her concert parties 'followed behind when [Allenby] captured *the* city'.[266] This

[262] William Owens, 'With the Wounded in the Palestine Advance', *The Red Triangle,* April 1918, pp. 307-308, (p. 307).
[263] ibid
[264] Woodfin, *Camp and Combat,* p. 79.
[265] *Summary of the War Work of the American YMCA*, p. 85.
[266] Lena Ashwell, Modern Troubadours: A Record of the Concerts at the Front, (London: Gyldendal, 1922), p. 166.

presence, at such a monumental moment in history, represented to the YMCA a ratification of its status within the military.

There is a specific and significant honour in the YMCA's work in Jerusalem that speaks to the broader position of the Association. In workers' descriptions there is an immense privilege for the work they were entrusted to do in the Holy City. The reason for this clearly apparent, with Jessop explaining that 'we are Christians. We are doing this because of the Master who lived here some two thousand years ago'.[267] While the YMCA had to focus on necessities and material provisions in the height of the offensives, its workers never ignored their priority of working for a Christian organisation, despite the somewhat simplistic conclusions of historians such as Kitchen that there was a 'lack of a clearly defined religious direction' in the YMCA.[268] A full explanation of why this was not the case will be given in a later chapter, yet within the case study of Palestine the religious direction was brought into stark clarity as huts were established across the Holy Land. At its most emotive, there was a YMCA erected on 'the reputed site of the Garden of Eden', with the *Red Triangle* commenting that the 'only regret is that it was not there in the beginning'.[269] This was clearly hyperbolic, yet spoke to the providential belief that it was fitting and right for the YMCA to be at work in the Holy Land. The YMCA was keen to make the most of the opportunity.

The importance of Jerusalem is immediately apparent in the effort the YMCA went to in order to support soldiers in the ancient city. Following the British capture, Jessop 'immediately' made the long journey back to Cairo, where he obtained 'an engine and five sealed carts and a horse cart' for the purposes of 'cleaning up the city for the first

[267] *Summary of the War Work of the American* YMCA, p. 86.
[268] Kitchen, *The British Imperial Army in the Middle East,* p. 88.
[269] 'The Romance of the Red Triangle: A New Book by the Chief', *The Red Triangle,* January 1919, pp. 194-196, (p. 196).

time in centuries'.[270] The YMCA played an active role in the reintroduction of western influence and the increase in Christian support following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. From the arrival, this was intended to have a permanency which would outlast the occupation of soldiers and which sought to establish itself for the post-war years. This has been demonstrated by Inbal Ben-Asher Gitler, in his argument that it was directly 'the experience of war' that enabled such work and the YMCA's place within it, facilitated by the appointment of a Methodist minister, Dr Archibald Harte, as permanent secretary, with a mission 'to provide cultural services to Jerusalem's diverse inhabitants'.[271] The challenge in this work was the reconciling of the different religions of significance in Jerusalem – a problem as old as history itself – but in the immediate circumstance to initiate a co-existence between Christians, many of them in the occupying military, and the Ottoman Muslims who had previously been dominant.

The lasting symbol of YMCA work in Jerusalem is the Three Arches Hotel, opened by Allenby in 1933 as an 'international monument of Peace and Brotherhood'.[272] This was seen as the culmination of the Association's efforts as a 'significant entity in the city's cultural landscape' under the British protectorate from the end of the war.[273] Its so-named Jesus Tower stood higher than any other in the Jerusalem at the time, exerting its significance, while its three arches represented the three monotheistic faiths as an emblem of shared respect. Work of this scale would not have been possible without the First World War, not only in the defeat of Ottoman control, but also in establishing an important position for the YMCA in the cultural landscape of religion. It was through

[270] *Summary of the War Work of the American YMCA*, p. 84.
[271] Inbal Ben-Asher Gitler, 'Reconstructing Religions: Jewish Place and Space in the Jerusalem YMCA Building, 1919-1933',*Zeitschrift fur Religions – und Geistesgeschichte* 60 (1) (2008), pp. 41-62, (p. 44).
[272] Gitler, 'Reconstructing Religions', p. 45.
[273] Gitler, 'Reconstructing Religions', p. 44.

the challenges of the desert that the Association was able to demonstrate its commitment and determination to deliver lasting support.

The five geographies studied here were all unique in the experience of the First World War. They do not cover the full extent of the YMCA's work, yet are together representative of the great challenges the YMCA overcame in its delivery of support. The YMCA committed itself to a continuity of care for soldiers which would follow them wherever they served. For an organisation that was not initially equipped even to deal with the rain and mud of Salisbury Plain in 1914, this was an immense promise, yet one which it fulfilled from the international base cities to the active fronts, whether under fire, in the trenches, or across the desert. It is this adaptability which serves as the greatest demonstration of the YMCA's commitment to soldiers' welfare and its mission to serve, regardless of the expense or threat of the conditions. It was, indeed, a 'daring enterprise', as Allenby had characterised it, but one which proved successful, offering a new model of charitable collaboration with the military and a worldwide support for the British armed forces. Such was the extent of its global expansion that the YMCA declared in 1917 that it was 'work upon which the Sun never sets', with base camp huts from Canada to New Zealand, in garrisons throughout India and South Africa, and on the fronts from France to East Africa, spanning more than 30 countries.[274]

[274] 'East, West, North and South: Work upon Which the Sun Never Sets', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 06/07/1917, p. 612.

Chapter Three: 'From Canteen to Christ'

The YMCA's Mission for Soldiers



Figure 5 The YMCA Queen's Club Tea-room for prisoners of war, Holland[275]

The YMCA owed its foundations to the culture of Christian missionary work. Its early networks were within British urban centres and it extended its work overseas throughout the Victorian era concurrently with the expansion of British imperial missions. In both contexts the YMCA sought to disseminate the word of God through a demonstration of Christian morality and social support. In 1914 the YMCA celebrated 70 years of experience in this field but was also faced with its greatest task as it reorientated its efforts to support the needs of soldiers in the First World War. This simultaneously provided the Association with its largest opportunity for

[275] 'Prisoners of War (Holland): Queen's Club Tea Room', YMCA Archive, Cadbury Research Library (CRL), University of Birmingham, YMCA/K/1/9/41.

missionary work, while also forcing it to reconsider both the motivation for, and means of, achieving meaningful connections with men.

Initial consideration must be given to what is meant by mission and what the YMCA sought to achieve through its work. Bob Tennant considers the very term 'mission' to be 'problematic' due to its imprecision, owing to the fact it can refer to 'either an organisation or an activity'.[276] It is therefore more valuable to consider the intention of the YMCA through its own use of the term. Here, the impression of the term is apparent as the YMCA was by no means a missionary organisation of the standing of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) or the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) as the missionary message was not its sole focus, yet it would be equally reductive to consider it merely an 'activity' within its wider work. For the organisation, spreading the Gospel was certainly a motivation but this fitted into a wider mosaic of support for men, which also included sustaining the religion of established believers and providing instruction in both morality and education. Although this was influenced by Christianity it was not contingent upon belief or pronouncements of faith. This became an increasing factor in the YMCA's work in the First World War which put the immediate needs of the soldier to the fore, centralising material support in addition to the spiritual.

In this way the pragmatic approach of the YMCA that believed in actions not words was more demonstrative of David Bebbington's definition of mission as 'the synthesis of Gospel and culture available for export'.[277] Here he offers a clear connection between the word and the life, which was essential to the YMCA's work. Missionary

[276] Bob Tennant, *Corporate Holiness: Pulpit Preaching and the Church of England Missionary Societies, 1760-1870,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 8.
[277] David Bebbington, 'Evangelical Theology in the English-speaking World during the Nineteenth Century', *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal* 46 (3) (2005), pp. 314-325, (p. 314).

networks became widely embedded across the British Empire, enabling what Jane Garnett has described as 'the multi-directional transmission of people and ideas'.[278] This was well-utilised by the YMCA who demonstrated their reach through pamphlets and lectures that were 'published simultaneously … in different parts of the world'.[279] This approach made missionary work, including that of the YMCA, a complicit component of imperialism, working in mutual support for what was considered the civilising mission, or more accurately the imposition of Western European lifestyles on the wider world. Yet, at the same time, Tennant has argued effectively against the conflation of 'missions and empire [as] connected in some deep sense' within historiographical discussion on the basis that 'religion is not a commodity', but rather 'overlapped' in interest with the empire.[280] He warned that failure to make this distinction could lead to one being 'subordinated by the other' in study.[281] While the British Empire certainly influenced the direction of missionary work, particularly in India and regions of Africa, the work of organisations like the YMCA also remained more broad, especially throughout Asia where it ran a significant operation in China. While there was overlap in the logistics and methods of missions and empire, they remained two distinct endeavours. This in turn is reinforced by Brian Stanley who considers that 'trends in imperial history have been only one influence' on missions 'and not necessarily the most important'.[282] Jeffrey Cox reinforces this point in his argument that 'the missionary enterprise was and is replete with contradictions', creating a complex relationship between mission and empire.[283] This interaction

[278] Jane Garnett, 'Anglican Economic and Social Engagement', in Rowan Strong (ed.), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume III: Partisan Anglicanism and its Global Expansion, 1829-c. 1914,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 456-478, (p. 457).
[279] *ibid*
[280] Tennant, *Corporate Holiness,* pp. 6-9.
[281] Tennant, *Corporate Holiness,* p. 6.
[282] Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag,* (Leicester: APOLLOS, 1990), p. 84.
[283] Jeffrey Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise Since 1700,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), ps 202 and 184.

between the two processes is witnessed in the work of the YMCA which had the clear influences of the imperial age both in its extensive work in India and in its paternalistic approach, but empire was by no means the focus of its work or direction. The British Empire will therefore be considered in this chapter as a contextual factor rather than a key agent.

The purpose of the Victorian missions was to convert new populations to Christianity and in so doing to introduce them to a mutually supporting godly and moral way of life. Stuart Maughan has identified the CMS as the leading organisation of the British missionary effort, whose work from within the '"low" evangelical' side of the Church of England led the way during the long-nineteenth century.[284] The main aim of the CMS was summarised as 'spiritual men for spiritual work', compelling those who had received the Gospel to proclaim it to others.[285] The society's perspective was established through four scripture-based foundations, the most central of which was a paraphrase of John 3:16, the declaration of God's love and promise for the world, conditional upon belief: 'There is salvation through Christ for every one that believeth.'[286] The goal of the society was conversion, a necessary and formalised process of joining the Christian church. In this it was not alone. Bebbington explains how in particularly evangelical missions, such as the CMS, it was seen that 'only those who had been converted were true Christians, for the experience was the essential gateway – the wicket gate of *Pilgrim's Progress* – to the life of discipleship.'[287] This, he argues, had a greater commitment even than the High Church view that it was in baptism that people became Christians. Whichever way it was achieved, it was the

[284] Stuart Maughan, 'Imperial Christianity? Bishop Montgomery and the Foreign Missions of the Church of England, 1895-1915', in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880-1914,* (Cambridge: Wm B Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 32-57, (p. 36).
[285] *Church Missionary Atlas* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1896), p. xi.
[286] *ibid*
[287] Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism', p. 237.

conversionary experience that was important to the missionaries in order to assure salvation. This centrality of the conversion distanced the missionary organisations from the YMCA which instead held a broader acceptance for men into its work that did not stipulate conversion, much as it did view that as a desirable outcome for men.

Moreover, too much of an attempt to quantify conversionary outcomes in missionary organisations can be seen as a distraction. Andrew Porter has highlighted this, arguing that it is 'helpful to remember … the relative weakness of the missions' through the relatively small number of converts.[288] This is especially the case in considering the YMCA. Barclay Baron, the Association's divisional secretary in Ypres, admitted that even the YMCA workers with the most 'intense religious conviction, could not have welded the YMCA into a strong missionary force'.[289] It therefore follows that any attempt to quantify missionary success through conversion statistics is not only reductive but also negates what was truly intended by the Association through its missionary approach. For while the YMCA had much in common with the outlook of organisations like the CMS it was not in itself a missionary society. It certainly did missionary work, as will be seen throughout this chapter, but it was fundamentally different in that it sought different aims and understood its value through different measures. Dr Kenneth J. Saunders, an American missionary who worked with the YMCA in India, set out the Association's already functioning missionary standpoint in a wartime memorandum which argued that 'it is of first importance for all of us that the missionary work of the Church of Christ should be emphasised'.[290] Missionary

[288] Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1800-1914*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 317.
[289] Barclay Baron, 'Memoirs', in Michael Snape (ed.), *The Back Parts of War,* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), pp. 101-213, (p. 131).

[290] KJ Saunders, 'The Missionary Opportunity of the Young Men's Christian Association in the Camps', *Red Triangle Press*.

work was therefore an important element of the YMCA, yet through his use of the phrase 'Church of Christ', Saunders indicated the key distinction of the Association's work. It was committedly inter-denominational, seeking as Saunders described 'to unite members of all the Churches' in working as though 'a great orchestra of many instruments with no jarring note'.[291] The term Church of Christ may also refer to an American Christian movement which emerged from the Restoration Movement of the late nineteenth century in which autonomous congregations gathered in nondenominational worship. No evidence appears to connect Saunders with the movement, yet his focus on the evangelism of unity would certainly be consistent. Through pronouncements of this kind the YMCA is observed not seeking to convert men to its own particular perspective of Christianity, but rather to connect them with other churches. This position was further illustrated by its general secretary, Arthur Keysall Yapp, who depicted the organisation as 'a bridge or communication trench between the organised forces of Christianity'.[292] Through a typically pragmatic wartime metaphor, Yapp thus placed the organisation in support of the Churches, creating a key distinction between itself and the missionary societies. Moreover, such a stance makes it more difficult to assess conversionary outcomes as a result of the YMCA's work above and beyond the limitations set out by Porter, as those men who did seek conversion were not becoming members of one specific church, but rather connected with a broader range of denominations.

This chapter will take a closer look at the methods and development of the YMCA's missionary work, from its founding in 1844 through to the rapid reorganisation with which it confronted the First World War. Placing this work within the context of the

[291] Saunders, 'The Missionary Opportunity'.
[292] Arthur Keysall Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), p. 111.

late-Victorian and Edwardian missionary networks will allow us to trace the missionary influence on the Association's war work and worldview, explaining the motivations and developments of the YMCA's policies and principles. In particular, this chapter will utilise the case studies of the YMCA's stance on sex and alcohol in order to demonstrate the impact of the association's missionary approach on the wartime lives of soldiers.

The Origins of the YMCA Mission

The YMCA George Williams founded had Christian mission at its core. His rapid expansion from the drapers of London to serve men across Britain and later throughout the world, perpetuated a formal mission to share the Christian message. But this message was not one merely of conversion, but rather came with an encouragement to benefit the health and well-being of men, developing its own means of social support that led to an encouragement of faith. Sports and games became the mainstays of YMCA centres, encouraging men to get involved without a pronouncement of their Christianity. The Association's leaders organised activities that were both social, like rambling, and competitive, like pool and football, to encourage individuals and community benefits. While prayer meetings had dominated the initial decades, this transition towards recreation really catalysed the development of the Association in the latter half of the century. The American historians Mayer N Zald and Patricia Denton argue that it was through the introduction of sport and recreation that the YMCA underwent a 'successful transformation' that helped it prosper over the subsequent era.[293] Yet, they also claim that this 'shift from its emphasis on religious proselytization to its emphasis on goals of character development' altered the organisation's 'basic goal' from one of evangelism to a 'more

[293] Mayer N Zald and Patricia Denton, 'From Evangelism to General Service: The Transformation of the YMCA', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 8 (2) (1963), pp. 214-234, (p. 216).

secularised one of developing the "whole man"'.[294] While the described shift is evident, it does not necessarily follow that this was secularising the Association, although such a fear was well-voiced at the time.

The expansion of the YMCA's social work was contentious, with repeated debates over whether and how such provisions aligned with its central mission. For its proponents, it was an incentive towards involvement in religion, yet for others it represented the desecration of the Association's work. John Wright penned a particularly aggrieved pamphlet in 1910 on the 'Present Day Problem in YMCA Work' which warned that 'the religious side may be crushed out altogether' by increasingly secular work.[295] This was also felt in North-East County Durham, as identified by Neil Garnham in his study of the YMCA in the region. Throughout the later nineteenth century fears were raised that 'secular' activities worked against the YMCA's mission, rather than in support of it. In particular, Garnham found that sport was viewed by some in the movement as something that 'could inhibit both the evangelical mission of the Association and the personal salvation of its members'.[296] There were three main reasons given for this: that it was 'potentially morally degrading by promoting personal vanity'; that sport encouraged smoking, drinking and gambling, and all other sins associated with pub culture; and finally that it was 'a distraction from the true goal of the Association: the propagation of the Christian gospel'.[297] Much of this is typical of any religious organisation where individuals have their own interpretations, yet it also speaks to a larger concern gripping the Association about how best to achieve the desired mission of Christianisation and to what extent social work should play a role in this, querying

[294] Zald and Denton, 'From Evangelism to General Service', pp. 216-218.
[295] John Wright, 'The Present Day Problem in YMCA Work', (1910).
[296] Neal Garnham, 'Both Praying and Playing: "Muscular Christianity" and the YMCA in North-East County Durham', *Journal of Social History* 35 (2) (2001), pp. 397-407, (p. 400).
[297] *ibid*

how far these methods threatened secularising the organisation away from true religious teachings. These discussions, however, remained centred around the means and not the ends of the organisation, and as a result none constituted a substantial threat to the solidarity of the YMCA. Binfield in particular notes how rare it was for an organisation of the size of the YMCA to have 'survived and prospered without schism'.[298] Broad consensus prevailed, helping the Association to cultivate widespread support.

The threat as viewed by Wright was formalised in the concept of 'practical Christianity', which eschewed the formal prayer meeting structure in favour of the YMCA's holistic approach. Wright's concern was that practical Christianity was in fact two discrete concepts of the social and the religious, operating in contention with one another and thereby putting the overarching Association 'in grave danger of losing that distinctively Christian character'.[299] This lack of synthesis between what he viewed as the two competing sides of practical Christianity may well have stemmed from his observations of YMCA work, yet as someone involved in the YMCA's National Council his perspective was more likely one of an established and educated Christian who was used to formal religious teaching. This was not the target audience of the work. The alternative point of view was later set out by Sir Robert Baden-Powell whose scouting movement had worked in collaboration with the YMCA since its outset. Baden-Powell suggested that although the success of YMCA services 'has been largely due in the first instance to their material value', once the man becomes acquainted with the YMCA its active principle 'to do good rather than be good' is communicated through the actions of YMCA workers, through which the religious message could be not only taught, but

[298] Clyde Binfield, *George Williams in Context: A Portrait of the Founder of the YMCA,* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), p. 38.
[299] *ibid*

demonstrated.[300] This was a reshaping of religion away from the traditional, yet one which opened up the Association to new support. Practical Christianity was to Baden-Powell and the majority of the YMCA's organisers a complementary process by which the practical was used to demonstrate the Christian through lived examples.

The supporters of practical Christianity progressively won the debate, with the YMCA's operations increasingly revolving around its social work. Even though sport and recreation became mainstays of the YMCA's work, fears over what were deemed the "wrong kinds" of socialising prevailed, becoming heightened in the new social dynamic of the First World War. The ideal Christian man was conceived to be strong and righteous, grounded in the ideals of muscular Christianity, although one which balanced the need for physical strength with a strong moral character. At its heart was an appeal for self-improvement with personal responsibility. As a result, drinking and gambling were prohibited in the YMCA as they were considered symptoms of weak morals. Some of this fixation on the perils of drink can be traced to Williams' own personal position as someone who had committed to teetotalism at a young age and with 'an abhorrence of tobacco', as Binfield has identified through his personal diaries.[301] However, this in turn was motivated by the Evangelical influence on Williams' faith. At the time of the YMCA's founding he was a Congregationalist, before converting to the Church of England in the subsequent decade. Binfield argues that his movement was 'among the last fruits of the Evangelical Revival', fresh and determined in character.[302] This is clear in the alignment of the YMCA with the temperance movement, which itself developed throughout the nineteenth century largely under the impulse of the Nonconformist churches. Henry Yeomans identifies the movement

[300] Robert Baden-Powell, letter to Mrs Stuart Wortley, 08/02/1916, CRL, K24/18; Robert Baden-Powell, letter to Mrs Stuart Wortley, 03/02/1916, CRL K24/16-17.
[301] Binfield, *George Williams in Context,* p. 19.
[302] Binfield, *George Williams in Context,* p. 25.

'as a key example of a moral regulation project' as a result of which 'abstinence from alcohol was therefore connected to self-betterment, a popular theme in temperance rhetoric'.[303] This is consistent with the intentions of the YMCA's own mission which was equally focused on inspiring individuals to make improvements towards a morally and therefore spiritually richer life. While significant for those men of industrial Britain facing the perceived moral perils of urban life, this would pale in comparison to the coming threats caused by the First World War, which raised the YMCA mission to new levels of reach, recognition and respect.

The Opportunity of War

'The Greatest Social Opportunity of our Lifetime'.[304] It was under this banner that the YMCA heralded its work just three months into the war. With its existing work supporting Territorial soldiers in their British training camps, the dual need and opportunity of the newly mobilised army was apparent to the YMCA's National Council which immediately set out to care 'for social and moral needs of men of HM Forces'.[305] This was the core of the YMCA mission throughout the First World War, building upon the pre-war work already discussed. Yet, for all its continuity, the reformulation of its work under the direction of the War Emergency Committee (WEC) created a new approach to missionary work that was wider-reaching and less formal than that which had preceded it. For a large part this was the necessary result of the unique circumstances of war: millions of men together, away from home, alternately facing adversity and boredom in an unfamiliar landscape. There was a vacuum for homelike domesticity and comfort which the YMCA was able to fulfil. An anonymous YMCA worker outlined the Association's main concern in *The Times,* warning that 'mischief

[303] Henry Yeomans, 'What Did the British Temperance Movement Accomplish? Attitudes to Alcohol, the Law and Moral Regulation', *Sociology* 45 (1) (2011), pp. 38-53, (ps. 41 and 43).
[304] 'The Greatest Social Opportunity of our Lifetime', advertisement, *The Times,* 12/11/1914.
[305] 'YMCA and the War', *The Times,* 12/08/1914, p. 11.

is begotten of idleness and want of homeliness'.[306] As already discussed, the focus of the home was important to the YMCA but it also went further than this, utilising the huts as a means for soldiers 'to be kept away from the estaminets and the company of women' through 'places where they can amuse and occupy themselves in a wholesome manner'.[307] Although morality had always motivated the YMCA's work it took on a new immediacy during the war as moral panics over the welfare of soldiers were heightened. Yet the transformation of the YMCA's mission was not only due to the negative threats and fears that stemmed from conflict. The logistics of war also gave the YMCA new access to a broader demographic of men, enabling its mission to expand well beyond the urban poor. The circumstances also reinvented homosocial relations, with Saunders arguing that 'the war has on the whole made us more brotherly'.[308] This can be identified through the new opportunities for mutual support that were utilised in the YMCA's hutwork throughout the war.

In this sense of rejuvenated mission the YMCA was not alone. The Baptist minister J.C. Carlile, who worked for the free churches' United Army and Navy Board during the war acknowledged that this was 'the golden hour of opportunity; this is the mission field'.[309] He viewed the soldiers' circumstances as uniquely facilitating missionary work, a perspective widely shared across the Christian churches. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, offered a similar view of 'new fields of opportunity', albeit balanced with 'new possibilities of peril'.[310] For although the war offered the churches new access to men, it also presented a number of spiritual and moral

[306] Special Correspondent, 'YMCA Huts in France – Club Life for Soldiers – A Successful Enterprise', *The Times,* 21/09/1915, p. 6.
[307] *ibid*
[308] Saunders, 'The Missionary Opportunity'.
[309] JC Carlile, quoted by Arthur Keysall Yapp, 'At the Sign of the Red Triangle: Interesting Items of News Gathered from Many Sources by the General Secretary', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 16/07/1915, (p. 641-2).
[310] Randall Davidson, *The National Mission of Repentance and Hope: Its Origin and Purpose,* (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1916), p. 2.

challenges to which organised religion had to adapt in order to prosper. Davidson was at the forefront of the Church of England's attempt to consolidate this work through the National Mission of Repentance and Hope, a nationwide 'concentrated effort to raise the whole tone and outlook of religious life', launched in 1916.[311] This programme sought to capitalise on the new missionary opportunities to demonstrate 'that it is in the Church, as the fellowship of servants of Jesus Christ, that they can find the truest interpretation of their ideals and the surest inspiration of their hopes'.[312] While these were admirable aims for the mission, it is widely considered to have been a failure not least because 'the concept of the national mission was vague', as concluded by David Thompson, with no solidified means through which the desired outcomes could be achieved.[313] To use Carlile's metaphor, while the mission field was fertile, the National Mission was not an effective means of cultivation and did not result in a fruitful harvest. Adrian Gregory has declared it to have been 'a complete failure', given that church attendance did not increase and 'the working class remained as apparently indifferent as ever'.[314] This indicates, to some extent, what Gregory has called 'an extreme case of wishful thinking' for religious leaders when talking about wartime missionary opportunities.[315] However, this should not be taken as meaning that the opportunities themselves were an illusion, but rather that it was wishful for the Church of England to consider its haphazard and uncoordinated attempt at a national mission a serious campaign for the improved Christianisation of Britain, especially given the disjuncture in ideologies set forth by those leading the mission.

[311] 'Repentance and Hope', *The Church Times,* 06/10/1916.
[312] Davidson, *The National Mission of Repentance and Hope,* p. 6.
[313] David M Thompson, 'War, the Nation, and the Kingdom of God: The Origins of the National Mission of Repentance and Hope', *Studies in Church History* 20 (1983), pp. 337-350, (p. 346).
[314] Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 171.
[315] *ibid*

One of these gaps in ideology is over the extent to which the National Mission should have promoted the social role of religion in the lives of believers. Thompson highlights that figures such as William Temple, who would go on to become Archbishop of Canterbury, considered 'involvement in social issues' to have been crucial to the 'evangelistic campaign', but argues that 'it is doubtful' as to whether the current Archbishop, Davidson, 'ever fully understood this'.[316] Similarly, Gregory recognises the campaign of the Bishop of London, Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, that 'the National Mission should be used to promote clean living'.[317] While such perspectives were prevalent in the organisation of the National Mission, the reticence of those including Davidson and the lack of process by which the scheme attempted to engage with social programmes necessarily hampered its success. The National Mission of Repentance and Hope therefore serves as an example of the recognised opportunity for wartime missionary work while simultaneously demonstrating the complications by which outcomes could be limited. This is a useful comparison for the relative success of the YMCA which was able to prosper through the opportunities presented by conflict through a cohesive programme of simultaneous social and spiritual care.

At the core of the YMCA's reformulated wartime mission was its strict policy of non-proselytisation, which made it distinct from other missionary organisations. Soldiers were welcomed into the YMCA without any obligation to engage in spiritual teachings, yet this did not mean that the hut space was secularised or lacking in religious work. The hut worker Canon James Adderley characterised this policy as being that the YMCA has 'not forced religion upon anyone, but on the other hand, has not hidden it under a bushel'.[318] The Gospel reference to Matthew 5:15 used here is particularly apt.

[316] Thompson, 'War, the Nation, and the Kingdom of God', p. 346.
[317] Gregory, *The Last Great War,* p. 170.
[318] James Adderley, 'The Church of England and the YMCA', *Red Triangle Papers* 20 (undated), CRL, YMCA/2/1/4.

The light of religion in the YMCA, which guided its moral code and commitment to service was not hidden under a bushel but placed on a candlestick, as the passage goes on to describe, in order that 'they may see your good works'. The ethos of religious light was therefore placed at the heart of a hut, illustrating the living representation that all hut visitors could witness. This depiction had a more literal impact on YMCA secretary Baron who, after the war, devised the idea for the social Christian society Toc H's 'Lamp of Maintenance', a modern form of Matthew's candlestick, as the symbol of the movement. The idea of such a light, as seen by both Adderley and Baron, was that even where formal religious work was not carried out, the light of Christianity guided all actions through the motivations of Christian care and morality. This was fundamental to the YMCA's presentation of Christianity in a form that was non-dogmatic and relevant to the challenges facing soldiers.

The chaplain and YMCA supporter Reverend Basil Bourchier explained this in more depth. He noted that while 'the serving of cups of tea, dolly-cakes and cigarettes may not at first sight appear necessarily religious … there is the very closest connection', with even canteen work being 'far more than a great social concern' as 'its basis is spiritual'.[319] He wrote from his experience serving on the Western Front that the soldier 'knows quite well that the Christ[ian] spirit of service is responsible for the presence of those behind the counter'.[320] Whether this was entirely true cannot be determined, yet it was certainly the guiding principle behind the YMCA's work. Bourchier summarised this approach as the 'gospel in action', pragmatic religion taught through actions, not words. The mission of such action-based Christianity was to demonstrate to soldiers the value of a Christian life and the benefits of faith-based

[319] Basil Bourchier, 'The Red Triangle from a Clerical View-Point', *Red Triangle Papers: The British Empire YMCA Weekly* 93 (2) (20/10/1916), reprinted from *The Church Times,* CRL, YMCA/2/1/K24/3.
[320] *ibid*

morality. The goal was not to convert men to the church as an end in itself, but rather to impart to them the strength and support that were considered to stem from a life lived in faith. In much the same way as the YMCA hut was a representation of aspirational domesticity, so too was it a demonstration of the ideal Christian life lived cleanly and with meaning. At its most simplistic this was the clear act of caring for one's neighbour, offering the branch of friendship. The evangelist and YMCA worker Gipsy Smith claimed that 'there were circumstances … in which the service of a cup of coffee to war-torn soldiers was as much Christian work as the preaching of a sermon'.[321] Evidently, these were not literal equivalents, yet the goodwill derived from the coffee and its supportive gesture opened the door to the YMCA's mission of friendship. This was of particular significance to the religious works director William Soothill, who believed that as a result of such acts 'we have now won the men's confidence', meaning 'they are willing to listen to our message'.[322] To Soothill, there was a correlation between the trust developed between the Association and the soldiers, and their responses to the YMCA's religious work. This formed part of Soothill's wider belief that one could disentangle religious commitment from church attendance through supporting religious lives by other means. Responding to the observation that soldiers were not attending church in significant numbers, he argued that 'it does not follow that by "cutting" Church our young men mean to "cut" religion.'[323] Through forms of social religion, including the work of the YMCA, soldiers could still be in contact with Christian teachings and uphold an ethical life.

[321] 'Is YMCA Work Secular? Gipsy Smith's Answer', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 13/04/1917, p. 334.
[322] William Soothill, *Red Triangle Bulletin* 16, 16/11/1917.
[323] William Soothill, 'Our Citizen Army: The Nation's Spiritual Hope 1', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 10/12/1915, p. 1149.

While this was the intention of the YMCA's work, it is more complicated to determine its success. The largest sources for opinions about the huts are soldiers' own writings, namely letters, diaries and memoirs, but these tend toward discussions of the material benefit and not the spiritual. This is not to say that it was only the material that mattered to men. As Jessica Meyer has observed, 'the bulk of the narratives … are recollections of the physical experiences of warfare focussing on the weather, exhaustion and shellfire', with the men either not able or not willing to write about the emotional impact of war service.[324] It is therefore difficult to determine the extent to which soldiers valued the religious benefit of hutwork, even among the frequent praise for the YMCA as an organisation. One Canadian soldier, W.L. Wright, explained this further. In a letter to his parents, appearing to respond to a question about whether he thought soldiers on the whole were religious, he wrote

> every soldier practically has a bible and I would say nine out of ten carry them with them. They may not read them very often, but although a fellow doesn't show his religion very much as a rule, they are maybe more religious at heart than the average man in civilian life. He doesn't make a practice of shouting it around, but they are most of them true at heart.[325]

Wright was a committed Christian who spent a lot of his spare time in the YMCA huts, and although he is not an example of someone who was converted by the YMCA's mission, he does appear to have been someone who appreciated the continuous care offered by the organisation on both a physical and spiritual level. Wright's letter gets at the crux of the problem with quantitively assessing the impact of missionary work.

[324] Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 130.
[325] WL Wright, letter, 23/05/1918, Imperial War Museum, D.20162.

He simultaneously demonstrates the significance of the YMCA's work and the imprecision with which that can be defined.

Within the YMCA the greatest attempt to quantify missionary outcomes was through the War Roll pledge, a system by which a soldier could sign a pledge card distributed in one of the YMCA huts, committing to the Christian faith. This scheme was arguably the closest the YMCA came to operating akin to a specific missionary organisation, yet there remained the 'communication trench' distinction, by which the YMCA operated as the mediator, passing all pledge cards to the denomination of the soldier's choosing. Initially the YMCA ran this independently, but in 1917 it was amalgamated into a single effort in collaboration with the Church of England Men's Society (CEMS), the Church Army, and the League of the Spiritual War. These three missionary arms of the Church of England had their own campaigns but by working in collaboration with the YMCA were able to combine extensive networks and resources to compile a more efficient War Roll. Owing to the success of the scheme, this was later expanded again to become a War Roll Joint Committee that included co-operation from the United Army Board, the Presbyterians, Wesleyans, and what was described as a separate 'special arrangement' with the Catholic Social Guild.[326] By signing the cards the soldier would agree to 'pledge my allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ as my saviour and King, by God's help to fight His battles and bring victory to His kingdom'.[327] This commitment to the principles of faith was war-focused through militaristic language, yet simultaneously related the lessons of war to life more broadly. Its principle was to extend the continuous thread of religious support offered at war back to soldiers' home lives through the passing of the pledge information to local ministers. Initially after

[326] 'Memorandum of YMCA War Roll Work', 1918, CRL YMCA/K/2/1/131.
[327] George Sherwood Eddy, *With Our Soldiers in France,* (New York, Association Press, 1917), unknown page number.

signing the pledge, the YMCA would ensure that 'a welcoming letter is sent out to the man who signs, together with a membership card and a prayer card', with the further intention 'that local clergy and ministers may visit the homes of the men' once they returned home.[328] John Tranter, the secretary of the Northern Federation of Evangelical Free Churches, complimented the YMCA on the success of this work, celebrating how it was 'opening a way for a life-line from the churches to the trenches'.[329] While remarks such as this indicate the scheme's value, the YMCA archive unfortunately does not hold the record of the War Roll or how many people signed it, limiting the extent to which the success can be measured. Similarly, just because a soldier signed the pledge, it does not mean that he necessarily upheld the promise. Peer pressure and other factors may have had a stake in his decision. Nonetheless, the War Roll is a strong demonstration of the YMCA's mission to advocate Christianity to soldiers in a way that was lifelong, not merely for wartime.

The pledge cards were distributed throughout the YMCA huts, but they were probably most successful when handed out after a talk given by an evangelistic speaker. The evangelist George Sherwood Eddy described how these were achieved so as to best encourage men to come forward and not to exclude those who did not think faith was for them. He noted how in a YMCA hut of a thousand men 'several hundred … are determined you shall not force religion down their throats'.[330] To encourage them to stay in the hut for the evening's program, Eddy would begin with a sing-song of familiar tunes around the piano before turning their attention to conversations and debates such as 'what was the greatest battle of the war?', then turning more introspective to ask 'what is *your* hardest battle? Is it not within, in the fight with

[328] 'Memorandum of YMCA War Roll Work'.
[329] John Tranter, letter, undated, CRL YMCA/K/2/1/127.
[330] Eddy, *With Our Soldiers in France,* unknown page number.

passion?'.[331] From here he 'would have the ear of every man in the hut' and be able to talk to them about morality, thereby achieving the YMCA's mission, and culminating with the distribution of the pledge cards upon asking the men if they are 'willing to take your stand … to break away from sin'.[332] Eddy suggests in his memoir that on such an occasion the majority of men would take up the pledge, although this must be tempered both by Eddy's intention to write favourably of his own work and by the issue of how much men signing here would be doing so out of a sense of pressure rather than a true commitment to faith. Regardless of this immeasurability, it is more valuable to note the significance of the YMCA's approach to its missionary work as expressed by Eddy, utilising a broad-based and non-proselytising approach that could inspire connection between life and faith. It was only through the opportunity of the First World War, in which groups of men would gather in the YMCA huts for evenings in want of both entertainment and inspiration, that ministers such as Eddy had access to teach such a Christian mission.

Social Mission

The YMCA contextualised its missionary work as part of its conviction to serve each soldier as 'the whole man', taking a holistic approach to their mind, body and spirit. The goal of promoting Christianity was for the improvements it could offer to their lives, particularly around morality and righteous living. While the circumstances of the First World War gave new opportunities for the YMCA to succeed in this work, such a social mission had long been the aim for the organisation, propelling its domestic work in the YMCA institution, or hut, setting. This drive for the Christianisation of life had developed in contention with the growing threats of secularisation and perceived

[331] *ibid*
[332] *ibid*

moral threats to the wellbeing of young men in the second half of the nineteenth century. These were perpetual concerns for the church in England, with a long history of concern over church decline, yet this discourse particularly increased around the turn of the twentieth century. Jeffrey Cox considers this process to be the 'religious counterpart of modernisation', in which society turned away from a dependency on religion, and contributed to the secular status of life in modern Britain.[333] This argument may have merit in the latter half of the twentieth century, yet up to and including the time of the First World War, British society can hardly be considered secular or removed from Christian influence. Cox has later looked to frame this as more of a 'story' of secularisation, yet it remains more valuable for the process under investigation here to consider secularisation within the framework set by Dominic Erdozain, which characterises it as 'not the moment the vehicle stopped moving', as in declinist arguments, but 'the moment when it called on no resource beyond its own, earthbound velocity'.[334] Erdozain points to the main shift being within Christian organisations and notes in particular the socialisation and ethicisation of sin which in turn produced 'ethicised religion' in which 'the language of sin and salvation was grafted onto a new narrative of temptation and rescue, with the gymnasium cast as mediator'.[335] This latter quotation implicates the YMCA's predilection for sporting and social activities that could both entertain and moralise young men, thereby fulfilling Erdozain's picture of ethicised religion. As an organisation which grew exponentially until after the First World War, the YMCA's story of secularisation was not one of

[333] Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 10.
[334] Jeffrey Cox, 'Master Narratives of Religious Change', in Hugh McLeod and Werner Urstorf (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 201-217, (p. 206); Dominic Erdozain, 'The Secularisation of Sin in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 62 (1) (2011), pp. 59-88, (p. 66).
[335] Erdozain, 'The Secularisation of Sin', ps. 79 and 83.

declinism, but rather of mutation of practices, just as Erdozain has framed it and as Williams originally conceived.

The YMCA implemented its belief in holistic care through the means of practical Christianity, led by action not word. The contention around this language has already been discussed, yet it can be concluded that the Association's advancement of these ideals led to a 'greater inclusiveness of membership', as recognised in Zald and Denton's study, in addition to encouraging broader outcomes of improving the holistic wellbeing, including faith, of a larger number of men .[336] This therefore enabled the YMCA to simultaneously increase the reach and impact of its work, in the diversity of those it was able to reach out to and the impact it could have on their lives, thereby improving on its religious mission. This reorientation of an approach did not remove religion from the focus but rather reframed it in terms of its morals and lessons, as tangible measures of good on soldiers' lives. The YMCA promoted this on the principle that 'it is morals, and not muscle, that ensure victory', positioning its missionary fight in direct correlation to that of the overarching war.[337] Such concern extended beyond the YMCA, although it can be identified as particularly prominent within the organisation. Army chaplain Tom Pym described how 'the vice of self-centredness, self-pleasing in its most comprehensive range' amounted to 'the negation of duty and service', placing the imperative of such a moral mission at the forefront.[338] The YMCA took such appeals directly to the soldiers, publishing pamphlets, such as that by Harold Puttock entitled 'Swinging the Lead', which warned against shirking 'the obligations of life' to form a 'moral habit' that would result in succeeding in their

[336] Zald and Denton, 'From Evangelism to General Service', (p. 219.
[337] 'Our Outlook', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 19/02/1915, pp. 135-136.
[338] Tom Pym, 'A Study in Contrasts and the Influence of Reaction', in Tom Pym and Geoffrey Gordon, *Papers from Picardy – By Two Chaplains,* (London: Constable and Company, 1917), pp. 32-57, (p. 38).

military duty and also, significantly, in their 'highest duty' to God.[339] Practical Christianity was therefore formulated as an important tool through which lessons of personal strength mattered equally for both a soldier's spiritual and military life. Robert Duncan has framed this as 'moralistic inclinations [were] feeding into a national consensus regarding national efficiency'.[340] The social mission of practical Christianity was in this way seen as a factor of victory in the heart of the YMCA's missionary commitment.

Teetotalism

The preoccupation with the ethics of sin was most concentrated on two areas - sex and alcohol. The YMCA had long focused on these issues, yet within the circumstances of the First World War they were brought to a new prominence, constituting much of the focus for the YMCA's missionary work with soldiers, in order to help strengthen them towards victory. The association had always been teetotal, designed to offer an alternative to the temptations of the pub. And it had always advocated for the Christian sanctity of sex within marriage, yet this was brought to a new prominence through the wartime separation of soldiers from their spouses and the prevalence of brothels in proximity to army camps. Taken together, these two case studies are representative of the YMCA's moralistic outlook and indicative of the Association's response to the war's moral pressures. They are also useful demonstrations of how the central committee's policies and principles were implemented and responded to on the ground, providing the closest measures of the YMCA's missionary value to the First World War.

The YMCA's opposition to alcohol had been a personal belief of Williams and this baton was passed to Yapp when he became General Secretary. He was also lifelong

[339] Harold Puttock, *Swinging the Lead,* (London: The Red Triangle Press, undated).
[340] Robert Duncan, *Pubs and Patriots: The Drink Crisis in Britain during World War One,* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 41.

teetotaller and Congregationalist and used this influence in restating the YMCA's strict approach to drink following the outbreak of war. Committee member LG Pilkington wrote to Yapp in the early months of 1915, seeking permission to 'sell intoxicants' in a YMCA officers' club on the grounds that 'it will help a lot of young officers to stay in camp'.[341] However, Yapp retorted that this would be 'impossible' as 'the question of principle is involved', and that he 'would rather see the place an admitted failure … than do what I believe would be absolutely wrong … from a moral standpoint'.[342] The logic of Pilkington's argument is understandable. Officers may have been swayed away from the estaminets and pubs by the YMCA's sale of drink and it almost certainly would have financially profited the YMCA. However, this would also remove the distinction which Yapp believed made the YMCA different and special. In an article for the Association's weekly newspaper the same position was publicly announced: 'the YMCA does not, under any circumstances, sell any intoxicants, neither is there the smallest chance of it ever doing so'.[343] Its canteens were to be dry, to provide an alternative and a distraction from the bars where alcohol was readily, and cheaply, available.

There were, of course, local infractions of this rule. YMCA secretary and Congregationalist minister Wilton Rix complained in his diary about the quality of whisky available while on service with the Association in Egypt in 1915.[344] More notably, Baron included in his memoirs the recipe for a 'Wipers cocktail' made from moat water and rum that was sold in the Lille Gate YMCA by its leader Dr CJ Magrath.[345] In this example, the alcohol was not only available from the hut counter,

[341] LG Pilkington, letter to AK Yapp, 31/01/1915, CRL, YMCA/K26/21.
[342] AK Yapp, letter to LG Pilkington, 03/02/1915, CRL, YMCA/K26/22.
[343] 'Our Outlook', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 29/01/1915, pp. 51-52.
[344] Wilton Rix, unpublished pocket diary, 25/07/1915, Mansfield College Archive.
[345] Baron, *The Back Parts of War,* p. 162.

but the regional secretary was also aware of it. Moreover, there is plentiful evidence that soldiers used the YMCA's facilities in addition to those of the pubs, rather than as a replacement. Donald Price, in an interview for the Imperial War Museum's sound archive, described how it was common to 'have your tea' at the YMCA before going on for a 'typical drink' during their time out of the line.[346] This example suggests that the YMCA was not entirely successful as a 'counter attraction' to the 'endless temptations' of life at the front, as Yapp had hoped it would be.[347] However, it can equally be seen that for every evening a man spent at a YMCA concert party, which thousands attended daily, that was an evening they did not spend drinking and instead spent in the presence of the YMCA's mission.

From the outbreak of war in 1914 there had been an increasing focus on the problems of alcohol in the British press and the national rhetoric. Yeomans, in his analysis of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century attitudes to alcohol, argued that while it had been 'a consistent and prolific source of public anxiety' for decades, the 'war intensified the need for tighter restrictions', leading to a second wave of teetotal campaigning.[348] This pressure led to the government establishing the Central Control Board (CCB), which published a report in 1918 on the medical dangers of alcohol that the YMCA considered recommended reading for all its hut workers. The CCB also trialled the nationalisation of pubs in Carlisle, where alongside the alcohol for sale they introduced 'new social facilities, such as billiard tables, newspapers and writing materials', in addition to the service of food.[349] These were the facilities also available in the YMCA's huts, demonstrating the considered value of the social space in

[346] Donald Price, IWM Sound Archive, 10168.
[347] Arthur Keysall Yapp, 'The YMCA in France', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 19/05/1916, p. 443.
[348] Henry Yeomans, *Alcohol and Moral Regulation: Public Attitudes, Spirited Measures and Victorian Hangovers,* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2014), ps. 1 and 100.
[349] Duncan, *Pubs and Patriots,* p. 136.

overcoming the problems of drink. The YMCA argued for this in its newspaper, stating that it must be 'the most effective counter-attraction possible' through the alternatives it provided.[350] The YMCA was therefore contributing to support for the government's suggested restriction and distraction from alcohol, one that extended the reach of such recommendations into the base camps and rest areas of the active fronts, where alcohol was seen as a particular problem. The Association included the CCB's report on its recommended reading list for all hut workers; an indication of the perceived significance of the board's work. Unlike the YMCA, the report was 'not concerned with the social evils arising from alcohol, but rather focused on the medical implications of intoxicants.[351] Nonetheless, there was a happy synthesis between the two missions which contributed to the YMCA's active engagement with national temperance campaigns.

While the government used the CCB to introduce a number of restrictions and recommendations, there were many who considered this not extensive enough. The British temperance movement had first emerged in the 1830s, gaining particular traction from the 1870s to 1900. While considered as one movement, it was constituted of two strands - the 'moral suasionists', who sought to use 'persuasion to promote their solution' of voluntary abstinence, as termed by Yeomans, and the prohibitionists who sought legal regulation.[352] Within this framework, the YMCA itself was prohibitionist as it had banned alcohol, yet it also utilised suasionist rhetoric in its mission for men to maintain sobriety as a form of self-discipline throughout their lives. The connection here was made that 'you may restrain a man from crime, but you cannot restrain him from sin'.[353] This was the crux of the YMCA's mission, focusing on

[350] 'A Startling Statement – and a Policy', *The Red Triangle,* 25/05/1917, p. 470.
[351] *Alcohol: Its Action on the Human Organism,* (London: HM Stationery Office, 1918), p. 132.
[352] Yeomans, 'What Did the British Temperance Movement Accomplish?', p. 44.
[353] 'Our Outlook'. *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 28/05/1915, p. 471.

the men's self-betterment, achieved through the suasionist course of action, as a way to morally uplift their lives. The Association placed a strong emphasis on the moral responsibility of the individual, as opposed to legal restrictions to guide rather than control behaviour. Yapp went as far as to argue that it was only through this 'constant and determined effort' of 'self control' that the 'first step to victory' would be achieved and the individual could liberate themselves from slavery. This complicated concept was presented in a pamphlet entitled 'Goal!' which illustrated the moral argument through the metaphor of a football match, complete with a colourful cartoon cover.[354] There was a clear ambition that this publication would be picked up in a hut as a comic and read by a soldier who had only a casual interest in moral issues, demonstrating the Association's commitment to expanding the reach of its mission through the use of language and images relevant and understandable to the men.

Both sides of the Temperance movement were led by Christian organisations. Yeomans argues that this caused the 'codification' of sobriety as a 'Christian virtue', which can certainly be seen in the way the YMCA put such great emphasis on it.[355] Moreover, he has identified that temperance was largely agitated for by 'Calvinist-influenced, evangelical Protestants' who supplied the movement with their 'ascetic Protestant spirit'.[356] Duncan has similarly identified the movement's evangelical influence, and its resulting alignment with the Liberal Party.[357] Given the pre-war predominance of non-conformity within the YMCA, and evangelical motivation of its leaders, it therefore follows that the Association would tie its mission in to temperance campaigning. The most devoted of the denominations to the campaign were the then-separate branches of Methodism. George Thompson Brake has investigated the

[354] Arthur Keysall Yapp, 'Goal', *YMCA with the Flag* 40 (undated), pp. 2-8, (p. 7).
[355] Yeomans, *Alcohol and Moral Regulation,* p. 38.
[356] Yeomans, *Alcohol and Moral Regulation,* pp. 51-52.
[357] Duncan, *Pubs and Patriots,* ps. 15 and 21.

Methodist commitment to temperance which connected 'temperance advocacy' with the 'social dimension' of the Gospel, in strengthening and motivating its believers.[358] The concept of the social Gospel held great influence over the YMCA's work and their motivations for temperance were very much aligned to those of the teetotal Methodists. A.W. Richardson argued in a pamphlet entitled 'The Nation and Alcohol' that 'social welfare and efficiency' depended on temperance and it was only in this way that 'the successful culture of body, mind and character' could be upheld.[359] There is a clear parallel here with the YMCA's mission statement of 'body, mind and spirit', yet while Richardson's pamphlet was promoted by the YMCA, it was published by the Student Christian Movement (SCM). It therefore stands as example not only of the social necessity of temperance, but also of the wider co-operation of the YMCA with missionary organisations, working together to seek practical outcomes from a religious motivation and beyond the peripheries of its own organisation to support the morality of men.

Such long-established crusades against alcohol have, however, led Duncan to argue that the war merely 'gave pro-temperance Liberals the excuse thy had been seeking for decades'.[360] There is certainly evidence for this, not least from Yapp himself with his personal renunciation of alcohol. The war can clearly be seen as a catalyst for arguments of efficiency and responsibility that provided nineteenth-century campaigns with a new motivation and urgency. This Yeomans has termed the 'problematisation of alcohol', unethical and immoral, set against the normative need for self-restraint.[361] Efficiency became a national priority, with the tri-fold nature of

[358] George Thompson Brake, *Drink: Ups and Downs of Methodist Attitudes to Temperance,* (London: Oliphants, 1964), p. 70.
[359] AW Richardson, *The Nation and Alcohol,* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1917), p. 26.
[360] Duncan, *Pubs and Patriots,* p. 10.
[361] Yeomans, 'What Did the British Temperance Movement Accomplish?', p. 49.

the 'physical, mental and moral', as defined by Richardson.[362] This again played into the similarly tri-fold YMCA mission statement and re-invented traditional arguments for a new context. However, the circumstances of war did also come to involve new actors in the temperance campaign. Yeomans argues that the period of 1914-1918 caused the 'temperance project' to take 'two steps forward', in the promotion of its ideal.[363] Where before the war it had been dominated by Methodists, the Church of England took on an important role, becoming the 'main protagonist in the pledge campaign'.[364] This project sought active participation from the population, on the same basis as the YMCA's separate War Roll pledge. The temperance pledge cards were also distributed in the YMCA huts, as well as other institutions, endeavouring to solidify soldiers' commitment to sobriety through the contractual signing of the card, which was also witnessed by a peer, sharing the commitment. Like the War Roll, a number of religious organisations ran parallel pledges, with the Church of England running their own in addition to the YMCA's which encouraged soldiers to 'promise by God's help to abstain from the use of all intoxicating liquors as beverages, and to do all that it can to promote the cause of Temperance'.[365] While no impact studies or statistics for the uptake of either campaign appear to survive, they did garner the support of the King who took the Church of England pledge in April 1915, implying an identified national need for a reduction in alcohol consumption. There was a clear propaganda element to this, which was utilised by the YMCA to implore soldiers to 'follow the King's example', giving real legitimation to their campaign beyond mere

[362] Richardson, *The Nation and Alcohol,* p. 11.
[363] Yeomans, *Alcohol and Moral Regulation,* p. 121.
[364] Yeomans, *Alcohol and Moral Regulation,* p. 109.
[365] YMCA temperance pledge card, CRL YMCA/ACC47.

pre-war tendencies.[366] Through recognition such as this it is evident that the mission of the YMCA was reaching further across society.

The YMCA, both through its pre-war nonconformist influence and prioritisation of the social Gospel, had evident motivations for supporting the temperance campaign. Furthermore, the active position of its hut programme meant that it was ideally situated to encourage soldiers away from alcohol and towards more ethically-based social actions. Its work as a counter-attraction for men's free time diverted attention towards self-improvement, a key element in its mission to inspire a healthy Christian life among soldiers.

Sexual Morality

While the moral consequences of alcohol were seen as detrimental to the wellbeing of the soldier, they were not as grave as those which were associated with sexual temptation. The circumstances of war, which created a segregated male space, intensified challenges to sexual morality and created a new sphere of temptation. Separated from women at home, soldiers turned to sexual outlets widely perceived as immoral. Bruce Cherry, in his study of sex and morale in the First World War, has argued that sex was 'an essential contributor to morale', of which 'the military knew the importance'.[367] Since the nineteenth century the British Army had allowed regulated prostitution, which Cherry argues 'created and sustained a culture that acknowledged a soldier's lust … and his right to satiate it'.[368] This created a problem for moral campaigners, such as the YMCA, who considered it their Christian duty to relieve men from the 'moral peril' which faced them in the 'awful temptations' of army

[366] 'A Startling Statement – and a Policy', p. 470.
[367] Bruce Cherry, *They Didn't Want to Die Virgins: Sex and Morale in the British Army on the Western Front, 1914-1918,* (Solihull: Helion and Company, 2016), ps. 43 and 63.
[368] Cherry, *They Didn't Want to Die Virgins,* p. 40.

life.[369] The two responses to such threats can be separated into the paradigms of the 'medical' and the 'moral', as Mark Harrison has identified.[370] The immediate threat was that of the medical problem of venereal disease (VD), which threatened military efficiency and dominated wartime debates on the legality of prostitution. It is similarly prevalent in the historiography, not least because it had a measurable impact and was publicly discussed through organisations such as the National Council for Combating Venereal Disease (NCCVD). The YMCA and Christian purity campaigns were certainly aware of and utilised the medical line, yet their overall focus lay in the inherent religious immorality of vice, which had an explicit biblical prohibition. For this reason, the YMCA's attitude towards sex was more resolute even than it was for alcohol, making it an important pillar in its mission towards morality.

The YMCA laid out its perception of sexual morality in a pamphlet entitled 'Sex and Sacrament' as part of its Active Service Papers, a series that covered the main challenges presented by the war. The pamphlet made deliberate note of its author Nat Berry's three years' experience working in France, including four months at a VD hospital. Although no biographical information for Berry can be located beyond that stated in the book, it demonstrates his practical knowledge of the wartime context of the issue. He defined sex as the 'sacrament of human love' that was the 'consummate act of sympathy and harmony', using deliberately religious terms yet connecting them with the realities of a soldier's life, warning against 'temptations'.[371] Another pamphlet distributed by the YMCA spoke similarly. In 'Christianity and the Problem of Purity' A. Herbert Gray, a Presbyterian chaplain and later marriage guidance promoter, described sex as 'beautiful, and happy, and holy' when in its 'proper place' within

[369] AW Anderson, 'Till the Boys Come Home', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 06/10/10/1916, p. 933.
[370] Mark Harrison, 'The British Army and the Problem of Venereal Disease in France and Egypt during the First World War', *Medical History* 39 (1995), pp. 133-158, (p. 135).
[371] N Berry, 'Sex and Sacrament', *Active Service Paper* 8 (undated).

marriage.[372] He condemned the 'poisonous insincerity' of 'impurity' which he argued could only be overcome with 'a full heart' and belief in God.[373] Both Berry and Gray conceptualised morality in Christian terms, recalling the lessons Paul gave in his letters to the Corinthians, yet neither made the biblical link explicitly. This suggests that while the YMCA's teachings were grounded in religion, the more pertinent frame of reference was the direct relation to contemporary issues than to scriptural lessons. Pamphlets, such as those by Berry and Gray, were widely distributed in the YMCA huts and designed so that they could be picked up and easily read by anyone who used the Association's services. They were therefore in line with the Association's wider religious teaching and pragmatic mission which were largely unconcerned with theological nuances. It is also notable that in neither in these pamphlets, nor in the Association's newspapers, does the YMCA directly address VD, or the medical ramifications of prostitution. Given its prioritisation of the pragmatic, this is somewhat curious, yet Edward Beardsley has identified that this was a common approach in the British Christian 'anti-vice crusade' during the war, 'downplaying' disease to focus on morality.[374] He gives little reason for this, other than through the outcome that it allowed them to avoid the discomfort of 'clinics and prophylactic treatment'.[375] The YMCA certainly does not appear to have confronted these issues, instead prioritising moral righteousness against temptation. For those leading the Association, it was not merely a health issue, even despite figures such as Berry's experience in a VD hospital, but rather a matter of principle which was seen to

[372] A Herbert Gray, *Christianity and the Problem of Purity,* (London: The Challenge, 1916), p. 4.
[373] Gray, *Christianity and the Problem of Purity,* ps. 3 and 8.
[374] Edward H Beardsley, 'Allied Against Sin: American and British Responses to Venereal Disease in World War I', *Medical History* 20 (2) (1976), pp. 189-202, (p. 202).
[375] *ibid*

permanently threaten 'family happiness' through 'poisonous insincerity', as described by Gray.[376]

Pamphlets such as these were deemed necessary during the war as a result of the 'enormous' immortality that was seen, at least in the eyes of Gray, to be 'daily ruining health for thousands' and leading to the degradation of morals.[377] The war was creating a particular environment for temptation, especially in the rest areas and base camps. This was highlighted more than once in the YMCA's periodicals with London singled out as 'a Mecca of interest and a centre of peril' along with the base camps of Egypt as providing 'terrible temptations' for the stationed soldiers.[378] Harrison and Cherry have both also indicated the particular example of Egypt as having a 'burgeoning trade in drugs, alcohol and prostitution' aimed at soldiers, centring around the 'carnal adventure' of the Wazir brothel district of Cairo.[379] The camps afforded men ample recreation time in which an escape from military life was sought. It was for this reason that the YMCA put such emphasis into its base camp provision, including the 'Soldier's Recreation Club' of the Ezbekiah Gardens located at the edge of Wazir where the slogan was 'something doing every night'.[380] It can therefore be inferred that in Cairo the YMCA's priority was the counter-attraction of men's recreation time away from immoral temptations. Clare Makepeace has argued that the crowds of men who attended brothels during the war considered them a 'site of homosocial bonding' and it can be seen that the recreational activities offered by the YMCA, including sports

[376] Gray, *Christianity and the Problem of Purity,* pp. 2-3.
[377] Gray, *Christianity and the Problem of Purity,* p. 2.
[378] FJC, 'Some Notes on the Red Triangle Story of 1917', *The Red Triangle Journal,* January 1918, p. 178; 'Our Outlook', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 01/09/1916, pp. 909-910.
[379] Harrison, 'The British Army and the Problem of Venereal Disease', p. 150; Cherry, *They Didn't Want to Die Virgins,* p. 37.
[380] David McCasland, *Oswald Chambers: Abandoned to God,* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1993), p. 81.

and music, were an alternative to this.[381] To what extent men did turn to the YMCA as an alternative to vice cannot be measured, although the Association was indisputably prevalent as a wartime social service, especially in areas where temptations were perceived to be heightened. Cherry has cited the YMCA's work, alongside that of the Church Army and Salvation Army, as providing an 'alternative to sin' although admits that this did not change the perception of prostitution remaining 'part of the social fabric' of war.[382] It can thus be seen that while the YMCA was making a contribution, its mission was not uniquely redesigning the landscape.

Nevertheless, it remained the case that within the male-dominated environment of the war even the sight of women was appealing. Veteran Donald Price described the 'godsend' of a female concert party in the YMCA and how 'marvellous' it was to see them.[383] Donald Hankey, a Christian writer and soldier, similarly considered that men were often so keen for female attention that if they 'ran up against "a bit of skirt" they would 'generally … follow it wherever it might lead'.[384] The YMCA was well aware of this appeal and sought to offer soldiers female contact within its moralistic environment. In this it engaged female-led concert parties, notably including that of Lena Ashwell, whose troupes constantly toured the YMCA huts of the base camps and rear positions. Moreover, 40 per cent of the Association's workers in France were female, providing an influence Baron considered to be 'beyond price' for men 'long separated from their homes'.[385] However, as identified by Jeffrey Reznick, the YMCA was careful to present these women as sisters and mothers, removed from

[381] Clare Makepeace, 'Male Heterosexuality and Prostitution during the Great War', *Cultural and Social History* 9 (1), (2012), pp. 65-83, (p. 71).
[382] Cherry, *They Did Not Want to Die Virgins,* ps. 101 and 179.
[383] Price, Sound Archive.
[384] Donald Hankey, *A Student in Arms: Second Series,* (New York: EP Dutton and Co, 1917), p. 55.
[385] Gipsy Smith, 'Facts and Figures about YMCA Work', handwritten memorandum, 08/01/1918, CRL YMCA/ACC2; Baron, 'Memoirs', p. 131.

sexualisation.[386] This created a clear distinction between the middle-class married women of the huts and the prostitutes of the maisons tolerées. The importance of the female workers as paradigms of feminine values sought to counter the societal fear identified by Callum Brown of immorality as being seen to stem from the military environment 'cut adrift from femininity' and the 'natural goodness' perceived to be inherent in women.[387] The YMCA can therefore be seen through its female workers to be redressing this balance and providing men with a practical education about the ideal Christian woman, removed from the sexual image prevalent elsewhere.

In addition to the YMCA's presentation of respectable women, they also utilised the Association's education programme to teach men the importance of morality. Gray saw this 'policy of education' as of particular importance because it was only through these means that they could 'make any headway against a thing like impurity', as needed to achieve the YMCA mission.[388] This was, as in the argument of Cherry, part of the major 'alternative' to prostitution that could lead men away from sexual temptation.[389] Both Cherry and Makepeace have described the moral 'veneer' of 'outward respectability' and a 'detached' sense of morality from 'peacetime behaviour' which made soldiers feel able to pursue desires they would have previously considered immoral.[390] The moralising work of the YMCA and others sought to re-engage the men with this moral compass through religious connection. The YMCA's educational programme organised for speakers, often from the major universities, to tour the huts lecturing troops. Moral and religious education constituted a major portion of this

[386] Jeffrey Reznick, *Healing the Nations: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain during the Great War,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 23.
[387] Callum G Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain,* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), pp. 98-99.
[388] Gray, *Christianity and the Problem of Purity,* ps. 3 and 8.
[389] Cherry, *They Didn't Want to Die Virgins,* p. 51.
[390] Cherry, *They Didn't Want to Die Virgins,* p. 90; Makepeace, 'Male Heterosexuality and Prostitution', p. 73.

work. Unfortunately, little survives of the content of these lectures, but there is some discussion of their perceived impact. W.R. Lane, a YMCA hut worker, found there to be particular interest in the moralising work, claiming that 'the spirit of hearing has been great' and that the men would 'readily welcome the change of a friendly and quiet talk' to guide them in the 'fierce moral contest' of war.[391] This quotation demonstrates the presence of such work and an attentive audience, although it could equally be considered that it was only a minority of soldiers in attendance and was likely not those whom the YMCA would consider most in need of moral guidance. Lane was also limited in his perspective as an employee of the Association as he would not have seen it from the soldier's view. One soldier, however, who did remark on the great value of this work was Hankey, who called on his readership to 'double your subscriptions to the YMCA' and similar organisations as 'you will be helping to combat vice in the only sensible way'.[392] Hankey's statement suggests that the YMCA's educational programme did benefit soldiers and increase the organisation's mission as he wrote from the perspective of a combatant himself. However, it must also be remembered that Hankey was a long-time supporter of the Association; he had known Baron, among others, before the war and contributed to its newspapers. His comment can therefore be seen to indicate the presence of the YMCA's work and its engagement of those with whom he served, even if it is not a fair representation of the impact.

While impact assessments remain difficult, the evidence discussed above does illustrate the YMCA's active involvement in campaigns against sexual immorality, just as it had done for alcohol. It worked both as a counter-attraction and a moral educator, demonstrating the moralised image of the domestic woman and the practical ethics of

[391] WR Lane, 'A Mission of Hope', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 28/05/1915.
[392] Hankey, *A Student in Arms,* p. 55.

a Christian life. The YMCA summarised its war work in June 1918 to be that which brought 'all parts of their lives under the influence of the Christian ethos' to 'help men live a Christian life'.[393] This holistic Christian mission is clearly evidenced throughout the hut programme, which brought moral guidance alongside social care and religious education to create a space in which the whole soldier could be supported. The YMCA's approach to both alcohol and sexual morality fed into this, framing the alternatives to temptation within a conception of a life defined by self-discipline and devotion to duty in order to be improve the moral and religious outcomes of the men. Under the circumstances of war, the YMCA reignited its mission, engaging more deeply with a broader range of men than it had previously been able to in its first six decades, but equally serving the original mission as set out by George Williams for the Christian welfare of men.

The mission of the YMCA in the First World War was not new. But it was taken to new levels by the opportunities of war, both positive through the broadened audience of men and negative through the increased temptations to which they were subjected. Moreover, while the Association's ambitions remained to attract men to a life of faith and Christian morality, the methods were transformed by wartime circumstances, notably through the commitment to non-proselytisation, focusing work instead on an open-door policy towards social mission. The YMCA was therefore able to distinguish itself from the British Christian missionary tradition and widen the scope of its work beyond that of specific missionary organisations like the CMS and CEMS. This did not result in a weakening of the YMCA's mission, but rather offered it the ability to engage broadly, encouraging not only Christian belief but also a life of ethics, leading by

[393] 'The Red Triangle Supplement: The YMCA and Social Reconstruction', *The Red Triangle Journal,* June 1918, p. 3.

example in the campaigns for teetotalism and sexual morality. Yet central to the success of this broadened approach was the YMCA's cross-denominational inclusion, which created an environment for the YMCA's mission that represented universality in facilitating soldiers' engagement with Christianity.

Chapter Four: 'Any Religion, Every Religion, and No Religion at All'

The Ecumenism of the YMCA



Figure 6 'The Indian YMCA' in Amarah, Mesopotamia[394]

'Protestant and Catholic, Anglican, Free-Churchman, Jew, Hindoo, Mohammedan – men of any religion, every religion, and no religion at all, are equally welcomed'. Such was General Secretary Sir Arthur Keysall Yapp's commitment to ecumenism within the YMCA during the First World War.[395] Under his leadership, the YMCA hut was a non-denominational and importantly non-proselytising space, in which soldiers of all backgrounds were welcomed. This put the Association in a unique position among the

[394] 'The Indian YMCA', YMCA Archive, Cadbury Research Library (CRL), University of Birmingham, YMCA/K/1/7/57.
[395] Art Arthur Keysall Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), p. 234.

many Christian charities providing support to the war effort. Although Talbot House was also 'open to all the world', according to Rev. PB ('Tubby') Clayton, his institution operated from within the Church of England, just as the Church Army also did.[396] The YMCA, by contrast, was independent, working beyond and between denominations to connect soldiers with religion. This made it distinct, using the resources and support from across the British churches, as well as providing a form of religion that was unconstrained by denominational boundaries. It never intended to serve as its own church, unlike the Salvation Army, but instead to supplement pre-existing organised religion. This enabled it to take a prominent role in the burgeoning phenomenon of ecumenism, promoting 'unity in the truest and widest meaning of the word', as Yapp described, and eschewing many of the 'ecclesiastical controversies' that were caused by differing opinions about 'theological subtleties'.[397] This broad-brush approach to its work meant that the YMCA was able to cast wide the net of soldiers it supported, from across the faith spectrum, in addition to those who professed no religion. Therefore, the YMCA was able to engage with men to an extent that would not have been possible without its interdenominational position.

The Ecumenical Context

The twentieth century has been termed the 'ecumenical century'.[398] Horton Davies, in justifying this as the subtitle of his fifth volume of the history of *Worship and Theology in England,* wrote that ecumenism marked 'the decisive difference' between the nineteenth-century 'competitive character' of the English Churches and the twentieth-century 'cooperative character'.[399] This is a theme widely reflected in the

[396] Philip Byard Clayton, *Tales of Talbot House: Every man's Club in Poperinghe and Ypres, 1915-1918,* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1919), p. viii.
[397] JB, 'Sir Arthur Yapp KBE', *The Red Triangle,* September 1917, pp. 1-4, (p. 1).
[398] Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: The Ecumenical Century, 1900 to the Present,* (Cambridge: Princeton University Press, 1965).
[399] *ibid*

historiography, with particularly the initial decades of the twentieth century within British Protestantism being characterized by the collaboration between denominations and discussions of potential Church reunion. This discussion of ecumenism is largely bookended by two events, the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 and the Lambeth Conference of 1920, between which are the pivotal years of the First World War. This decade must therefore be considered as a whole, considering both the influences which shaped wartime ecumenism and the impact left by the war. From this understanding, the work of the YMCA can be placed within an expanding phenomenon of ecumenism, both reacting to and shaping the trend.

The World Missionary Conference of 1910 was, as its name indicates, a summit of mission organisations and Church leaders, designed to bring together experience and knowledge from across international missionary movements to develop common strategies for the evangelisation of the world. It has come to be seen, as Paul Avis has described it, as the 'inauguration of the world-wide ecumenical movement', at least for how it operated within and between institutions.[400] Through the conference the lineage of Christian missionary work leading into ecumenism can be witnessed. Avis argues that this stemmed from a 'pragmatic' concern on the mission field, where 'cooperation and comity' were of practical benefit in an environment removed from the traditional church structures.[401] This is echoed by Brian Stanley in his extensive study of the Conference, in which he identified the main proponents of collaboration to have been missionary agencies as opposed to the churches themselves, for it was they who observed these commonalities in their work with other denominations.

[400] Paul Avis, 'Anglicanism and Christian Unity in the Twentieth Century', in Jeremy Morris (ed.), *The OxfordHistory of Anglicanism Volume IV: Global Western Anglicanism, c. 1910-Present,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 186-213, (p. 187).
[401] Avis, 'Anglicanism and Christian Unity', p. 189.

However, while Stanley recognises that 'narratives of the ecumenical movement typically begin' in 1910, he also notes that the original name for the conference had been the 'Third Ecumenical Missionary Conference'.[402] As this indicates, there were two previous iterations held in 1888 and 1900, demonstrating how the 1910 Conference fitted in as part of a longer established narrative. However, 'ecumenical' was dropped from the title, Stanley highlights, because it was 'overwhelmingly Protestant and broadly evangelical', and without representation from the Catholic or Orthodox churches could not claim to be truly ecumenical.[403] This is certainly true, yet it is also indicative of the early shoots of ecumenical efforts, which at the time were largely motivated by the nonconformist churches, with some, albeit limited, involvement from the Church of England.

The denominational make-up of ecumenical efforts at this time is reflected in the pre-war work of the YMCA. William Garrett Horder, himself a Congregationalist minister, wrote in a 1917 article for the YMCA's weekly newspaper of how in the pre-war years all those involved in the Association 'were either Nonconformist or very low Churchmen'.[404] This makes sense for an organisation which developed as a non-denominational body through the missionary networks and in this respect it held a lot in common with the ethos of the World Missionary Conference. It is therefore unsurprising that the chairman of the 1910 committee was John Mott, a Methodist layman, who was actively involved in the American YMCA and would go on to become its General Secretary between 1915 and 1931. While the American YMCA worked independently from its British older sister, there was much cross-pollination of ideas.

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[402] Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 127; Brian Stanley, 'The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910: Sifting History from Myth', *The Expository Times* 121 (7) (2010), pp. 325-331, (p. 326).
[403] Stanley, 'The World Missionary Conference', p. 326.
[404] William Garrett Horder, 'Then and Now: A Glimpse of Early Days in the YMCA', *The YM: British Empire Weekly,* 22/06/1917, p. 562.

The president of the British YMCA, Arthur, Lord Kinnaird, was also a special delegate at the World Missionary Conference, which was also attended by a number of further delegates from across the YMCA's international work. As has already been discussed, the YMCA had an established and active presence on the mission field, working throughout Asia and Africa, with additional missions to Central and Southern America. At the Conference, the Association was praised by American Episcopalian Bishop Logan Roots for doing 'more than any other Christian organisation in China' and in particular praising how 'rousing an active and liberal spirit' it was able to convey.[405] The YMCA can therefore be seen to have played an integral role in the ecumenical missionary impulse which influenced the World Missionary Conference. This, in turn, was an organisation which was strongly influenced by the same evangelical figures as the international missions that were catalyzing ecumenism at this time.

The evangelical enterprise of the Edinburgh Conference can then be compared to the opposite bookend of ecumenism, the Lambeth Conference of 1920. Whereas Edinburgh was an inter-denominational Conference, Lambeth was a Church of England-organised assembly of the global Anglican communion. This means that it sought a different purpose: where the former was an external opportunity for developing collaboration, the latter was an internal opportunity to reorientate church policy for what was determined to be the new era and a collaboration between international branches of one common church. The central themes of the Lambeth Conference were 'reconciliation, fellowship and unity', in what Avis has argued to be a direct outcome of the First World War experience and the perceived changing national

[405] Logan Roots, 'The Problem of Co-operation Between Foreign and Native Workers', *World Missionary Conference, 1910: The History and Records of the Conference Together with Addresses Delivered at the Evening Meetings,* (London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910), pp. 289-293, (p. 291).

mood.[406] At the conference 22 resolutions on the 'Reunion of Christendom' were passed, the most notable of them being the 'Appeal to all Christian People'. This called for a 'universal Church of Christ … reaching out towards the goal of a reunited Catholic Church', asking all followers of Christ to 'deplore the divisions of Christian people'.[407] Through this bold statement the Anglican Communion placed itself at the centre of ecumenical efforts for Church reunion, taking on a much greater role than in the preceding decade. This 'landmark' moment, as it is referred to by both Mark Chapman and Jeremy Worthen, saw the church assert itself on the ecumenical space, albeit on its own terms.[408] Through the Appeal the Church of England envisaged an ecumenical future that brought the nonconformist denominations back in house with itself, remaining as the established church. Such a move, in the argument of Chapman, was a 'redefinition of Anglicanism' as 'both un-Protestant and un-English', reasserting itself as a post-denominational and non-Roman form of Catholicism.[409] The Church sought to look internationally, expanding its focus beyond England and in particular towards the growing churches of the United States, where some reconciliation was seen as most possible.

This centring of ecumenism on Anglican terms, however, also raised a counter-side, as explored by Adrian Gregory. The dominance of the Church of England, both in size and influence, threatened to comparatively weaken the position of the nonconformist denominations and the individual identities they had carved. 'If all Christians were

[406] Avis, 'Anglicanism and Christian Unity', p. 193.
[407] 'Resolution 9: Reunion of Christendom', *The Lambeth Conference 1920,* https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127731/1920.pdf?year=1920 on 09/09/2020.
[408] Mark Chapman, 'Un-Protestant and Un-English: Anglicanism and the 1920 Lambeth Conference 'Appeal to All People'', *Ecclesiology* 16 (2020), pp. 159-174, (p. 160); Jeremy Worthen, 'The Centenary of the 'Appeal to All Christian People' and the Ecumenical Vocation of Anglicanism', *Theology* 123 (2) (2020), pp. 104-112, (p. 104).
[409] Chapman, 'Un-Protestant and Un-English', ps. 160 and 162.

united', he asks, 'what was the point of the chapels?'[410] In many ways, the perception and place of nonconformist chapels in society was already changing, with Peter Catterall arguing that by this time 'barriers between Anglicans and Free Churchmen' were already being eroded, particularly what was seen as the 'social exclusiveness of the chapel', a process which only intensified as a result of the First World War.[411] Indeed, in the aftermath of war, the nonconformist churches were experiencing an unprecedented moment of national attention, and what Gregory has termed perceived 'respectability' from the establishment.[412] This he attributes to the mutual 'commitment to the national cause' that had been shared between the majority of British churches during the war. The Free Churches were seen for once to be on the same side as the Anglicans, no longer solely defined by their common dissent from the established church, as David Bebbington has argued was mainly the case during the Victorian highpoint of Nonconformity.[413] The war became a point of unity and an opportunity for collaboration with the established Church. It was in this context that reconciliation became the watchword of Christianity in Britain by 1920, as Avis has argued.[414] The rhetoric around the Armistice was one in which points of similarity rather than difference were highlighted, as reflected in the Lambeth Conference's choice of themes. It is in this spirit, and from this root, that ecumenism was fostered to which Protestant chapels and churches alike responded.

Ecumenism has also been cast as a 'concession to decline' within the churches, which saw them turn from seeking frontal growth from non-believers to attempting lateral

[410] Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 175.
[411] Peter Catterall, 'Church Decline, Secularism and Ecumenism', *Contemporary Record* 5 (2) (1991), pp. 276-290, (p. 284).
[412] Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 175.
[413] David Bebbington, *Victorian Nonconformity,* (Bangor: Headstart History, 1992), p. 21.
[414] Avis, 'Anglicanism and Christian Unity', p. 193.

growth from other denominations, in much the same way as proponents of secularisation have also posited.[415] Catterall criticises theorists of secularisation, including Robert Currie, for making such arguments based on a perceived slump in church attendance, which in his argument fail to appreciate 'the persistence of belief without belonging', not to mention the lack of evidence for a widespread rejection of church membership.[416] Indeed, analyses such as Philip Jenkins' thesis that 'Christendom was mortally wounded' by the experience of the First World War do not withstand scrutiny, especially when considering the optimism intrinsic in post-war ecumenism.[417] In particular, the declinist argument of ecumenism fails to appreciate the internationalist perspective prevalent in the period, both evident through the delegates at Edinburgh in 1910 and the resolutions addressing the 'Anglican Communion' at Lambeth in 1920. Ecumenism was not an introspective solution to decline in the minds of early twentieth century Christians, but rather an extrospective opportunity to build on the bonds initiated by missionary work and then developed in wartime.

Relationships between the British denominations had been significantly altered by the First World War, to a state unimaginable in 1914, or even 1910. Where the Edinburgh Conference had been driven by missionary committees within and between churches, by the time of Lambeth 1920 such inter-denominational efforts had progressed to the church authorities themselves. Discussions around reconciliation between the British churches prospered throughout the early 1920s, driven by what Avis has identified as the 'engine' of 'local ecumenism'.[418] Bell agrees, indicating that 'the vast majority of

[415] Catterall, 'Church Decline', p. 283.
[416] Catterall, 'Church Decline', ps. 282 and 287.
[417] Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Changed Religion For Ever,* (Oxford: Lion Books, 2014), p. 218.
[418] Avis, 'Anglicanism and Christian Unity', p. 211.

ecumenical activity took place in the civic spaces of towns and villages', particularly around the issues of post-war memorialisation.[419] Increasingly, in his argument, 'Nonconformists and Anglicans conferred on matters of social concern', where a common understanding had developed through the war years.[420] This would later be consolidated in the 1924 Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC), which brought together Anglicans and nonconformists, but the trend can also be identified at an earlier stage in the establishment of YMCA clubs across Britain as part of the Association's Peace Programme that created ecumenical spaces particularly within rural communities. It is this local momentum that appears to have driven national level discussions on ecumenism, particularly among the Church of England and the Free Churches between 1921 and 1925, the pivotal years identified by Avis. He argues that it was during this period that the 'separatist mentality' of churches was surrendered; a trend also recognised by Davies who somewhat poetically described the growing 'ecumenical chorus' of this era.[421] At all levels of organised Protestant Christianity there was a developing trend of reconciliation, stimulated by the war experience.

Ultimately, however, the ecumenical impulse of 1920 soon retreated, with Stuart Bell observing 'little evidence' of much ecumenical impact after the Lambeth Conference.[422] This, he argues, was due in large part to the changing context of the post-war world. Where the churches had been brought together during the conflict, such 'justification for disregarding the requirements of a church law' soon also

[419] Stuart Bell, 'The Church and the First World War', in Tom Lawson and Stephen G Parker (eds.), *God and War: The Church of England and Armed Conflict in the Twentieth Century,* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 33-60, *(*p. 159).
[420] Bell, *The Church and the First World War,* pp. 173-4.
[421] Avis, 'Anglicanism and Christian Unity', p. 211; Davies, *Worship and Theology in England,* p. 251.
[422] Bell, 'The Church and the First World War', p. 51.

faded.[423] This is a harsher determination than that of other historians who have traced the waning of ecumenical discussions to later in the decade. There were active conversations between denominations with regards to integration and re-union following Lambeth, although these were largely inconsequential. The only major change in church structure came in 1932 with the reunification of the Methodist churches. Avis locates the final nail in the coffin of Anglican-Nonconformist church reunion to 1925, a year following COPEC, when conversations between the Church of England and the Free Churches finally broke down.[424] As Matthew Grimley has argued of this breakdown, 'it is striking that the sticking point had been episcopacy and the sacraments, not disestablishment'.[425] This structural, rather than liturgical, contention can be traced back to the Lambeth Conference, which Chapman argues saw a 'recasting of Anglicanism in an ecclesiological rather than a doctrinal direction'.[426] While there had been much local and lower-level reconciliation of belief, this proved incompatible with top-level concerns and preoccupations with proper church structure that proved insurmountable.

As will be seen in a later chapter, this timeline from Armistice optimism to inter-war realism was broadly concurrent with the one experienced by the YMCA whose own Peace Programme ran out of steam in the mid-1920s. There was no one moment of disruption, rather a more gradual process in which the momentum of the initial post-war years could not be sustained. This is the argument Stanley makes for the decline in ecumenical effort from the mid-1920s, when competing contextual pressures came to influence and once again reshape religious concerns both within the churches and

[423] *ibid*
[424] Avis, 'Anglicanism and Christian Unity', p. 196.
[425] Matthew Grimley, 'The State, Nationalism and Anglican Identities', in Jeremy Morris (ed.), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, c. 1910-present,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 117-136, (p. 124).
[426] Chapman, 'Un-Protestant and Un-English', p. 163.

within organisations like the YMCA.[427] Of course, this was not the end of the overall process of ecumenism, as Davies has shown in his long durée view of church trends. However, even he recognises that where the early-1920s focus had been on church reunion, the priority of particularly Anglican politics had moved by the middle of the decade to the Prayer Book controversy which culminated in the unofficial implementation of the new Book of Common Prayer in 1928. This argument of contextual shift is not incompatible with Grimley's understanding of the breakdown in reunification efforts, but rather contributes to an understanding of a society in flux whose attention transformed quickly in the aftermath of the First World War and the subsequent impact of the upheaval and insecurity of the 1920s as a decade. The years surrounding the war can therefore be seen to represent a pivotal and specific era of ecumenical effort which was already gathering speed by the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, but which was rerouted by the circumstances of war.

Wartime Ecumenism

The experience of war created new opportunities for ecumenism born largely out of necessity. The circumstances of war meant that traditional church-going practices were disrupted within the military space, in which access to a soldier's preferred denominational representative could often be limited and church services regularly makeshift, occurring outside a consecrated space. The Army Chaplains' Department that supported the British Army was multi-denominational, reflecting the proportion of different church adherence in the army. In August 1918 there were 1,941 Church of England chaplains, 643 Roman Catholics, 515 combined from the Free Churches and 298 Presbyterians.[428] With the addition of Jewish and Salvation Army chaplains this

[427] Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century,* p. 130.
[428] *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War,* (London: HMSO, 1922), p. 190, quoted in Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 89.

gave a total of 3,416 chaplains for the whole army. At earlier points in the war this total had been significantly lower. The majority of chaplains were attached to certain units, often two battalions at a time, which meant that it was often difficult for clergy of particular, especially smaller, denominations to reach all of their flock. Inter-denominationalism was the natural outcome, with co-operation in church services and especially in pastoral care. It was this disruption of normal church structures and resulting inter-denominationalism that enabled a greater ability for clergy to diversify their services and an increasing flexibility between perceived boundaries, leading to an increase in non-denominational services. The nuance between inter- and non-denominational is important here, for one signifies co-operation between churches and the other a removal of such compartmentalism. As will be seen, the ecumenism that developed in the First World War was a mixture of both, led by the army chaplains, backed by the church authorities at home and facilitated by philanthropic groups such as the YMCA.

Much of the evidence for wartime ecumenism comes from the organisation of voluntary communion services for soldiers. The Anglican chaplain Ernest Courtenay Crosse summarised the wartime situation: 'if the army had its way, there would, I think, be only one form of Christian religion, and religious controversy is so hopelessly out of place in France that in practice its discordant voice is seldom heard'.[429] Crosse was just one of many Christian voices who spoke of the unity of worship at the front and the simplification of services that minimised denominational differences in favour of co-operation and collaboration. His fellow Anglican clergyman, the Rev. JCV Durrell, similarly described how 'at the Front we have a freer hand than is possible in parish churches at home', suggesting how the circumstances of the war allowed for the

[429] Ernest Courtenay Crosse, *The God of Battles: A Soldier's Faith,* (London: Longmans, 1917), p. 16.

unanimity described by Crosse.[430] Durrell worked for the Church Army, thus illustrating the contribution of religious actors beyond the chaplaincy. He recounted how the running of some communion services would be shared, enabling 'actual co-operation between chaplains of different denominations', where 'one chaplain will take the prayers and read the lessons, the other preaching the sermon'.[431] In other places the services would be taken each week by a different denominational minister. In the final year of the war this collaboration went further. The Assistant Chaplain General, the Rev. Harry Blackburne, described how he came to the decision with Durrell and secretary Evans of the YMCA to alternate local hut services in the First Army area between 'a Prayer Book service, and a non-Prayer Book service on alternate Sundays'.[432] It can therefore be seen that church services were not characterised by denomination, but rather by liturgical tradition. The Prayer Book service would certainly favour Anglicans, but was not exclusionary of nonconformists and the balance on alternate weeks also encouraged participation from soldiers of a number of church backgrounds. Church services can therefore be seen to have become less divided and more co-operative throughout the war, rejecting many of the denominational traditions and religious controversies of home.

This transition in the character of services is directly attributable to the experience of war. As Dr. Lauchlan MacLean Watt of the Church of Scotland remarked in his 1917 book, 'what a lesson for the divided Churches at home is often given us here!'.[433] Such was the level of integration experienced between chaplains while at the front. Much of

[430] JCV Durrell, *Whizzbangs and Woodbines: Tales of Work and Play on the Western Front,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), p. 80.
[431] Durrell, *Whizzbangs and Woodbines,* pp. 195-196.
[432] Harry W Blackburne, *This Also Happened on the Western Front,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), p. 154.
[433] Lauchlan Maclean Watt, *In France and Flanders: with the Fighting Man,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), p. 91.

this increased ecumenical work was the result of pragmatism, for it was not always possible for separate services to be held. However, accounts such as Durrell's also indicate how the removal of formal boundaries between the denominations encouraged collaboration which was more easily achieved than in the established social structures of home. Much of this was due to the common focus of wartime preaching, which centred around the needs of the soldiers and their experiences of war. The Wesleyan chaplain J Gordon Bennett, who served on the Mesopotamian front, demonstrated the extent of the ecumenical work he was able to co-ordinate. To mark the New Year in 1917 he arranged a week-long programme of 'special Evangelistic services', acknowledging the 'amazingly comprehensive … different types of men who are willing to help us'. On the billing was 'one RC [Roman Catholic] Lieutenant, one Primitive Methodist (United Board Chaplain), one Presbyterian, one or two Wesleyan Chaplains, two Church of England, and one American missionary'.[434] A scheme of this scale was certainly made possible by the fact they were at a base camp, but it also relied on the active participation and local organisation of Christian representatives at Makina Camp, near Basra. It was on the initiative of these individuals that such ecumenical work was able to develop.

While this trend towards ecumenism was widespread throughout the war, it was not universally adopted. As Oliver Rafferty has argued, 'Catholic chaplains insisted on keeping themselves apart at a time when other denominations were beginning to cooperate'.[435] This remained a point of contention throughout and after the First World War whenever ecumenism was raised. It is widely recognised, as Edward

[434] J Gordon Bennett, in Anthony Bennett (ed.), *A Mesopotamian Diary: An Account by a Volunteer Padre, Rev J Gordon Bennett, December 1916 – May 1917,* unpublished edited diary (1997), Imperial War Museum, IWM 97/33/1, (29/12/1916).
[435] Oliver Rafferty, 'Catholic Chaplains to the British Forces in the First World War', *State and Society* 39 (1) (2011), pp. 33-62, (p. 45).

Madigan and Michael Snape have argued, that 'Roman Catholic chaplains seem to have encountered fewer obstacles than their Anglican counterparts' in establishing good relations with ordinary soldiers, although this was largely limited to soldiers who identified as Catholic.[436] It is certainly the case that many individual Catholic chaplains extended their care to all soldiers in their locality, regardless of religious belonging, yet within the Catholic hierarchy, there remained a separation. As Rafferty also acknowledges, 'Catholics refused to take part in joint church parades and to have anything to do with 'ecumenical' services of any kind'.[437] This created an insurmountable divide that limited the extent to which ecumenism developed during the First World War. There are some localised examples, including that quoted above from Bennett, yet this was the exception, rather than the rule, with the official position of the Roman Catholic church being that clergy should not participate. In some regards, the success of the Catholic chaplains, as noted by Madigan and Snape, could be seen to allow them to have 'seized the opportunity provided by the war to shore up their credentials as true patriots', as Richard Schaefer has argued.[438] 'The devout behaviour of Catholic soldiers', as Snape has observed, was seen to be particularly notable, with them 'frequently depicted as exemplars of the faith to the Catholic faithful at home'.[439] This distinctively high sense of denominational belonging set both the Catholic chaplains and soldiers apart from the other churches. Much of this stemmed from the historic separation of Catholics and Protestants, where the various

[436] Edward Madigan and Michael Snape, 'Introduction: British Army Chaplaincy in Context', in Edward Madigan and Michael Snape (eds.), *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1-16, (p. 12).
[437] Rafferty, 'Catholic Chaplains to the British Forces in the First World War', p. 45.
[438] Richard Schaefer, 'Catholics and the First World War: Religion, Barbarism and the Reduction of Culture', *First World War Studies* 1 (2) (2010), pp. 123-139, (p. 133).
[439] Michael Snape, 'British Catholicism and the British Army in the First World War', *British Catholic History* 26 (2) (2002), pp. 314-358, (p. 332).

reformed denominations had shared more of a common root than they did with the Roman Catholics.

However, there was one form of wartime ecumenism that transcended even the Protestant-Catholic divide. This was the introduction of the National Days of Prayer, a novel form of public worship, which brought together followers of all British churches in a committed day of prayer for issues pertaining to the war. Philip Williamson, in his study of these national days describes how 'they were arranged by consultation between the leaders' of the Churches of England and Scotland, the Roman Catholics and the free churches, 'establishing an entirely new co-operation between the principal churches' and an unprecedented level of unanimity in worship.[440] The official nature of the days was reinforced by the direct involvement of the King and the Prime Minister, who together were able, as Williamson argues, to create a new 'tacit alliance between the churches, the monarchy and the government', which was able to place religious efforts at the forefront of the public's minds, whether or not they were regular churchgoers.[441] The National Days of Prayer spoke to an older tradition, dating from at least the sixteenth century, yet they were reconstituted in response to the needs of the First World War led by the Prime Minister and supported by the King and church leaders. King George V described the first National Day of Prayer, held on 3rd January 1915, as 'a call for united prayer, intercession, thanksgiving, and for those who have fallen in the country's cause'.[442] Although his position as Head of State was intertwined with his role as Supreme Governor of the Church of England, his call was reflected by all the major churches, including support for the day being offered by the Catholic churches in France and Belgium. Despite the limited impact that sometimes

[440] Philip Williamson, 'National Days of Prayer: The Churches, the State and Public Worship in Britain, 1899-1957', *English Historical Review* 531 (2013), pp. 323-366, (ps. 330 and 325).
[441] Williamson, 'National Days of Prayer', p. 325.
[442] 'Day of Intercession', *The Daily Telegraph,* 05/11/1914, p. 7.

resulted from ecumenical initiative, the National Days of Prayer can be seen as an indication of the growing consensus on ecumenical matters during the First World War.

The growing consensus was mainly built around issues pertaining to the war. This has been identified by Stuart Bell, who has argued that it was this 'shared purpose' which brought the denominations together between 1914 and 1918.[443] Evidence for this can be seen in the common language around the war effort, which sought to unite and motivate the nation as a whole above and beyond the members of individual churches. The effect of this was borne out in the immediate post-war, with Bell identifying that 'after the Armistice, joint services were commonly held to celebrate the cessation of hostilities'.[444] This continuation of ecumenical prayer for the national cause can particularly be seen in thanksgiving and remembrance practices at the war's end. A clear impact of the changing trend throughout the war can be seen in the thanksgiving services that followed the Armistice. On 12th November, the first full day of peace, King George V and Queen Mary attended a service of thanksgiving at St. Paul's Cathedral. Four days later, on 16th November, they attended another service at the Royal Albert Hall, accompanied by the Prince of Wales, Princess Mary and Princess Christian. This second service was ecumenical; held in an unconsecrated common space. Yet the content of the two services was remarkably similar. The hymns 'Praise My Soul the King of Heaven' and 'For All the Saints' were sung at both, and both also featured a reading from Isaiah 40.[445] The reading, which focuses on the emotions of post-judgement Jerusalem, would have been resonant with congregations experiencing the

[443] Stuart Bell, *Faith in Conflict: The Impact of the Great War on the Faith of the People of Britain,* (Solihull: Helion and Company, 2017), p. 158.
[444] Bell, *Faith in Conflict*, p. 159.
[445] 'The King at St Paul's To-day: Public Thanksgiving', *Daily Mail,* 12/11/1918, p. ?; 'Victory Thanksgiving: To-day's Service at the Albert Hall', *The Times,* 16/11/1918, p. 8.

conflicting emotions of Armistice. It offered the comfort of God and the promise of the 'way of the Lord', which would 'make straight in the desert a highway for our God', suggestive of the easing of stress with the end of the war, while also remembering those who have died much as 'the grass withereth, the flower fadeth'. For while this was the case on earth, 'the word of our God shall stand for ever'; a promise of the redemption that awaits in Heaven.[446] This was certainly a powerful text for the circumstances, and its inclusion across different services of thanksgiving, is indicative of the shared sentiment between the churches at the time. The purpose of the Albert Hall service, like that of the National Days of Prayer, was to unite the people in prayer around a national issue, grounding the focus on the material and experiential with thanks to God.

It is notable that the Albert Hall service took place in an unconsecrated venue. This was a neutral, civic space that moved organised Christianity beyond the church walls. The use of the Albert Hall may simply have been one of capacity – indeed, it was used again days later by the YMCA for a similar service – yet it is also indicative of this meeting of churches in common ceremony in public spaces. Activity of this kind originated in the National Days of Prayer, which often brought together civic and religious spaces. For example, to mark the first National Day of Prayer in Exeter a procession was organised, departing the Guildhall and moving to the Cathedral where the prayer service was held.[447] This demonstrates the connection that was developed between the institutions of society during the First World War, centred around ecumenical worship. Comparable processions and connections between the civic and religious came to characterise the war memorial movement and resulting

[446] Isa 40:1-8 (KJV).
[447] 'Day of Intercession', *Western Times,* 02/01/1915, p. 2.

remembrance practices, where an ecumenical, or even inter-faith, service would be held in conjunction with local leaders to pay respects for the war. Such an integration, Williamson argues, 'renewed the assumption that the churches fulfilled important national purposes', by emphasising the churches' commitment to the national effort and making them a focal point for national attention.[448] Yet, this tied many ecumenical efforts to the war itself, leading to Bell's later argument that 'once the war had ended, so too did the justification for disregarding the requirements of church law' and the resulting retreat back to denominational foci.[449] Therefore, it can be observed that the ecumenism that developed in wartime was one of pragmatism, which enabled more soldiers to access Christian teaching, and which brought communities together across the commonalities of the conflict experience. Its lack of permanence or linear development throughout the subsequent decades does not negate its importance, demonstrating the exceptional circumstances that were necessary to foster such change. This is also only one part of the ecumenical experience. It was perpetuated and facilitated largely by the churches as the organisational structures of Christianity, yet it was through external organisations, such as the YMCA, that ecumenism was largely driven, initiating many of the practices that would come to characterize changing approaches to Christianity in Britain over the subsequent century.

The YMCA's Perspective

The First World War catalysed a major expansion in inter-denominational efforts, yet the YMCA had already been an early proponent of ecumenism, the roots of which can be traced back through its preceding 70 years of missionary work. Since its founding in 1844 it had operated outside formal church structures to support men of any background. In keeping with the context of pre-war religion, this was largely fostered

[448] Williamson, 'National Days of Prayer', p. 337.
[449] Bell, 'The Church and the First World War', p. 51.

through its expansion in missionary networks, but was also achieved domestically. Of particular importance here was the YMCA's presence among the urban poor who came to the Association from a variety of church perspectives. Despite this, the pre-war makeup of the YMCA had traditionally been predominantly nonconformist. As Horder explained in a 1917 article for the *YM British Empire Weekly*, in the pre-war years the YMCA members 'were either Nonconformist or very low Churchmen'.[450] This he attributed to the Association having been 'too articulately and doctrinally religious', a position it moved away from during the course of the war.[451] The Anglican chaplain Canon James Adderley went further than this, honestly remarking in a YMCA publication that 'The Church of England was not very friendly to the YMCA in old days. It treated it rather as if it were a Nonconformist sect'.[452] This, however, was transformed by the experience of war, and, having personally made use of the YMCA's services during his chaplaincy, he regarded the Association as having 'captured the imagination of the public' of all backgrounds, indicating the transformation of the YMCA's standing from that which was seen to be overwhelmingly nonconformist, to one which Anglo-Catholics such as Adderley came to support.[453] General Secretary Sir Arthur Keysall Yapp was key to this transformation. In the initial years of the war he repeatedly reaffirmed the YMCA's position of non-denominationalism both in the Association's own publications and in the national press. This provided a clear policy direction that spoke both to its own members, as well as to potential supporters. Under his leadership, which began in 1912, the YMCA refused to be drawn into denominational disagreements, Yapp committing the organisation to stand 'for

[450] W Garrett Horder, 'Then and Now: A Glimpse of Early Days in the YMCA', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 22/06/1917, p. 562.
[451] *ibid*
[452] James Adderley, 'The Church of England and the YMCA', *Red Triangle Papers* 20, CRL YMCA/K24/4.
[453] *ibid*

Christianity in its broadest and most definite sense'.[454] While this was a restatement of the YMCA's core principle, it was important for how it would deliver its war programme and how in so doing it would exert itself on a much larger stage. An article written for *The Times* by an unnamed YMCA source in 1915 restated this commitment that 'all the YMCA buildings are available equally to Atheist and Nonconformist, Protestant and Roman Catholic'.[455] Crucially, it also stated that 'only about 10 per cent of those now working over here [on the Western Front] had had anything to do with the YMCA before the war'.[456] In part, this speaks to the rapid growth of the Association following the outbreak, but its inclusion in this article was also an indication to *The Times'* readership of how the membership of the YMCA had broadened even within the first year of the war. Through such deliberate reassertions of its purpose and message, the YMCA was able to transform its reputation through its war work and significantly enhance its ecumenical position.

To achieve this, the YMCA built upon the developing ecumenical sentiment of wartime religion. Its position for this was laid out in a 1916 memorandum to all YMCA workers and Church bodies by Ernest Clark Carter, the director of the Association's work in France, an American humanitarian who would later be accused of sympathising with Stalin's Communists and endorsing the show trials of 1938. This 'memorandum regarding the interdenominational position of the YMCA' stated that the Association's ecumenism should be 'truly "interdenominational"' and not "undenominational", supporting all men to become more committed followers of their chosen

[454] AK Yapp, 'At the Sign of the Red Triangle: A Familiar Badge in all Parts of the Empire', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 15/01/1915, p. 19.
[455] Special Correspondent, 'YMCA Huts in France – Club Life for Soldiers – A Successful Enterprise, *The Times,* 21/09/1915, p. 6.
[456] *ibid*

denomination.[457] Successful branches of the YMCA, he claimed, 'have sought to make Anglicans more loyal Anglicans, Presbyterians more useful Presbyterians, and Free Church men more serviceable Free Church men'.[458] This characterisation demonstrates how it was the YMCA's aim to support and collaborate with the organised churches and not to override them. Yapp echoed this in his characterisation of the YMCA as 'a bridge or a communication trench', connecting the soldiers to the churches and not usurping the need for organized Christianity or denominational belonging.[459] The practical implications of this can be seen in how the YMCA's huts were used to host church services. As the Senior Chaplain of the 21st Division described a typical week, 'on Sunday [the YMCA hut] is the scene of the C. Of E. communion service at 7:15; after breakfast the Wesleyan chaplain arrives, and if wet the Church of England holds a voluntary service, while the RC chaplain comes in to see if he can hold Mass, for which permission is willingly given'.[460] This indicates how the YMCA opened its doors to all denominations, providing a communal space open to all. As chaplains looked to collaborate with each other, the YMCA offered use of its premises to facilitate this work, creating an interdenominational space.

While the YMCA huts had a multi-functional purpose of hosting a variety of denominational services, the Association also went further than this, regularly providing its own services that ascribed to no particular denominational format. This did not necessarily mean they contravened Carter's interdenominational commitment, but rather served to supplement those of the churches and help develop a soldier's faith. By not, as Yapp also stated, dealing in theological minutiae or

[457] Edward Clark Carter, 'Memorandum Regarding the Interdenominational Position of the YMCA', 1916, p. 2, CRL, K24/5.
[458] *ibid*
[459] Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle*, p. 198.
[460] 'The Empire's Debt to the YMCA: The Testimony of a Senior Chaplain', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 05/02/1915, p. 76.

denominational disagreements, the YMCA was able to provide a form of worship that was agreeable to a large cross-section of the Army. This balance was not always achieved, with Carter acknowledging that 'some Associations have been dominated by enthusiastic members of one section of the Church of England' or that others 'have been predominantly Free Church Associations'.[461] Even if Church labels were not applied, certain influences could be seen to dominate. Rev. Arnold H. Griffiths, a Congregationalist minister and YMCA secretary in Egypt during the war, described how the traditional YMCA "song service" predominantly suited nonconformist soldiers, creating barriers to Anglican and Catholic soldiers in places where this was relied upon. He expressed his 'dissatisfaction' on the grounds that 'owing to its lack of the forms of worship and reverence it fails to attract any but men of a certain type of non-conformity'.[462] The YMCA was particularly prone to nonconformist bias, given the dominance of particularly Methodist and Congregationalist members in the pre-war years. Griffiths' concerns also demonstrate how just because a service was ecumenical in design – the song service was simply that, a programme of communally sung hymns – it did not mean it suited all denominations equally. Even towards the end of the war, the YMCA's central organisation was conscious of these limitations. In the *Red Triangle* supplement on social reconstruction published in June 1918 it was admitted that 'it is simply impossible, in the existing circumstances, for any service to be entirely undenominational in character'.[463] Personal biases and perspectives would always have an influence, even as the Association broadened its scope throughout the war.

In order to develop its interdenominational position and to expand its work for soldiers, the YMCA actively sought to work with the army chaplains. Association

[461] Carter, 'Memorandum regarding the interdenominational position', pp. 1-2.
[462] AH Griffiths, quoted in James W Barrett, *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt,* (London: HK Lewis and Co, 1919), p. 137.
[463] 'The YMCA and Social Reconstruction', *Red Triangle Supplement,* June 1918, p. 6.

secretaries were advised by central office that 'in every case the help of the chaplains should be sought', with it generally accepted that 'in 9 out of 10 cases' the Association would be welcomed.[464] However, such integration with the chaplains was not always straightforward. This was particularly the case in relation to the clergy of the Church of England, who made up the majority of the Chaplains' Department, and was more pronounced in the early years of the war as both parties developed their roles. The Rt Rev. Llewellyn Gwynne, the Deputy Chaplain-General in France, wrote frequently in his 1915 diaries of the 'thorny question' of YMCA work, describing how 'they send out mainly clergy as workers who interfere with the work of the chaplains'.[465] This was an issue of stepping on each other's toes, with Gwynne meeting Dr John Simms, the Presbyterian Principal Chaplain, Oliver McCowan, the YMCA's regional secretary, and the Adjutant General on a number of occasions to work out a compromise. There is no evidence that these disagreements stemmed from ideological differences, but rather from both sides trying to prove themselves as valuable in the support of soldiers and promotion of faith. As Snape has argued, the 'popular and practical ecumenism' of wartime Christianity was able to 'put the churches to shame', leading to some chaplains being 'intimidated by their sheer prevalence and by their negative implications'.[466] It was feared by some that the attraction of the YMCA would detract from the chaplains' appeal among soldiers and complicate their jobs. The Rev. William Soothill, the YMCA's religious works director, responded to the debate, stating that the Association was not 'in any way entrenching upon the office of the Army Chaplains', but instead was seeking to serve as 'their adjutants'.[467] This characterised the YMCA

[464] 'Our Outlook', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 15/10/1915, p. 951.
[465] Llewellyn Gwynne, in Peter Howson (ed), *The First World War Diaries of the Rt Rev. Llewellyn Gwynne, July 1915- July 1916,* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), p. 22.
[466] Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 200.
[467] William E Soothill, 'Our Citizen Army Three: The Nation's Spiritual Hope', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 31/12/1915, p. 1223.

as the administrative support, working to enable and assist the chaplains in their roles. Despite the early complication laid out by chaplains including Gwynne, this conception of the YMCA as their support was widely accepted. Gwynne recorded in his diaries his frequent use of Association facilities as a place where he could meet with soldiers, preach at services and carry out confirmations. Complaints of this type also appear to be largely concentrated into the initial half of the war, with a more collaborative balance being struck in the latter years, indicating the development of both the YMCA and the Chaplaincy during the war, and the rewarded success of the Association's efforts.

Carter's memorandum also addresses this debate. He summarised the solution to be that 'the YMCA is simply the courtyard to the Church, or the handmaid of the Church, or as some have said, the scaffolding for the Church'.[468] He thus characterised the role of the YMCA to be as a meeting place for religious men, a helping hand to the chaplains, and a support for the development of the church. It can be seen that this sentiment carried to those working on the ground, with Padre Bennett similarly describing how the YMCA had proved itself to be 'an auxiliary to the Churches'.[469] To achieve this, he went on, it had overcome the fears that the YMCA may have been 'abusing its success by becoming merely another denomination'.[470] This was also addressed by Carter, who acknowledged that 'the Archbishop of Canterbury wanted to be sure that there was no danger of the YMCA becoming another denomination'.[471] Randall Davidson had cause for concern: the Salvation Army had made similar claims in the 1880s before formulating itself as its own church. Upon his visit to the Western Front in 1916 he 'felt a little in the atmosphere' at a YMCA hut in Bailleul 'of a rather

[468] Carter, 'Memorandum regarding the interdenominational position', p. 4.
[469] Bennett, *A Mesopotamian Diary,* 16/05/1917.
[470] Bennett, *A Mesopotamian Diary,* 16/05/1917.
[471] Carter, 'Memorandum regarding the interdenominational position', p. 3.

determined and independent YMCA religion which owes no allegiance to any church', but he was also willing to support the organisation owing to how 'keen and absorbed' the soldiers were in its work.[472] Carter went on to note that the Association was able to allay these concerns, namely through highlighting how the YMCA was powered by a coalition of men belonging to different churches, 'who would break their connection with the Association if they felt that the Association was growing up outside of the church, and a rival to it'.[473] Indeed, by the end of 1916 when Carter published his memorandum, the churches, including the Church of Scotland, United Free Church of Scotland, and Church of England were officially providing clergy to work for the YMCA, demonstrating endorsement for their work. There was much collaboration between the Church of England's Church Army and the YMCA, working alongside one another to share resources and not to compete for support. Despite this, a low level of rupture persisted throughout the war. Griffiths complained in a report of YMCA work that just 'because some clergy are too stiff is no reason why the YMCA should be sloppy', admitting that relations with certain chaplains were not always easy.[474] Moreover, while the practical alliance of the organisations helped support soldiers, some friction over the long-term status of the organisations remained. E Gordon Savile of the Church of England Mens Society (CEMS), who also provided war work similar to the Church Army, complained in May 1918 that this could be resolved if the YMCA 'would make a specific and widespread pronouncement upon their future policy' to ensure that there would be no post-war competition.[475] The YMCA had no intention to serve as anything other than an auxiliary to other churches, yet the Church of England's concern is nonetheless unsurprising.

[472] Randall Davidson, *Visit to the Front, 1916,* Lambeth Palace Library, Davidson.583.
[473] Carter, 'Memorandum regarding the interdenominational position', p. 3.
[474] Griffiths, in Barret, *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt,* p. 137.
[475] E Gordon Savile, letter to GK Bell, 02/05/1918, LPL, Davidson.379.

Despite these setbacks, the YMCA was able to earn the trust of the British churches, especially through its war work, and this enabled it to take on a leading role in wartime ecumenism. Assistant Chaplain-General Blackburne recounted in his memoir his attendance at a series of interdenominational meetings hosted by the YMCA at their Ypres headquarters. 'These meetings', he described, 'do a lot of good, especially so when we all say out plainly what we are thinking at the back of our minds'.[476] In addition to discussing issues of war, they also talked of ways to encourage 'social reconstruction after the war', highlighting the collaborative development of Christian work over the war years.[477] This is just one example of the co-ordinating role the YMCA played, bringing together clergy from different denominations in common work. The Anglican chaplain and staunch YMCA supporter Rev. Basil Bourchier was said by the YMCA to have 'rejoiced in the contribution now being made by the Young Men's Christian Association to the problem of Christian unity', suggesting that the YMCA was not only working with the churches to better serve soldiers during the war, but also developing collaborative working arrangements for the wider benefit of Christianity that could have a post-war legacy.[478] In achieving this, the support of the church authorities was crucial. From a position of relative scepticism at the outbreak, the Church of England had potentially the largest transformation in this regard during the war. During conferences of the Assistant Chaplains-General (ACGs) on the Western Front throughout 1917 and 1918 these Anglican leaders routinely offered 'every encouragement and support to the YMCA, ultimately concluding that 'the YMCA had come to stay and be reckoned with' as an important force in Christianity.[479] The ACGs even went as far as to discuss the possible merger between the Church of England's

[476] Blackburne, *This Also Happened,* p. 141.
[477] Blackburne, *This Also Happened,* pp. 145-6.
[478] 'Our Outlook', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 26/03/1915, pp. 255-256, (p. 255).
[479] Conference of Assistant Chaplains General of Armies, 20/02/1917 and 23-24/01/1918, Museum of Army Chaplaincy, Shrivenham.

own Church Army and the YMCA, at least on a practical level during war, feeling that there was 'military dissatisfaction with the Church Army' that the YMCA was able to overcome.[480] Ultimately this did not materialize, with the chaplains concluding that compartmentalising the Church Army huts within the YMCA structure would be 'a notable blow for unity' and that it was better to focus efforts on co-operation.[481] It can therefore be concluded that inter-denominational co-operation was viewed with significance during the First World War, both by the churches and the YMCA, with the latter being able to exert a significant role in the ecumenical space.

Catholic Exceptionalism

However, the integration of one church always eluded the YMCA. Despite its commitment to open its huts for all men, of all faiths, throughout the war, there remained limitations in the extent to which it was able to collaborate with the Roman Catholic Church. As has already been discussed, this was not an issue solely limited to the YMCA. Similarly, Protestant chaplains found it difficult to unite their work with their Roman Catholic counterparts. Yet, there remained for the YMCA a particular distrust from the Catholic Church of their work before, during and after the First World War. This came to a head in 1920 when the Pope issued a decree prohibiting members of the Roman Catholic Church from participating in lay Christian organisations, including a ban specifically on joining the activities of the YMCA. The reasoning for this was explained by an American Catholic, the Rev. Thomas J Burke, whose article for the journal of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia detailed how the 'soul of the YMCA is its interdenominationalism' which made it necessarily incompatible with Catholicism.[482] The Christian faith for

[480] Conference of Assistant Chaplains General of Armies, 06-07/11/1917.
[481] *ibid*
[482] Thomas J Burke, 'The Recent Condemnation of the YMCA', *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 35 (2) (1924), pp. 137-158, (p. 139).

Catholics, he argued, depended on a 'definite doctrine' of 'formula, rite and ceremony', which could not be upheld by an organisation, such as the YMCA, which allowed for the communal participation of from men of all denominations and none.[483] Unlike the disagreements that had arisen with the other churches, this was an irreconcilable rift.

Throughout the First World War, there were prevalent signs of this tension, both in the publications of the YMCA and the Catholic Church. One anonymous Royal Flying Corps officer's testimony in the *Army and Religion* report summarised much of the Roman Catholic Church's view of wartime religion. He complained that many men had an 'indefinite belief in a vague, indefinite God' as they had not been taught the particulars of faith.[484] 'The remedy is obvious', he exclaimed; men needed 'the real teaching of the Catholic Faith in its entirety'.[485] The officer's testimony does not condemn organisations like the YMCA specifically – after all, the *Army and Religion* was a YMCA-funded report so would likely have edited out such a section had it been present – but there is a clear implication in his desire for soldiers to be taught the 'fundamental doctrines' in place of vague belief that indicate a specific Catholic need in religious formation. This encompasses a sentiment shared further than just the Roman Catholic church, but it was undoubtedly experienced by Roman Catholic soldiers. Such an idea is reinforced by evidence included in Charles Plater's comparative survey *Catholic Soldiers,* in which one anonymous contribution suggested that the conditions of the war, including the greater intermixing of soldiers from different denominational backgrounds, commonly led Catholic soldiers 'to enhance their value' of their Church belonging, owing to the 'moral and religious

[483] *ibid*
[484] David Cairns, (ed.), *The Army and Religion: An Enquiry and its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation,* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1919), p. 116.
[485] *ibid*

character' that doctrinal focus was able to develop.[486] Such evidence highlights the ideological divide which made it difficult for Catholic authorities to support the interdenominational focus of the YMCA, where the depiction of Christianity was more centred around pragmatism than formal teachings.

While the ideological objections to ecumenism are clear, it is notable that the Papal decree which prohibited the YMCA did not come until after the First World War. As has been discussed in an earlier chapter, it was as a result of the circumstances of war that the YMCA was able to expand its position to one of national significance, yet the decision not to make such a definitive statement during the war suggests that despite the Catholic authorities' reluctance to approve of the YMCA's interdenominationalism, the participation of Catholic soldiers and chaplains at a local level in YMCA war work was tacitly permitted. A large reason for this would have been pragmatic. While there were Catholic Huts providing recreation for soldiers these were nowhere near as widespread as the YMCAs, which, despite not promoting a doctrinally specific Christian message were nonetheless a Christian space, in which Christian morals were encouraged. It is clear that the 1920 decree was a product of the First World War and the changing landscape of religion it catalysed, yet it may also be contended that it was as much a product of the Armistice and the potential for the YMCA's increased influence in the post-war world. As Snape has argued, 'the proliferation of wartime soldiers' huts run by non-Catholic groups and denominations served to put Catholics on their guard'.[487] This indicates that the wheels of change had been set in motion during the war, yet the lack of authoritative prohibition for interdenominational work during the war does allude to the increasing sentiment of the time that the changes

[486] Charles Plater, *Catholic Soldiers,* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1919), p. 152.
[487] Snape, 'British Catholics and the British Army', p. 350.

introduced out of necessity during the war on the active fronts could have been brought home and developed as the soldiers returned. The year 1920 is also significant as this was the year of the Lambeth Conference, which we have already seen represented a watershed moment in the Church of England's efforts towards greater ecumenism. The papal decree was published three months after the Anglican 'Appeal to All Christian People' and while it makes no direct reference to these ecumenical efforts, it does firmly close the door on any furthering of wartime collaboration.

While it took until after the First World War for the Pope to make an explicit statement about the YMCA, tensions between the Association and the Roman Catholic churches can be observed in international missionary work in the years preceding conflict. An article by Father Martin Kennelly, published in The *Field Afar,* the journal of the Catholic Foreign Missionary Society of America, claimed that the YMCA missions would result in 'each participant being left to find out which religion [implying denomination] is the true one'. Kennelly was dismissive of this, arguing that 'obviously no one finds out and the greater number is puzzled to choose among Protestant denominations', with no direction over their doctrinal contradictions.[488] This is clearly reductive, missing out the link offered by the YMCA to the Protestant churches, yet nonetheless speaks to the concern felt by the Roman Catholics that such unstructured Christian missionary work could not adequately equip someone with faith. Kennelly's opposition is highlighted by Jean-Paul Wiest, who includes it in his argument that 'the success of the Protestant missionaries was a threat to Catholic missions', particularly in China where he situates his evidence.[489] Competition was certainly afoot, but Wiest also observes a weakening of the Christian message at least in the perception of Roman

[488] Martin Kennelly, *The Field Afar,* August 1914, p. 8.
[489] Jean-Paul Wiest, 'Roman Catholic Perceptions of British and American Protestant Missionaries', *Journal of Cultural Interaction in East Asia* 6 (2015), pp. 19-30 (p. 25).

Catholics, when evangelised by Protestants. Although his study predates the First World War, the themes of missionary work carry across, contributing to Catholic opposition to the hutwork of organisations typified by the YMCA.

In terms of Catholic willingness to participate in the more social activities of the YMCA, historians John Tracy Ellis and Christopher van der Krogt both argue that this was largely rejected by Catholics as they had their own denominational societies that contributed to the perpetuation of separatism.[490] Respectively from Australia and New Zealand, their experience is broad-reaching and corresponds with that observed in Britain, in which a sense of community belonging was offered by specifically Catholic societies. These 'self-sufficient parallel societies', as termed by van der Krogt, were established by the late-nineteenth century, meaning that they were ingrained in the Catholic experience by the time of the First World War. The division was not acrimonious; the parallel Catholic and non-Catholic organisations were seen by van der Krogt to enjoy 'good relations' and collaborated on some sporting activities, in much the same way as can be observed during the war, but it remained important for them 'to preserve and pass on its distinctive religious beliefs and practices' through Catholic-specific organisations.[491] This indicates the cultural divide that saw Roman Catholic soldiers remain 'other' to their non-Catholic comrades and highlights the received cultural barriers to integrated participation in practices including the YMCA's hutwork.

Irrespective of sentiments within the Catholic church, the YMCA wanted Catholic soldiers to participate, believing all men could benefit from the moralised space of the huts. However, there was also reluctance on the side of some Protestants to allow

[490] Christopher van der Krogt, 'Catholic Religious Identity and Social Integration in Interwar New Zealand', *The Catholic Historical Review,* 86 (1) (2000), pp. 47-65, (p. 47).
[491] van der Krogt, 'Catholic Religious Identity', ps. 56 and 63-64.

collaboration with the Catholics. Anne Summers argues that this stemmed from a broad Protestant 'distrust of Roman Catholicism' that had become entrenched in the previous centuries, stemming both from a prejudice of their immigrant heritage and a wariness of their community's separatism.[492] This became enough of an issue by March 1916 for Yapp to directly address it in the Association's newspaper, stating that 'we have often been criticised for allowing Roman Catholics to use the YMCA huts for their services', a service the YMCA extended to all chaplains.[493] He condemned such exclusion, but the presence of this example serves to demonstrate how the words of the general secretary were not always experienced in practice across the YMCA hut network and of how there was continual discord on this matter.

Inter-faith Work

'No man's religion will ever be attacked from a YMCA platform'. This was Yapp's commitment to all men of the British Army during the First World War.[494] The ecumenical work of the YMCA extended beyond Christianity, supporting 'men of every religion and no religion' within the huts.[495] It is important to note that the YMCA was, foremost, a Christian organisation and hoped to bring men, regardless of their backgrounds, in touch with the Word of God, albeit in a pragmatic and non-proselytising way. Yet specific provision was also made for men of other faiths both in their own huts and through integrated care. This support was predominantly aimed at Jewish and Muslim soldiers, with the Association dedicating more time and understanding to the other monotheistic faiths than it did for Hinduism or Buddhism. Yet, such inter-faith work was innovative and garnered widespread support from faith leaders for the support the YMCA was able to provide. This was of particular

[492] Anne Summers, *Christian and Jewish Women in Britain, 1880-1940,* (London: Palgrave, 2017), p. 23.
[493] Yapp, 'Our Outlook', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 24/03/1916, pp. 263-265, (p. 263).
[494] Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* p. 12.
[495] *ibid*

importance during the First World War given the religious diversity within the British Army as representative of men drawn from across the British Empire.

Inter-faith relations were best demonstrated by Harold Boas, employed by the Australian branch of the YMCA to work in the Association's Jewish Department, travelling to England to support Jewish soldiers stationed in the army base camps. In his memoir of his wartime experiences, Boas called such work 'a unique occurrence in the 2,000 years of historical cleavage between Jew and Gentile', remarking how significant the YMCA's support for Jewish soldiers was.[496] Between 1916 and 1918 Boas was based at Southern Command on Salisbury Plain, providing for Jewish soldiers across the camps. Around the time of the Armistice in November 1918 he was moved to London in order to establish the YMCA Jewish Hut on the Strand, a symbol in central London of the YMCA's commitment to inter-faith support. This Boas described as 'a piece of specific Jewish service, financed and run by Jewish people' under the auspices of the YMCA.[497] This was one of ten huts entirely paid for by the London Jewish community, demonstrating their active support and endorsement of the inter-faith work of the YMCA. But perhaps the most significant endorsement of the YMCA's work for Jewish soldiers came from head Jewish chaplain Rabbi Michael Adler who wrote in a letter to *The Times* as early as February 1915 that he was 'deeply impressed by the whole-hearted unanimity with which the different religious bodies are working' within the YMCA, describing how 'no distinction whatever of faith is made by them'.[498] Huts were regularly given over to the Jewish chaplains on Saturday mornings in order

[496] Harold Boas, *The Australian YMCA with the Jewish Soldier of the Australian Imperial Force,* (London: 1919), p. 5.
[497] Boas, *The Australian YMCA,* p. 195.
[498] Michael Adler, 'The YMCA and Jewish Soldiers', *The Times,* 09/02/1915, p. 9.

for them to host their services, further demonstrating the support the Association gave to Jewish soldiers.

The value of this support and Christian-Jewish collaboration should not be taken for granted. As Summers recognises in her study of Christian and Jewish women in Britain around the turn of the century, many Jewish people's experience with their local communities was marked by the Christian missionary desire to convert them, particularly in their engagement with welfare and education charities.[499] This contributed to a sense of distrust from Jewish communities, notably in East London, so it is therefore remarkable the confidence given in the YMCA's work by both Boas and Adler and the understanding that the YMCA was looking to support and not convert Jewish soldiers. There was some precedent for this, as Summers has highlighted in her example of the Travellers' Aid Society's (TAS) co-operation with the Jewish Association for Protection of Women and Girls in providing assistance to Jewish immigrants as they arrived at London docks from the 1880s, but increasing in prevalence from 1900.[500] It is particularly notable that the majority actor in the TAS was the Young Women's Christian Association, further reinforcing the dual YWCA-YMCA commitment to inter-faith, as well as inter-denominational, work. It was through efforts of this kind that the Association was able to distinguish itself from other Christian organisations and earn its reputation as a supportive organisation for Jewish soldiers.

Tending to Jewish soldiers in the British Army was a challenge of numbers. They were often disparate, a minority in whichever unit they served, which made specific provision difficult. It therefore became all the more important for organisations like

[499] Summers, *Christian and Jewish Women,* p. 27.
[500] Summers, *Christian and Jewish Women,* p. 40.

the YMCA to be welcoming spaces for Jewish soldiers, supporting them even when they were not in contact with their specific chaplains or figures such as Boas. To some extent this was the same experience for Muslim soldiers, yet there were in this instance battalions, not least in the Indian Army, which were majority Muslim and thus provided a different opportunity for support from the YMCA. There also existed a different set of cultural tensions of which the Association had to be simultaneously conscious. Extending support across the imperial army necessitated this inter-faith work, thereby extrapolating its open-minded ecumenism to other faiths. This brought to the fore the need for non-proselytisation, seeking to prioritise harmony over mission. This was important to YMCA leaders, with William Jessop, the regional secretary for Egypt, declaring it his mission to make the Association's huts 'real centres of Imperial fellowship'.[501] Crucially, achieving this meant reaching beyond the white Christians of the dominions and encompassing specific inter-faith work.

The most notable example of this is the YMCA's work for Indian soldiers. The Indian YMCA had been established in the 1850s, but largely served European missionaries and colonists until the turn of the century when an extension of its work came to have a greater influence on the local populations. This has been studied by Harald Fischer-Tiné, who notes in particular the 1907 establishment of the Army Department of the Indian YMCA 'to take care of the moral and physical well-being of the 70,000 odd British troops stationed in South Asia'.[502] This was a new era for the YMCA's work. Whereas before the war, by its own admission, it 'was frankly a Christian organisation', the aim of which had been for Indians to 'come to love, honour, and obey Jesus Christ' as described in *The YM British Empire Weekly,* its war work transformed it away from

[501] William Jessop, 'Our Outlook', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 24/09/1915, p. 879.
[502] Harald Fischer-Tiné, ''Unparalleled Opportunities': The Indian YMCA's Army Work Schemes for Imperial Troops during the Great War (1914-1920)', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 47 (1) (2019), pp. 100-137, (p. 103).

such explicit intentions.[503] The teaching of religion or expression of Christian theology were prohibited. James Barrett, a YMCA secretary in Egypt, described how the YMCA's Christian workers would 'necessarily refrain from any form of religious address' when working with Indian soldiers.[504] Adapting their work to be less specifically religious took necessitated detailed changes to imagery that were not obvious to the many. As David Omissi identified in his study of Indian letters from the war, the YMCA's headed writing paper that was freely available in the huts worried the Indian censor that it 'might start inflammatory rumours in India that the troops were being converted to Christianity'.[505] To overcome this, as Barrett noted, the YMCA instead offered plain writing paper for Indian soldiers, adapting provision to the wartime situation.

Special consideration of this kind was not unusual in British imperial handling of India, and nor was a focus on its Muslim population over those who were Hindu or Sikh. As observed by David Motadel, 'from the middle of the nineteenth century the British increasingly treated the Muslim population of India as a distinct group' as 'Muslims were usually regarded as sensitive subjects and prone to revolt'.[506] Faisal Devji has developed this, arguing that 'British concerns with pan-Islamism' in particular – the threat of unity of the world's Muslims under an Islamic state, thereby dismantling the British Empire – developed a specific politics 'that was as much about positing a special relationship with the country's Muslims and thus leaving the more numerous Hindus out, as it was about constituting Islam as an object of knowledge and rule'.[507] There were strong themes of fear and protection for the empire that

[503] 'Building the Empire in India', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 26/05/1916, pp. 473-474, (p. 473).
[504] James W Barrett, *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt,* (London: HK Lewis and Co., 1919), p. 126.
[505] David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-1918,* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 14.
[506] David Motadel, 'Introduction', in David Motadel (ed.) *Islam and the European Empires,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 1-31, (ps. 9 and 2).
[507] Faisal Devji, 'Islam and British Imperial Thought', in David Motadel (ed.) *Islam and the European Empires,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 254-268, (p. 262).

influenced imperial policy following the Indian Revolt. This was in turn reflected in the operation of the Indian YMCA, which showed the clear influence of the imperial context. The Indian Association's leaders were predominantly British, with support from American missionary workers, meaning they were largely Christian and of the same background as the colonialists. This is not surprising for the Association or its goals, yet has caused Ficher-Tiné to argue that the war work was 'shaped by the rather self-seeking motives of a Protestant Christian organisation whose primary goal it remained to 'evangelise the world''.[508] While, as discussed in the previous chapter, the YMCA's work had developed out of the missions where evangelisation was the goal, this was not the case in its war work, particularly in the sensitivities applied to work with Indian soldiers, as indicated by Omissi. Ficher-Tiné is correct in his assertion that Indian Christians led the hutwork within India, the 'special service' which was described by KJ Saunders in his statement of the YMCA's missionary work.[509] This makes sense for an organisation which held Christianity at its core. It does not necessarily follow, however, despite the argument of Ficher-Tiné that this gave the work 'a subtle but all-pervading Protestant missionary zeal'.[510] This was not the approach of any of the YMCA's hutwork, as has already been argued, and in the specific example of work with Indian soldiers, it would not have been either wise or consistent with imperial policy to approach it in this way. As John Slight has argued, the First World War was characterized by 'alarmism and paranoia' on the part of officials and officers to the threat of 'militant Islam', of the kind which would have been inflamed

[508] Fischer-Tiné, "Unparalleled Opportunities", p. 124.
[509] KJ Saunders, 'The Missionary Opportunity of the Young Men's Christian Association in the Camps', The East and the West'.
[510] Ficher-Tiné, "Unparalleled Opportunities', pp. 106-107.

by a conversionary approach to Muslim soldiers.[511] It was not in the character of the YMCA to approach its work in such a reckless way.

The YMCA's work was necessarily adjusted to suit Indian soldiers. YMCA secretary Charles T Bateman described as early as January 1915 how 'they cannot naturally undertake Christian teaching', when working with Indian soldiers, reinforcing Yapp's frequent statement of the deliberate distinction, although they were still able to 'exemplify the Christian spirit', through a pragmatism of characteristics.[512] Such principles, G Sherwood Eddy argued, were not unique to Christianity and often upheld a lot of consistency with the teachings of Islam, namely where it 'has taught temperance an inculcated an obedience'.[513] This approach, which highlighted consistency was successful, in the argument of Indian YMCA worker S Perkash Singha who observed that 'the Indian soldier is casting off old superstitions and prejudices and imbibing the ideas of the age' through the YMCA's work.[514] Singha argued that Indian soldiers were not generally familiar with the YMCA before the war but through the benefits of hutwork they came to support it, not through conversion but as a result of greater inter-faith and inter-cultural co-operation. The success of this collaboration can also be determined through the changing approach of the Indian Government. Early in the war, Yapp described, the authorities prevented the YMCA from serving the Indian soldiers on the Western Front for fear of religious tensions causing uprisings. However, through the demonstration of the Association's work in India and in Indian

[511] John Slight, 'Anglo-French Connections and Cooperation against "Islamic" Resistance, 1914-1917', in James R Fichter (ed.), *British and French Colonialism in Africa, Asia and the Middle East: Connected Empires across the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries,* (London: Palgrave, 2019), pp. 67-88, (p. 71).
[512] Charles T Bateman, 'The YMCA within Sound of the Guns: An Impression of the Association's Work in Northern France, Described After a Personal Visit of Inspection to the Centres of Activity', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 15/01/1915, p. 9.
[513] G Sherwood Eddy, *Everybody's World*, (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1920), p. 180.
[514] S Perkash Singha, 'The Indian Soldier as I Know Him', The *Red Triangle,* November 1917, pp. 81-84, (p. 81).

hospitals in England, permission was eventually given for specific recreation huts in France on the promise that 'there should be no proselytizing, no preaching, no prayers, no hymn singing, no Testaments or Bibles given, and no tracts'.[515] These principles already in place, the YMCA readily agreed and specific Indian huts were built, offering small mosques instead of prayer rooms and statues of the Buddha. Such a focus on specific work is not to say that Indian soldiers were entirely segregated from YMCA huts aimed at white soldiers. There was no colour bar of the kind imposed by the American YMCA on their men. With separate army units for Indian soldiers it was more convenient to establish specific YMCA huts for Indian soldiers that could offer them cultural familiarity and the tailored non-Christian approach. However, Yapp did also remark 'how well these Indian heroes get on with our own Tommies', sharing in games and songs wherever they did serve together, including on Salisbury Plain.[516] Such a level of inter-faith work was unprecedented, garnering the support of both the British and Indian authorities and widening the reach of the YMCA across the British Army.

With great pronouncements of inter-faith collaboration it is easy to view the YMCA as idealistic and to treat it as a utopia of imperial harmony. As with all dealings between Britain and its empire, this was clearly not the case in practice and prejudices persisted, often perpetuated through a lack of cultural understanding. In particular, the evidence we have for the YMCA's work in this area is very imbalanced, focusing on the organisation itself and not in the written reaction from Indian soldiers. This is largely through the limitation of available archival sources, although to some extent was also written into the original record, as argued by Omissi, where soldiers would

[515] Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* p. 201.
[516] Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* p. 203.

not have wanted to concern or confuse their families by writing about the Young Men's *Christian* Association. Tensions, similarly, are not to be expunged from the inter-denominational work of the YMCA among Christian soldiers. Fears about an Association that was too low, too Protestant, *too Christian,* too materialistic, persisted among some throughout the First World War. Nevertheless, the connections fostered by the YMCA, both between churches and faiths, were pioneering for the early twentieth century. Partly, this was the fortune of timing, with the outbreak of war coming early in what would become the Ecumenical Century and shortly following the 1910 World Missionary Conference. It was also the circumstance of conflict, in which soldiers were removed from their communities and where collaboration became essential to deliver adequate religious provision to an army. Yet there is also something distinct about the work of the YMCA and the Association's own impulse for fostering ecumenism through both inter-denominational and un-denominational means. Its holistic hutwork drew together clergy and laity from across the Christian spectrum, reconciling in commonality the values of a diligent life of faith. Such diversity required curtailment of some theological controversies and denominational practices, yet for the YMCA who never sought to replace the Churches themselves this was of no consequence. While this imputed imprecision may never have garnered the endorsement of figures like the Pope, the YMCA was successful through its war work in bringing together a broader range of churches and Christians than it ever had before. It would not be until another world war that such a level of integration was again generated. In 1942, half way through the Second World War, the British Council of Churches was formed, in which the YMCA played a role, bringing together British Protestant churches for common action and social responsibility. It would take another 50 years still for the formalisation of the Roman Catholics' involvement and the establishment of Churches Together in 1990 to create a national movement of

ecumenical worship and collaboration of the kind pioneered in the YMCA's huts during the First World War.

Chapter Five: "You Make Christianity Attractive"

The Theology of the Huts

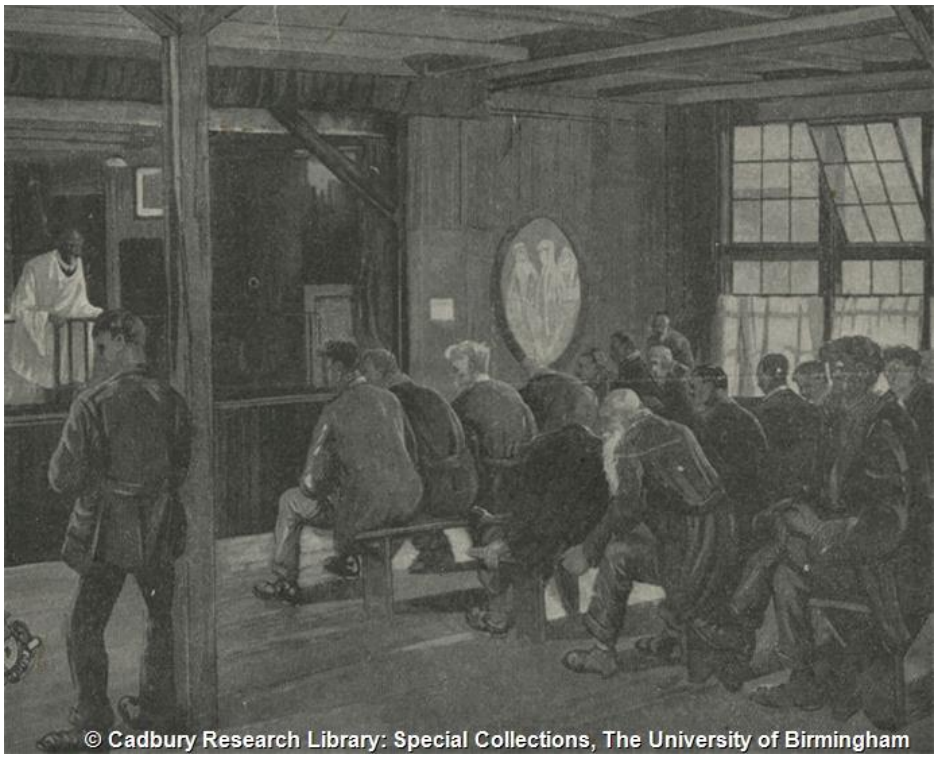


Figure 7 YMCA Church service for prisoners of war, Ruhleben[517]

Engaging soldiers with Christianity required a specific framework of religion that was clear, familiar, and tailored to the circumstances of war. Attracting soldiers to the YMCA's huts was straightforward, offering the comforts the men craved, yet it was only through its informal approach to liturgy that the Association was able to have the religious impact at the heart of its mission. Its religious teaching was focused on the pragmatic and active principles of its war service, creating a Christian setting that decentralised the formal preaching of organised church services in favour of social Christianity grounded in action, not language. The religion of the YMCA was not new;

[517] 'Prisoners of War (Germany): Service in YMCA at Ruhleben', YMCA Archive, Cadbury Research Library (CRL), University of Birmingham, YMCA/K/1/9/2.

it built on centuries of British understanding of Christianity and owed many of its principles to the ecclesiastical developments of the nineteenth century, yet the circumstances of war facilitated the Association's comprehensive re-presentation of the Christian religion, removed from parish and church boundaries and placed into the itinerant military realm. The liturgy that came to typify YMCA hutwork spoke directly to the needs of soldiers and addressed their active concerns, ready to answer the soldiers' new consideration for matters of religion, motivated by their reappraisal of life and death, and capitalising on the opportunities presented through social hut spaces.

Accounts of the YMCA huts often describe them as regularly full, and of services and concerts being oversubscribed. Yet comparatively little reflection is given by the men, at least in the surviving written record, about the meaning of the teachings they heard, and how they changed their behaviour. Callum Brown has addressed this limitation in his major study of twentieth-century religion in Britain, recognising that 'religion is difficult to study because it is a 'thing' that has to be studied in terms of its consequences'.[518] This study is no different. It is notoriously difficult in particular to determine the effect of religious teaching and this is exacerbated by the YMCA's audience of young men, often with little formal religious education, and living in the extreme conditions of war. Lacking many soldiers' perspectives, the focus of the evidence base must therefore fall upon the YMCA organisers themselves and their own presentation of their liturgy, with only a comparatively minor reaction from their congregations. While this is somewhat limiting towards any assessment of what were the most pertinent lessons, conclusions can nonetheless be drawn based on what were

[518] Callum G Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain,* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), p. 8.

the oft-repeated messages of the YMCA leaders and chaplains, from their perspective of what encouraged men to listen, participate, and respond. Some of this will come from the formal church services hosted in the huts, while others from the more informal talks and conversations with the men, as well as through the actions of the huts' demonstrable ethos and concert parties.

For all its heritage as a Christian missionary organisation, there were wartime fears within the YMCA that its hut success may have been only physical. Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Scouting Movement and volunteer with the YMCA, confessed these concerns, acknowledging through his experience 'that the success of the huts both at home and overseas was due in the first instance to their material value to the men'.[519] The challenge therefore followed of how to convert these gains into successful support of its Christian mission, in getting the men to listen and respond to its religious teachings. To Baden-Powell, the core principle was that its approach was active rather than passive, summarised in the phrase 'to do good rather than to be good'.[520] In other words, it was not just that soldiers should develop the hut habit of relying on the YMCA for physical comforts, but they should also make use of its spiritual support and engage with its teachings, both moral and liturgical. He called this 'the right spirit', which he considered 'so essential to making a good man and a good soldier'.[521] This was the influence for his Scouts and also became key to the YMCA's social mission, with teaching focused on moral development with an intrinsic connection to the circumstances of war, as discussed in the YMCA's mission for soldiers. Yet, social and pragmatic Christianity went further than this. Not only was it a means by which to achieve secular aims of personal development, but it also opened the door towards

[519] Robert Baden-Powell, letter to Mrs. Stuart Wortley, 08/02/1916, CRL, YMCA/2/1/18.
[520] Baden Powell, letter to Mrs Stuart Wortley, 03/02/1916, CRL, YMCA/2/1/17.
[521] Baden-Powell, letter, 03/02/1916.

engaging the men with direct religious teachings, even where they had had no previous interest or education. As the missionary worker turned YMCA secretary, George Sherwood Eddy described it, the letters of the YMCA could just as easily stand for 'You Make Christianity Attractive'.[522] As one of the 'most renowned international evangelists of the time', Eddy certainly knew what was required to make the Christian mission heard, with Rick Nutt concluding that Eddy found particular strength in the social gospel and localised engagement, such as that organised by the YMCA.[523] The First World War was an opportunity that provided a fresh audience who were in a position to hear the word of God, either for the first time or with new depth, around the new focal point of the recreational hut.

To fully examine the forms of religion prevalent in the YMCA's war work, this chapter will initially explore the structure and methods of religious engagement that took the huts from a refreshment counter to a place of shared worship. This formation of fellowship and the influence of social evangelism built upon pre-war influences to make meaningful connections with the soldiers. The chapter then moves to delve into the content of this religious teaching and the scripture that was seen to have the greatest impact on soldiers' faith. Initially this is seen through military metaphor and connections made to the early church through Paul, offering a sense of continuity throughout church history. It will then consider the impact of personal representations of God through the image of Jesus Christ, ultimately leading into the sometimes theologically contentious comparisons of Supreme Sacrifice that were seen to hold such significance for soldiers. Through descriptions of hut work and services this chapter will take a close level analysis of some of the most significant scriptural

[522] George Sherwood Eddy, *With Our Soldiers in France,* (New York: Association Press, 1917).
[523] Rick Nutt, 'G Sherwood Eddy and the Attitudes of Protestants in the United States toward Global Mission', *Church History* 66 (3) (1997), pp. 502-521, (p. 518).

passages and hymns that to the YMCA encapsulated its presentation of liturgy and influence on the military. It would be both impossible and unnecessary to cover all resonant Christian teachings from the war, particularly given a lack of surviving documentation of orders of service. Therefore an assessment has been made of those which were among the most prevalent, featuring in multiple accounts of war ministry and published in YMCA articles and hymnals for circulation among its secretaries. The effect is a presentation of Christianity almost solely reliant on the New Testament and on lessons with a direct, and often literal, resonance with the lives of soldiers at war.

'Tea and Buns Can Be a Kind of Sacrament'

Crucial to the YMCA's aim to distinguish itself as an attractive source of religion for soldiers was its commitment not to proselytise, thereby steering away from overt evangelism. This built on the mutual importance of the huts as domestic spaces, welcoming to all, as well as in shaping the Association's mission through a facilitation of its ecumenical principle. This non-proselytisation was, as claimed by Red Cross worker turned YMCA secretary James Barrett, 'the only embargo', with no other restrictions being imposed.[524] The YMCA's religious work was thus flexible, but necessitated a different approach for religious teaching that did not outwardly seek conversion or preach at those who did not wish to engage. To maintain a Christian influence in the huts, the "light upon a candlestick" approach was adopted, as discussed in the mission chapter, imbuing the huts with a religious atmosphere. This was reinforced by a YMCA memorandum which characterised the hut space as 'a tower of strength', quoting Psalm 61, a refuge from the enemy.[525] 'It is a venture of faith', the article reminded the hut leaders, 'the tent is not without its altar'.[526] But the YMCA

[524] James Barrett, *The War Work of the YMCA in Egypt,* p. xii.
[525] 'The Religious Value of the "YM": A Tower of Strength to Severely Tested Men', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 08/06/1917, p. 523.
[526] *ibid*

also went further than this, making sure that core religious teachings were still maintained even through relaxed and informal means. This flexibility contributed to the Association's overarching commitment to social evangelism and the establishment of a fellowship that extended beyond congregation to become a mutually supportive community in the service of both God and the moral self-improvement that it was believed would help deliver victory, temporally and spiritually.

Without formality or structured preaching taking priority, the YMCA instead centred its teaching around 'a positive ideal of fellowship', as outlined in the organisational magazine.[527] This was not merely counter-attraction, but a more meaningful development of the social work with which men were first met upon entering the huts, seeking to foster a supportive community that was both caring and Christian. It was important that the material led where the spiritual would follow. Assistant Chaplain-General to First Army, Rev. Harry W Blackburne, recognised that 'certainly tea and buns can be a kind of sacrament', a fact also recognised within the YMCA by Gipsy Smith, who described that 'there were circumstances … in which the serving of a cup of coffee to war-torn soldiers was as much Christian work as was the preaching of a sermon'.[528] Neville Talbot termed this the 'holy grocery'; the religious service of material comforts that built upon the active principle valued by Baden-Powell. The service of comforts represented an initial offering of friendship that would, in turn, lead to the development of trust, the relaxation of domesticity, and ultimately fostering fellowship among the men. It would open the door to conversations of faith and even if the soldiers did not wish to engage in them, they would nonetheless receive the

[527] 'Our Outlook', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 25/08/1916, p. 791.
[528] Gipsy Smith, 'Is YMCA Work Secular? Gipsy Smith's Answer', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 13/04/1917, p. 334.

Gospel in action through these physical elements as an active demonstration of care and support.

The ultimate ambition for Yapp was that this focus on fellowship would 'lead men to a saving knowledge of that friend' – Jesus Christ – 'who will never fail him nor forsake him'.[529] This is perhaps the most overtly Christian commitment to fellowship laid out by the YMCA, and is therefore an important insight into the manner of YMCA religion. There are three key elements to Yapp's statement. The first is the restatement of the commitment to non-proselytisation, in that the YMCA would 'lead' men to religion, rather than force them towards it, highlighting the tone of supportive encouragement through the guiding imagery of the helping hand approach. Secondly, it is significant that Yapp characterised God as the One 'who will never fail him'. The YMCA's religious teaching was acutely tailored to the needs of men, making reference to the support soldiers sought in God. Thirdly, it is crucial not to overlook that in saying God will 'never fail you nor forsake you', Yapp was quoting Moses telling Joshua to 'be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee'.[530] He was here echoing the reassurances offered by Moses in Deuteronomy, assuring the soldiers just as the prophet Joshua did of God's support that would ultimately lead to salvation. Yet, Yapp reshaped this, in turn invoking the image of Jesus as the personable face of God, rather than the omnipotent abstract of God seen in the Old Testament, a signifier of the human God that will later be shown to be a powerful image in the soldiers' minds. Overall, this mission statement laid much of the groundwork for the character of the YMCA's liturgy, establishing a relevant and reliable fellowship of faith for soldiers.

[529] Arthur Keysall Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), pp. 234-235.
[530] Deut 31:6 (King James Version).

Another way that Yapp depicted the YMCA's fellowship mission was in stating that the mission was 'not to proselytise, but to serve'.[531] This firmly redirected the scope of the Association's work, putting it in direct relation to the needs of the soldiers. He called to mind Jesus' instruction at the Last Supper for his disciples to serve, thereby placing the YMCA's aims as a continuity of the church's original mission. Such an approach was especially important, the YMCA noted, as 'men do not rush up and make feverish enquiries on such topics' as questions of religion.[532] There was widespread suspicion of 'formal and organised religion', which necessitated the service-based approach.[533] It was certainly policy that 'the utmost use should be made of the Testament, Gospel, booklet and pledge table, which should find a place in every hut', yet the way these were utilised had to be done in a non-preaching and supportive way that fostered fellowship.[534] This required a social ministry, of the kind studied by Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald J Sider. Although their examples are rooted in late-twentieth century America, the means of establishing a social action evangelism are pertinent to the wartime experience of the YMCA. In particular, they describe 'pre-evangelism' as a means of 'offering activities for nonchurchgoers that foster a connection' and in turn connect this with a discipleship based on the Christian commitment to love thy neighbour.[535] This is pertinent to the YMCA's work and is heightened when coupled with its ecumenical commitment that removed fixed church boundaries from its work. This particularly put the focus of work on substance rather than structure, which once coupled with the social focus of the YMCA, set the environment for its fellowship of service that supported the soldiers both as individuals and as Christians.

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[531] Arthur Keysall Yapp, *In France and Flanders,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), p. 23.
[532] 'Our Outlook', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 10/03/1916, p. 215.
[533] *ibid*
[534] 'Our Outlook', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 10/09/1915, p. 831.
[535] Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald J Sider, *Saving Souls, Serving Society: Understanding the Faith Factor in Church-based Social Ministry,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 52 and 70.

Within this context of pre-evangelism leading towards non-denominational Christianity, the YMCA blended together ideas of both official and unofficial religion. John Wolffe argues that it was through 'interlinked rites and social customs' that unofficial religion really had an impact in the early twentieth century, as seen in the YMCA's hutwork.[536] What this relied on was the 'underlying religiosity' of the masses, even where overt Christianity could not penetrate. What Wolffe introduces as unofficial religion can also be described as diffusive Christianity, which he claims is 'a vague non-doctrinal kind of belief'.[537] This is a somewhat dismissive reference to a significant conception of religion that held much sway particularly during the First World War. Michael Snape has developed this, recognising the pervasive nature of diffusive Christianity as reaching further than official religion possibly could. He situates the origins of this in the pre-war decline of church attendance, coupled with a general lack of education that meant simplified religion was much more effective, especially once the circumstances of war disrupted normal parish patterns.[538] What religious education a soldier may have had often originated from Sunday school, making it necessarily diffusive and malleable to a child's understanding. A fear highlighted by both Wolffe and Snape was that such simple tokens of faith, untethered from church services, could end up as treating Christianity as a talisman, deriving far more from spirituality than from the religion itself. Yet within the YMCA this was not seen to be the case; the Association made use of simple religious teachings that increased soldiers' understanding of God without being so reductive as to detach symbols and tokens from their true meanings.

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[536] John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945,* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 79.
[537] Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain,* p. 92.
[538] Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars,* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 25.

While fellowship could be fostered over the canteen tables and among the men in a concert audience, the greater work was achieved in the Quiet Rooms and chapel spaces of the YMCA huts, where soldiers could gather in prayer or discussion. Diffusive or informal Christianity certainly remained important here, but this was mitigated by opportunities for quiet reflection that opened space for discussions of faith. William Soothill, the YMCA's religious works secretary, described the value of the 'very great service to the individual soldiers' of the Quiet Rooms, 'for the purposes of meditation, quiet reading, and private prayer'.[539] This was consistent with pre-evangelism, utilising a space that offered soldiers a respite from the 'continual hubbub and unrestfulness' of army life to tap into religious ideas and themes.[540] While the Quiet Rooms could be silent, they could also be a place for collective prayer, as demonstrated by YMCA worker PH Sitters who identified that men were taking advantage of 'all these opportunities for prayer and meditation' which could ultimately lead to a 'great number of conversions taking place in the various huts'.[541] It certainly would be an overstatement to claim that the Quiet Rooms, let alone the YMCA at large, were much of a conversionary force, yet the indication from Sitters is that there was a significant value to the conversations held and prayers shared.

The presence of the Quiet Rooms and the prayer services contributed to an atmosphere of present religion which fostered the spirit of social evangelism. This went further than diffusive Christianity in that it was a structured conception of Christianity grounded in actions. The terminology used here is important to clarify. Language around social religion has developed in the century since the YMCA used it to explain its First World War ministry. Delos Miles has more recently highlighted 'the difference

[539] WE Soothill, 'Quiet Rooms: How They are Used and How they Might Be', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 13/04/1917, p. 331.
[540] *ibid*
[541] PH Sitters, Memorandum, 26/04/1915, CRL, YMCA/K/2/3/54.

between social ministry and social action', as demonstrated through the parable of the Good Samaritan. 'What the good Samaritan did was social ministry. If he had sought to change the conditions which led to the Jericho road robbery and mugging, that would have been social action.'[542] Within this conception, the YMCA's work can be observed as social ministry, in providing a literal frontline service of support without ambitions for structural change. However, early proponents of social religious language were not so clear in making these distinctions. David Lindsey, a Baptist writer, was one of the earliest to write on the term social evangelism in 1912, connecting the concept with ecumenism. He centred his definition on the passage from Matthew's gospel which said 'for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them'.[543] This is resonant in the work of the YMCA and its pioneering commitment to ecumenism, yet in the principles of its wartime work, the Association can be seen to have taken social evangelism further and towards a greater impact. Another of the important early writers, whom Doug Rossinow characterises as 'the single most prominent activist', was the American Methodist Harry F Ward who in 1915 described social evangelism as 'getting the very dynamic of God into all human movements'.[544] This, at a grand scale, was the ambition of the YMCA's work. It built on Lindsey's rejection of the necessity of church structure to encourage religious lessons by offering suggestions for the new formulation of religion through interaction. There is no evidence of the YMCA leaders interacting with works of this kind, although their collective presence in the immediate pre-war and early war years indicates that this was a developing theme in Christian practice. Ward himself called social

[542] Delos Miles, 'Church Social Work and Evangelism: Partners in Ministry', *Review and Expositor* 85 (1988), pp. 273-283, (p. 277).
[543] Matthew 18:20 (KJV).
[544] Doug Rossinow, 'The Radicalisation of the Social Gospel: Harry F Ward and the Search for a New Social Order, 1898-1936', *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 15 (2005), pp. 63-106, (p. 65); Harry F Ward, *Social Evangelism,* (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1915), p. 2.

evangelism part of the 'signs of the times', referencing this trend.[545] Lindsey and Ward were also both nonconformists, representing the Baptist and Methodist denominations respectively. The influence of these traditions on the YMCA leaders makes it likely that they were engaging with these trends, even if evidence of this no longer exists.

These trends can also be observed in the wider rise of Christian engagement with social matters from the turn of the twentieth century. As observed by ER Norman, this was catalysed by the Church of England's Christian Social Union, which became a recognised part of British church culture with the Lambeth Conference of 1908.[546] The Union had been founded in 1889 by the Oxford Divinity Professor, Canon Henry Scott Holland as a means of charitable support for those less fortunate, applying 'moral truths and principles of Christianity to the social and economic difficulties' while also aiming 'to present Christ in practical life as the Living Master and King, the enemy of wrong'.[547] This is a somewhat different conception of social Christianity for the purposes of mission, taking on a paternalistic care, particularly for those living in London slums. There is significant consistency here with the approach of many in the YMCA in their connections with soldiers, seeking to educate through accessible means. In his 1903 study of the origins of this movement, Dr Arthur Woodward wrote of its proponents as 'Christian socialists', but made the distinction that this was 'not the economic socialism of the Continent, but an ethical socialism', seeking to inspire people towards self-improvement in faith, much akin to the YMCA's goals.[548] In particular, Woodward identified that this work owed much to the 'High Churchmen',

[545] Ward, *Social Evangelism,* p. 5.
[546] ER Norman, *Church and Society in England, 1770-1970: A Historical Study,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), ps. 221 and 239.
[547] Arthur V Woodward, *Christian Socialism in England,* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1903), p. 103.
[548] Woodward, *Christian Socialism,* p. 134.

those of the Anglo-Catholic tradition and successors to the Oxford Movement, who worked in slum missions, often during their theological training.[549] Anglo-Catholics like Scott Holland were of a different tradition and perspective than nonconformists like Lindsey and Ward, yet equally viewed Christianity as important for more than just faith alone, highlighting its interaction and influence on everyday life. While they were divergent on many theological issues, there were also many points, like those found here, in which there was concordance. This was borne out in the collaboration within the YMCA during the war, bringing together multiple strands of Christian socialism.

The germination of the High Anglicans' involvement in Christian socialism occurred in the slum missions and settlements of the late-nineteenth century. Young men pursuing Church ministry, typically those fresh from their undergraduate studies at the University of Oxford, would spend a period in slum communities such as the Oxford and Bermondsey Mission (OBM) or Oxford House at Bethnal Green, preaching the Gospel. Lucinda Matthews-Jones, in her study of Oxford House, explains the 'religious selfhood' that was constructed by its heads 'based on the new ethos of practical Christianity'.[550] There are clear echoes of this in the work of the YMCA which also focused on practical Christianity, albeit achieved through somewhat different means. As Matthews-Jones also explains, the focus of Oxford House's preaching was the so-called 'open-air jamboree at Victoria Park', where open-air preaching would regularly occur.[551] This was far more overt proselytisation than the YMCA favoured in its wartime mission, although in the last years of the nineteenth century it too was to be found participating in such work, with the YMCA band in particular joining in the jamboree, alongside the Salvation Army. These missions had a direct influence on

[549] Woodward, *Christian Socialism,* p. 98.
[550] Lucinda Matthews-Jones, 'Oxford House Heads and their Performance of Religious Faith in East London, 1884-1900', *Historical Journal* 60 (3) (2017), pp. 721-744, (p. 723).
[551] Matthews-Jones, 'Oxford House Heads', p. 728.

wartime liturgy, not least through the many clergymen who found their feet in settlement preaching before taking on YMCA or chaplaincy roles during the First World War. Canon James Adderley, who became a YMCA secretary, and the wartime Bishop of London and chaplain to the London Rifle Brigade, Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, were both heads of Oxford House, while YMCA regional secretary Barclay Baron and Talbot House founder 'Tubby' Clayton were both involved in OBM. It is therefore important not to view the social evangelism with which they engaged in the war as wholly new, but rather as taking influence from late Victorian and Edwardian trends in social Christianity.

The continuation of settlement ministry into YMCA work can be identified in an article that was cross-published in both the *Oxford House Magazine* and by the YMCA's Red Triangle Press. In it, its authors, 'two Oxford House men', detailed the YMCA's work in Britain and Flanders, celebrating 'the efficiency of the YMCA and the value of its work' in bringing 'a simple faith', that 'still goes deep and it is the beginning of the Christian life'.[552] It was this commitment to social evangelism, developed in the pre-war years, that found its opportunity to captivate the minds of soldiers craving religiosity. As argued in an article for the YMCA's journal, 'there are numbers of men striving after an articulate and definite form of religious life' who found a way in through the YMCA.[553] Elsewhere, in an editorial for the *YM British Empire Weekly* it was noted that 'social work opens doors that might otherwise be forever closed against the messenger of Christ', thereby bringing men towards faith without the need for proselytisation.[554] This was further accepted by the YMCA's religious works secretary, Rev. WE Soothill, who argued that 'it does not follow that by "cutting" Church our

[552] "Two Oxford House Men", *YMCA Work in Britain and Flanders,* CRL YMCA/K26/4, ps. 13 and 17.
[553] FEW, 'With the Cinderella of the Forces', *Red Triangle,* February 1918, pp. 242-244, (p. 242).
[554] 'Our Outlook', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 27/10/1916, p. 1007.

young men mean to "cut" religion'.[555] As has already been established, church attendance is an insufficient measure of religiosity, particularly in the circumstances of war. Through social evangelism and the examples of practical religion, the YMCA was therefore vital to the engagement of soldiers with Christianity from a far less formal or prescriptive standpoint.

Despite its use of language pertaining to social and practical religion, the YMCA did not use the explicit term 'social evangelism' until David Cairns' *The Army and Religion* was published in 1919, as a YMCA-funded survey of military opinions on religion. Cairns devoted a whole chapter of his review to social evangelism, defining it as 'the social mission of the church. The church must show its faith in the value of human personality by its works. All Christian forces must unite to face the social problem – not with the object of winning men, but out of the spirit of spontaneous love exhibited by Jesus'.[556] Here we see displayed both the YMCA's commitment not to serve as a solely conversionary force, but also how it built upon previous definitions of social evangelism to address social problems through a focus on the very dynamic of God, as Ward termed it, as definite and pragmatic, taking priority over church structures and dogmatic nuances. This naturally leant itself to a broad-church approach, bringing together nonconformists and those from across the Anglican spectrum to a common understanding of Christianity that worked for ordinary men and leant itself to thorough explanations of significance in war. The main conclusion from Cairns' *Army and Religion* that is often quoted by historians is his summary that 'the soldier has got religion; I am not sure that he has got Christianity'.[557] At a surface level, this reads as

[555] WE Soothill, 'Our Citizen Army: The Nation's Spiritual Hope 1', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 10/12/1915, p. 1149.
[556] David S Cairns, *The Army and Religion: An Enquiry and its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation,* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1917), p. 381.
[557] Cairns, *The Army and Religion,* p. 9.

an expression of the YMCA's informal religion which tapped into a sense of need for a Higher Being that had not necessarily been informed by Christian education or attached to Christian principles. This could be seen as the initial stage of pre-evangelism, with the potential to lead towards a fuller life of faith. However, as Brown has argued, 'the churches analysed British religiosity in greater depth in 1917-1919 [the period in which Cairns produced his report] than in any other period of the century', leading towards what Adrian Gregory has concluded is a misrepresentation of Cairns' statement.[558] To Gregory, it is not 'a peculiarity of the war' that soldiers held an unstructured faith in God, but rather that 'this is a perfectly good generic description of the English for at least three centuries'.[559] Social evangelism can therefore be seen as something more significant than mere informality of faith, featuring a direct shift towards a pragmatic religion that built on ecumenical principles and a welcoming approach as encapsulated by the YMCA's hutwork.

'The Whole Armour of God'

Upon establishing relationships with soldiers through social evangelism, it then became crucial to engage them in active understanding of Christianity. Particularly in its work with infrequent churchgoers, the YMCA focused on giving Christian lessons in a way that was directly applicable to their wartime experience. Religious teachings could not be arbitrary, and needed to give the men both a tangible connection to God and lessons that could benefit their service lives in addition to the spiritual in order for them to be effective. The impact of this was that teachings were often simplified of theological complexity and translated into everyday language, creating a clear theological distinction from formal Christianity to create a wartime religious lexicon.

[558] Brown, *Religion and Society,* p. 93.
[559] Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 154.

Rev. T. Prothero, the YMCA's Religious Work Secretary for the Winchester Area argued that what was necessary was for the Association to tap into 'the vast reserves of unconscious Christianity in men', through stimulating 'their chivalry' and 'their joyful service' which were apparent through their commitment to the Army.[560] Such a framing of religion as related to war was not unique to the YMCA, indicating the effect this had on the men, but the Association was a particular example of using a presentation of God as directly comparable to the soldier over and above the wider wartime trends.

From its outbreak, the war was regularly conceptualised as a holy conflict, with the intention of legitimising the cause. Within Britain, this was not in the formal *jihad* sense of holy war, but rather as a means of expressing 'just what the nation, soldiers and civilians alike wanted to hear', as argued by Stuart Bell.[561] Bell offers an important study on the faith of ordinary people during the First World War, highlighting the significance of these religious ideas in motivations for war. Brown reinforces this, arguing that it was perpetuated largely by the churches in Britain who 'took it upon themselves to be part of the propaganda machine of the day, bolstering the recruitment posters, government newsreels and the calls to duty'.[562] While there is certainly evidence for this, it diminishes the significance of religious teachings to suggest they were only used for the benefits of war motivation and the reconciliation of the needs of the nation to go to war. Particularly in the example of the YMCA, war is reconciled to religion just as much as religion to war, bolstering morale but also personal development and commitment to faith. In the Association's presentation it was not so

[560] T Prothero, '"Religious Education in the Camps"', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 13/07/1917, p. 646.
[561] Stuart Bell, *Faith in Conflict: The Impact of the Great War on the Faith of the People of Britain,* (Solihull: Helion and Company, 2017), p. 42.
[562] Brown, *Religion and Society*, p. 89.

much the holiness of the war overall, but the individual significance of God in war and how this affected the soldier. This simplicity and individuality spoke to the questions present in the minds of many soldiers about the meaning of God in war, but also what was required of them as individual soldiers for the cause. The Methodist chaplain and hymn writer Thomas Tiplady, who regularly visited YMCA huts to engage with soldiers, described how during his wartime ministry there had been 'no change of creed but something greater, a change of spirit', in which men came to him prepared to engage with Christianity to an extent they had not before.[563] Soldiers were open to religion in a way they had not been in their civilian lives, largely owing to the fact that, as Tiplady argued, 'the shadows of death were thick about them'.[564] Pressed with the challenges of life and death, for many for the first time, in addition to the internal conflicts presented by the war and the newfound duties impressed upon men, it is understandable that many sought their answers in Christianity, seeking comfort and motivation, and yet more so that it was through direct military allusions that Christianity was best understood.

The use of religion for the reassurance of soldiers is clearly observed in the hymns which became the regular choices of the YMCA. The simple hymn service was a fixture of the YMCA huts, adjoining onto either an evening programme of secular entertainments or a religious talk or prayer service. Where records of the popular choices survive, including in the YMCA-published hymnals, it can be observed that there was a reliance on popular, traditional hymns, many of which would have been well-known to soldiers in their pre-war lives. Yet those most frequently cited also hold a direct connection to the experience of soldiers, making them useful tools in

[563] Thomas Tiplady, *The Soul of the Soldier: Sketches from the Western Battle-Front*, (London: Fleming H Revell Company, 1918), p. xxiii.
[564] Tiplady, *The Soul of the Soldier,* p. xiii.

motivating the men, connecting them with Christian teachings through a more memorable and emotional means. The atmosphere of the huts during the sharing of this singing was often described as remarkable, with a report into YMCA work in the Third Army Area in France describing how 'the old hymns throb with new meaning. Passages of scripture, well worn and dull through familiarity, become luminous and laden with new discovery as when hot from the writers' pen.'[565] Men were thinking and engaging, reacting to the lyrics with renewed emphasis given their experiences of war. YMCA secretary RH Millar echoed this, acknowledging how there was 'a new emphasis imparted to old, well-known words that can never be forgotten'.[566] In making this point, he used the example of 'Lead, Kindly Light', a John Henry Newman hymn which is literal in its requests for God's sustenance 'amid the gloom'. There is no doubt that this would have connected in soldiers' minds with the physical struggles of combat, especially through the resonant hope to 'Lord, lead me on'.[567] Millar noticed how effective these 'straight helpful words' were for the men, in connecting them with the word of God and offering comfort when 'the night is dark, and I am far from home'. Such reassurance against adversity is also demonstrated in another of the YMCA's favourite hymns, 'Abide With Me', which also featured as one of the few included in the YMCA's *Camp Songs*. This was the choice, A Cecil Dixon noted, of the Association to close their first day in Libya, where it was said to perfectly encompass 'one of life's most exhausting and uplifting days'.[568] Here again, comfort was the priority, but this time not only set against the circumstances of lifetime struggles, but also in the liminal space where death was a constant threat and fear, adopting a more sombre tone. As in 'Lead, Kindly Light', the request for support was made, yet here it was depicted as

[565] 'Confidential Report on YMCA Work in Third Army Area (Havre)', 12/02/1917, CRL, YMCA/K/2/3/98.
[566] RH Millar, *The Red Triangle in a Rest Camp,* memorandum, CRL, YMCA/K/2/3/96.
[567] John Henry Newman, 'Lead, Kindly Light', 1833.
[568] A Cecil Dixon, 'On the Libyan Desert', The *Red Triangle,* September 1917, pp. 9-12, (p. 9).

unique and pivotal: 'when other helpers fail and comforts flee', 'in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me'.[569] The popularity of this hymn far exceeded the YMCA, yet its frequency of performance even within the Association serves as a further indication of its pertinence in wartime. This is in turn reflected in its continued presence in Anzac Day, Armistice, and Remembrance Sunday services, connecting back to the emotion and pervasiveness of fears of imminent mortality experienced by soldiers, the sentiment of which was widely apparent during the war to the YMCA.

While the YMCA used hymns to offer comfort and reassurance, so too were they used to inspire soldiers, uplifting their minds in a duality towards the war and God. This is evident in 'Fight the Good Fight', one of the twelve hymns included in the YMCA's camp songbook alongside 'Abide with Me', and which Hampshire Regiment soldier Johnson William Double described in his diary as being used by the YMCA as the closing hymn of the evening program in Malta.[570] There is an overt literal appeal to this hymn, where the 'good fight' undoubtedly symbolised the moral quest of war in the soldier-singers' minds, enhanced by the lyrics' detachment of the original biblical verse to 'fight the good fight of faith'.[571] The devout life as instructed by Paul to Timothy was certainly also the goal for the YMCA in seeking soldiers' self-betterment, yet this was conflated with militaristic imagery, framing Christian life as a battle, the Victory which is sought in Heaven. Here, God is not the comforter, but 'Christ is thy strength', emboldening soldiers.[572] The Anglican composer Geoffrey Shaw refuted in the YMCA's magazine that 'when a man has a uniform, he requires a special kind of song', of the kind of 'Onward, Christian Soldiers', claiming that his serving 'brother-in-law likes the

[569] Henry Francis Lyte, 'Abide with Me', 1847.
[570] Johnson William Double, diary entry, 29/03/1916, Imperial War Museum (IWM): 09/79/01.
[571] 1 Tim 6:12 (KJV).
[572] John SB Monsell, 'Fight the Good Fight', 1863.

same kind of song that he liked two years ago'.[573] While this was undoubtedly how some soldiers felt, the frequency of militaristic hymns in YMCA and chaplaincy services indicated that they were well-received by the men and that they did speak to a craving for resilience and certainty in battle. This was not unique to the hymnody, with militaristic themes also influencing preaching and prayer themes, including, as YMCA minister the Rev Dinsdale T Young wrote, 'St Paul's passages which bear on the military life, and which use the military life as a metaphor of the Christian life'.[574] The conflation here is deliberate and chosen for its efficacy, clearly representing a pertinent message for soldiers. This is demonstrated in another passage from Paul's second letter to Timothy: 'thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ'.[575] The soldierly metaphor is representative of a life of discipleship, where obedience and discipline are emphasised, but also with connotations of strength and power, in the same vein as 'fight the good fight', serving as a consistent reassurance of the valour of war when used in the context of conflict.

Military imagery is used powerfully in the Bible to represent the idealised masculine life, creating an understandable and relatable set of language for use with soldiers. Biblical scholar Raymond Hobbs argues that 'war language as a metaphor is relatively uncommon when compared with other metaphors', but rather than making this insignificant for inclusion, it concentrates the significance on one form of Christianity which could then be utilised by clergy in wartime, such as the example given by Young.[576] The primary author of military metaphors is Paul, as already seen in his

[573] Geoffrey Shaw, 'Songs for Soldiers', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 05/05/1916, p. 400.
[574] Dinsdale T Young, 'How to Preserve One's Own Spiritual Life in Camp', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 22/01/1915, p. 32.
[575] 2 Tim 2:3 (KJV).
[576] Raymond Hobbs, 'The Language of Warfare in the New Testament', in Philip Esler, *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context,* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 248-262, (p. 250).

letters to Timothy, which Hobbs argues suggests a tonal 'shift between Gospels and Letters', from the life of Christ to the life of the early Church. [577] This is also observed by J Punt who states that 'Paul used military imagery to explain his ministry', utilising a lexicon of a society familiar with Roman-era conflict.[578] Punt and Hobbs agree that this reflects an instability felt in the communities in which Paul evangelised, being used in the words of Punt 'in situations where he felt compelled to defend himself', and to Hobbs, in ' a community which sees itself as a community under threat from human and superhuman powers'.[579] The consistent themes of challenge and threat were powerful motivators for Paul in his Christianising mission, and had a resonant comparison to wartime society, creating for the YMCA a consistency of tone and message with the early church. In encouraging soldiers to faith this assured them that war was not inconsistent with Christianity, but rather that there was a biblical precedence for a life of faith which encompassed the idealised qualities of a soldier. Moreover, a reliance on the militaristic language of Paul also alludes to similarities between the two societies, namely the YMCA's presentation of Christianity which was non-denominational, grounded in teachings and morals and not in structural contest, like that of the early church. This further indicates the similarities between the two societies as ones in flux, under existential risk but also bearing the possibilities of immense flourishing.

The most pertinent of Paul's letters for military imagery is Ephesians 6, described by Hobbs as 'the locus classicus' of such symbolism.[580] In this passage the follower of Christ is instructed to 'put on the whole armour of God', illustrating the essential

[577] Hobbs, 'The Language of Warfare in the New Testament', p. 260.
[578] J Punt, 'Paul, Military Imagery and Social Disadvantage', *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 23 (2016), pp. 201-224, (p. 213).
[579] Punt, 'Paul, Military Language and Social Disadvantage', p. 214; Hobbs, 'The Language of Warfare in the New Testament', p. 259.
[580] Hobbs, 'The Language of Warfare in the New Testament', p. 251.

aspects of Christianity as military-style protection, from 'the breastplate of righteousness', to the 'shield of faith', 'helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit'.[581] Not only is this further indication of the emboldening nature of Christianity on the believer, but also presents it as protection in life and towards death. This imagery was popularised by Charles Wesley in his hymn 'Soldiers of Christ, Arise', which became a favourite during the First World War. Philip Whitwell Wilson, former Liberal MP and religious writer, in his 'The Captain of Our Salvation' series for the YMCA's journal, argued for the importance of the 'helmet of salvation' imagery, describing it as 'a badge' which represented 'the power of God' which 'saves lives'.[582] Such figurative speech can therefore be seen to have been used as a representation of the importance and strength of God, related in terms familiar to the military. Bell observes that these themes were heavily relied on during the war, often typified through the ideas of the 'Lord of Hosts' – another line in 'Soldiers of Christ, Arise', which translates from the same Hebrew root as 'armies' – and the 'God of Battles'.[583] His analysis of these terms reinforces the way in which chaplains and the YMCA used the wider language of Ephesians, not as 'bellicose' and 'bloodthirsty', but rather as 'an expression of their understanding of the nature of God', which focused on God's determination for righteousness.[584] There was an established tradition of using such imagery in church liturgy, as in the Sanctus prayed by both the Roman Catholic and some strands of the Anglican churches, but this was given a more central role in wartime. The armour of Christianity was not there to suggest an impenetrability through which the soldier could not be harmed, but rather a spiritual protection, which would offer strength for the individual to overcome any internal battles and which also,

[581] Eph 6:11-17 (KJV).
[582] Philip Whitwell Wilson, 'The Captain of Our Salvation 3: Arms and the Man', *The Red Triangle,* December 1918, pp. 161-164, (p. 161).
[583] Bell, *Faith in Conflict,* p. 49.
[584] Bell, *Faith in Conflict,* pp, 60-61.

regardless of the direct outcome of war, would offer the ultimate victory in the afterlife in the kingdom of God. This shroud of protection offered in spiritual armour had a clear impact on soldiers, even in the First World War when battledress had largely changed, to help provide them with a resolve to be both good soldiers and good Christians, two conceptions that were entwined through use of the metaphors.

The presentation of the righteous warrior, based in scripture, has been present throughout history, becoming in the medieval period interconnected with the image of the crusader. These powerful symbols of Christian strength carried over into the First World War, as highlighted by Philip Jenkins who argued that 'most combatant nations used an iconography in which their cause was portrayed by that old crusader icon Saint George, and their enemies as the Dragon'.[585] The Christian hero of the crusader, rooted in both history and myth, was reinforced by Pauline symbolism, to offer a sense of righteousness in the cause of war and connecting the purposes of war with the will of God. The impact of this symbolism in the early twentieth century is best demonstrated in the inclusion of a crusader's sword as the spine of the Cross of Sacrifice in every Imperial War Graves cemetery that was built in the aftermath of 1918, as argued by Wolffe.[586] The connotations here were not only of valour, of bravery, and of fighting for morality, but also of imperialism which itself was important for its implication of national exceptionalism. This carried much weight in the minds of supporters of the British Empire who, as Bell has observed, used such comparisons through history and with the Bible to offer legitimacy. Bell argues that Britain had a 'self-proclaimed 'most-favoured nation' status', which although had a long heritage,

[585] Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Changed Religion Forever,* (Oxford: Lion Books, 2014), p. 7.
[586] John Wolffe, 'Forever England beneath the Cross of Sacrifice: Christianity and National Identity in British First World War Cemeteries', in John Carter Wood (ed.), *Christianity and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Europe: Conflict, Community, and the Social Order,* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht LLC, 2016), pp. 53-72, (p. 57).

had taken hold nationally throughout the Victorian era and which influenced its sense of national entitlement and virtue into the First World War.[587] This certainly had a great impact leading into the war years and thus came to influence soldiers during the war, particularly those of the middle and upper classes who had been exposed to ideas of muscular Christianity, as previously discussed. Together wartime imagery and muscular Christianity created a form of religion that was aspirational and many men would have sought to emulate the strength suggested by Paul or the honour depicted by the crusaders in their conduct on the contemporary battlefield.

Despite the strong presence of this rhetoric in wartime society, the YMCA utilised it comparatively less often, indicating that ideas of imperial strength were less of a priority. As we have seen, this was not due to an aversion to militarism in itself, but instead appears more as a separation from imperialism. This likely owed much to the strong nonconformist influence in the Association, which separated its tone from that of the Church of England for whom church and nation were interconnected. Preaching on the valour of empire would also have been a diversion for the YMCA away from its focus on the soldier as an individual, for whom glory could be achieved through personal, rather than imperial, strength. It would be incongruous to say that the YMCA was anti-imperialist: it owed much of its development to imperial missionary work and advocated its support for British war aims throughout the First World War. The distinction was therefore not political, but rather theological. The soldier was a good Christian through his own actions and morals and not merely through allegiance to the empire. Appeals to a greater purpose – in earth as in heaven – were frequently made, yet in so doing the soldier was presented as the one with agency, giving him the

[587] Stuart Bell, ''Soldiers of Christ Arise': Religious Nationalism in the East Midlands during World War I', *Midland History* 39 (2) (2014), pp. 219-235, (p. 225).

power in a life of faith that was relational to him. The YMCA's presentation of Christian militarism therefore can be concluded to have drawn more on the personal motivation and dedication preached by Paul than through the historical precedent of the crusaders, a distinction not universally seen in wartime Christianity.

In some instances, militaristic appeals to the Bible could be very direct and literal. Nowhere was this more true than in the Palestine campaign, where religious comparisons were difficult to avoid as British soldiers crossed the Sinai and fought their way towards the so-called liberation of Jerusalem, just as the crusaders had done in centuries past. It was noted in the YMCA's monthly journal in December 1917 that the 137th Psalm constituted 'matchless language' in the comfort it was able to provide the men.[588] The psalm's yearning for the Holy City – 'if I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning' – while exiled to a foreign land, would have been pertinent to the soldiers, who often felt as though they were left waiting in the advance into Palestine. This was even more the case for those who had served in Mesopotamia, literally alongside the 'rivers of Babylon'. Yet it was not just factual in its impact on soldiers, but also emotional, indicating both the gravity of Jerusalem as the holy strategic goal and the anger at those whose fault was the exile. The violence of the Old Testament was largely avoided by wartime preachers, yet particularly within the informality of the YMCA's religion, this was a valuable comparison which could not be ignored. Such was the militaristic imagery of the Bible that it created these reassurances for First World War soldiers that they were not alone and were in fact connected with the very tradition of Christianity through scripture and history, galvanising them in strength towards the ultimate goals – however imperfectly defined – in war, life, and ultimately faith.

[588] 'The Adversary', The *Red Triangle,* December 1917, (pp. 175-176), p. 175.

‘The Captain of our Salvation’

The language of Paul connected soldiers with Christian tradition and gave expression to their need for physical and religious strength. Yet there was also a far greater role model through which moralistic comparisons could be made, examples sought, and reassurance offered. In making its religion personal and specific the YMCA centred much of its teaching on the human face of God: Jesus Christ. Where God the Father’s omnipotence could be seen to contradict the challenges faced in war, Jesus the Son lived on earth, faced challenges, was bodily vulnerable, and ultimately sacrificed himself for the world. This made comparative examples particularly easy for men to understand, regardless of their religious education, and also easy to empathise with, further emboldening their religious strength. There are consistencies between this and the way the YMCA utilised Paul. Whitwell Wilson described the importance of the study of Paul’s life for ‘his patience, his thought for others, his command of temper’, and thereby his self-restraint and personal strength, qualities revered by the YMCA.[589] Yet, even more importantly for Whitwell Wilson, the lesson of Paul was ‘how it was the very grace of Christ – that and no other which brought him through’.[590] This is the central point of Paul’s letters, beneath the military imagery and emboldening compulsion, to advocate for communities to follow the life of Christ and to demonstrate the value of Christianity, with much the same principle as the YMCA, through living example rather than proselytisation.

Whitwell Wilson was deliberate in his use of military comparisons, referring to the Apostles as Jesus’ ‘little platoon’.[591] The effect here was different from the biblical war imagery, establishing a comparison in which the literal conflict was reflected in the

[589] P Whitwell Wilson, ‘The Captain of our Salvation: A Series of Studies on the Relationship of Christ and his Soldiers’, The *Red Triangle,* September 1917, pp. 27-30, (p. 27).
[590] *ibid*
[591] Wilson, ‘The Captain of our Salvation’, p. 27.

image of Christ. This was itself another iteration of practical Christianity, in which the narrative of the Bible was put into military terms, understandable to the soldiers. But it also leant itself to themes of muscular Christianity, perpetuating the reconceptualization of faith that emerged in the nineteenth century in which, as Albert Marrin has argued, 'the image of Christ became fused with the public school ideal of manliness'.[592] The ideals of soldiering were sourced in terms of the ideals of God, as demonstrated in the superior qualities of Jesus. YMCA writer A Herbert Gray highlighted in particular Jesus' qualities of 'perpetual endurance' through which he believed soldiers could draw from His 'quiet strength' and 'consummate bravery', even when confronted with suffering and death. These were idealised attributes for soldiers, which also sought inspiration in Christ through muscular Christian principles which emphasised the manliness of Christ and his accordant strength. The use of muscular Christianity was familiar to those of the officer class who had been through the public school system and depicted a presentation of God that was entirely human in physicality, while still supreme in character. This enabled religious teachers throughout the war to utilise Christ as an aspirational role model, aiding motivation to fight as well as Christian belief.

Having established the muscular superiority of Jesus Christ and the importance of His life on earth, wartime preachers could then draw these examples out for how these influences continued to influence contemporary life. Rev. Sidney M Berry, a YMCA writer who would go on to become the leader of English Congregationalism, told in his article for the YMCA's journal on 'the essentials of Christianity' of how God 'lives today to help men just as He helped them when He was upon earth'.[593] Here, Berry

[592] Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1974), p. 152.
[593] Sidney M Berry, 'The Essentials of Christianity', *The Red Triangle,* February 1918, pp. 245-246, (p. 246).

connected the enduring spiritual presence of God with Jesus' physical presence as described in the Gospels, utilising the connection to the physicality with which men could empathise and understand. This was further indication, in Berry's words, of how 'to say that God is a person means that he has a personal love for us, a personal care over us'.[594] It is this relationship that is the vital message, imbued with all the human qualities of emotion that indicated a personal stake in a faith in God. There is also an implied reciprocity to the nature of the relationship, that suggests that a Christian life is not just a one-sided practice of worship to God, but also one in which love and care will be offered back. This was crucial in fostering the central message of fellowship and when placed with the lessons of Jesus' ministry on Earth, works to illustrate a fellowship both with the Lord and among peers: the foundation of Christian congregation. Operating outside formal church structures, it was especially important for the YMCA to develop these community relationships that could offer sustenance in war as well as in the men's spiritual lives.

It was impossible to talk of the life of Jesus without addressing His death, a theme that was particularly pertinent to soldiers during the First World War. Death was an unavoidable fact of the conflict which naturally men feared, confronted, often for the first time, with their own mortality. In reconciling themselves to these possibilities there was an understandable reach towards comparisons with Jesus' Crucifixion, in turn lending itself to discussions of sacrifice that were resonant in the lives of soldiers. Jenkins has observed that 'the crucifixion theme was a mainstay of wartime propaganda imagery', being used precisely because of its motivating impact.[595] The symbol of the Cross was far from novel during the First World War, yet it proved to be

[594] Berry, 'The Essentials of Christianity', p. 245.
[595] Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War,* p. 102.

a powerful reminder of Jesus' sacrificial death for the goodness of mankind. It was used as an observable indicator of Christ's connection, particularly for those on the Western Front who regularly passed by the numerous wayside calvaries, which, in the words of AD Morrison, served as 'the symbol of the ultimate meaning of war'.[596] The calvaries appeared in wartime art, from postcards sold to soldiers to carvings made from shell casings, indicating the impact they had on the men. The cross was therefore a resonant image, not only as the emblem of Christianity, but also for the connection it was given to the cause of war, as referenced by Morrison, once more linking spiritual and military aims in one righteous cause. The most powerful impact of this was the phrase 'Supreme sacrifice' which became applied to all soldiers who died in combat, obscuring the divide between their sacrifice in the cause of defeating Germany and Jesus' sacrificial death for the forgiveness of all earthly sins, giving significance and importance to military deaths. This was important not for those who died, but for those who survived. It gave meaning to the soldiers' families, reassuring them that their loved ones did not die in vain, but it also suggested a commitment to those still serving that in the event that they died, they would not be forgotten. It is this latter reasoning that has more relevance here.

The soldiers' preoccupation with death encouraged them, in the observations of a number of chaplains, to reassess the biblical story, 'learning the meaning of the Cross of Christ' as a direct result of war.[597] The YMCA also observed this and facilitated better understanding through the publication and distribution of illustrated pamphlets which educated soldiers on the Easter story. These told in simple, Sunday

[596] AD Morrison, 'Crosses: A Puzzle, a Symbol and a Dream', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 22/06/1917, p. 556.
[597] James O Hannay, 'Man to Man', in in RB MacNutt (ed.), *The Church in the Furnace: Essays by Seventeen Temporary Church of England Chaplains on Active Service in France and Flanders,* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1917), p. 346.

School-style, terms of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection, in approachable language that was designed to picked up from the hut tables by those with a casual interest. This was typical of the YMCA's approach: making scripture accessible both physically and intellectually through means that were informal, while working to ensure soldiers had a full understanding of Christianity. The presence of these Bible stories built on the foundational belief among clergy that the majority of soldiers only held a basic understanding of Christian teachings. Chaplain William Duncan Geare described how 'may know little about Him, but they know of Him'.[598] The YMCA could therefore build on this, highlighting what they viewed to be the most important elements for education, as through the Easter pamphlets. The prominence of the Christian relationship with sacrificial death was explained in the special edition of the YMCA's newspaper for Easter 1916, in which the editorial stated that soldiers' 'minds will be directed to the great fact they are facing death and to the new glorious certainty that their true Captain is the Prince of Life'.[599] Here a jump is made. It makes sense that men's minds were turned to the possibility of their death while at war, yet it does not follow that this convinced them with certainty of God's existence or sacrifice. Again God was described in military terms as the 'captain', but the writer, most likely the newspaper's editor Basil Yeaxlee, is also telling the reader something more. He is observing the opportunity for soldiers to become more sure of their Christian belief, echoing the missionary principle of the YMCA War Emergency Committee that the conflict provided them a great missionary opportunity, in that 'our hope is that we may help them know Him as never before'.[600] Moreover, the writer further contextualised the form of belief that he believed held power for the soldiers in his reference to Jesus

[598] William Duncan Geare, *Letters of an Army Chaplain,* (London: Well Gardner, Darton and Co., 1919), p. 52.
[599] 'Our Outlook', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 21/04/1916, p. 359.
[600] *ibid*

as the 'Prince of Life'. This utilises a quotation from the Apostle Peter in Acts in which he described Pilate as he who 'killed the Prince of Life', a juxtaposition which implies the injustice of the Crucifixion.[601] Once given the additional context of Jesus overcoming death through His resurrection, this conception of Christ gives soldiers an aspirational faith commitment that could provide assurance to those fearing death of salvation in Heaven, helping affirm their faith by offering solutions to the challenges that faced them.

The same editorial went on to describe the Easter story as 'the darkest deed in human history, and at the same time the decisive victory of Divine light and love'.[602] Again this euphemistic language can be applied as much to the war as to the Bible, depicting Jesus' death and resurrection in terms of a righteous battle. It speaks to the sense of hope offered through faith which the YMCA believed related directly to people's sentiments towards the war itself. A YMCA editorial in April 1915 described this rhetoric as the 'highest form of appeal for Christian men', celebrating the 'great wave of patriotism and its concomitant self-sacrifice for the country's sake'.[603] This was a true conflation of devotion and duty, but one which appealed greatly to those grasping for meaning to the war. The effect of all of these comparisons to Jesus and His dedication through sacrifice is that it gave soldiers purpose and significance, enhancing their belief in the cause of war through the example they were seeking to emulate. Such comparisons were not without controversy, and although the YMCA tended to use language that alluded to the comparison without making it directly, it nonetheless relied on such implications for its messages to impact on soldiers. This was true to Yapp's personal understanding of Christianity which saw him caring 'little

[601] Acts 3:15 (KJV).
[602] 'Our Outlook', p. 359.
[603] 'Our Outlook', The *YM British Empire Weekly,* 09/04/1915, pp. 303-304, (p. 303).

for theological subtleties, and less than nothing for ecclesiastical controversies'.[604] This was an effective standpoint for ensuring the stability of the YMCA's ecumenism, yet also encouraged a liturgy that was not always consistent with the pre-war churches. Deputy Chaplain-General to the Western Front Llewellyn Gwynne complained of these heretical comparisons in his diaries, stating that 'the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed hereafter'.[605] For a bishop, this was the theologically correct stance. Yet, there was a power to such language which became a major trend in First World War religion.

The power of this rhetoric around sacrifice is best observed in the prevalence of Good Friday imagery in YMCA preaching, which was often detached from the wider Easter story to place the focus on the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus. A particular example of this is the frequent use of the hymn 'When I Survey the Wondrous Cross' which is one of the most often referenced in descriptions of YMCA services and concerts, even outside the Easter period. Tiplady recalled how 'during the bitterest weeks in the Somme fighting there was scarcely a service in which we did not sing' the hymn, valuing it for 'its assurance of redemption' through which 'it gave comfort in the face of death'.[606] This hymn, written by Isaac Watts in 1707, described the Crucifixion, sacrifice, and themes of sorrow and love. Its singing would have encouraged the sentiment of kinship with Jesus, a key motive of the YMCA, in making the direct comparison of sacrifices. Sung against the backdrop of war it is also difficult to imagine a soldier not being moved by the final two lines of 'Love so amazing, so Divine/ Demands my soul, my life, my all', reminding them of their duty and responsibility

[604] 'Sire Arthur Yapp KBE', The *Red Triangle,* September 1917, pp. 1-4, (p. p. 1).
[605] Llewellyn Gwynne, in Peter Howson, (ed.), *The First World War Diaries of the Rt Rev Llewellyn Gwynne, July 1915 - July 1916,* (Woodridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), p. 127.
[606] Tiplady, *The Soul of the Soldier,* p. xxxv.

once again with the duality of God and country.[607] The commitment to the importance of obedience to duty is a consistently pertinent theme, drawing out soldiers' dedication to duty through reassurance that their sacrifice was right and meaningful. Sung on the battlefield, it also would have connected with the surrounding makeshift cemeteries filled with wooden crosses, each representing an individual sacrifice. While it is impossible to separate Jesus' death upon the Cross from His resurrection and thereby His Victory over death, the weight of emphasis on Good Friday over Easter Sunday in wartime liturgy is significant. The promise of an afterlife confirmed for the Christian in Jesus' resurrection and later Ascension is an important motivator that death for the soldier is not the end, yet in centring dialogue on the sacrifice it is indicating that it is in the temporal that the greatest empathy is found, where soldiers really can relate their own experiences and the suffering of their dying peers to Christ Himself.

This reliance on the rhetoric of sacrifice has been addressed by a number of historians, notably Adrian Gregory, who depicted it as 'the informal civic religion of wartime Britain', such was its pervasiveness in religious discourse.[608] However, Gregory takes this further, labelling this conflation as 'patri-passionism, the redemption of the world through the blood of soldiers'. There was certainly some element of this in wartime rhetoric, although Wolffe makes a more nuanced argument that although the strong visual prominence of the Cross during the First World War made men 'associate the sacrifice of the dead with that of Christ himself', it was rare for an 'explicit claim' to have been made of soldiers emulating Christ's sacrifice, relying instead on 'implicit associations' rather than overt martyrdom claims.[609] This is in evidence in the YMCA's liturgy and worship, where no claims of martyrdom were made, yet the powerful image

[607] Isaac Watts, 'When I Survey the Wondrous Cross', 1707.
[608] Gregory, *The Last Great War,* p. 156.
[609] John Wolffe, *Sacred and Secular Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland since 1914,* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), p. 17.

of the Cross and reliance on the poetry of Good Friday hymns were frequent. Furthermore, Gregory's use of patri-passionism raises a curious similarity to the heresy of patripassianism: the belief that God the Father suffered. Gregory's term, although linguistically similar, is distinct from patripassianism which can be traced back to the second century. There is overlap in the two terms, namely through the concept that it is not just Christ the Son who sacrificially suffered, but Gregory uses his term to argue that wartime theology denied the singularity of the Crucifixion, while the original heresy made claims of God's passability (capability to suffer). There were undoubtedly examples of both being used during the First World War, as shown in Gwynne's reminder that wartime sacrifices should not 'be compared to the glory' of Christ and through the unconventional theologies of some army chaplains, notably Geoffrey Anketell Studdert Kennedy (more popularly known as "Woodbine Willie") who argued for a suffering God. Bell has extensively studied Studdert Kennedy, concluding that his arguments were 'grounded in his experience of war'.[610] It can therefore be rationalised that the prominence of ideas of sacrifice did, at least to some extent, alter the presentation and understanding of Christianity during the First World War. However, the significance placed in the historiography on Studdert Kennedy in particular also indicates him as an outlier who was not representative. In considering these contexts in the frame of the YMCA, it can be determined that the Association's liturgy did not stray directly into either patri-passionism or patripassianism, but rather made comparisons to the relevance of Jesus' sacrifice in the lives and sufferings of soldiers, a distinct yet related liturgical tool.

[610] Stuart Bell, 'The Theology of 'Woodbine Willie' in Context', in Edward Madigan and Michael Snape (eds.), *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 95-110, (p. 110).

The prevalence of the language of sacrifice and the weighting of teaching towards the Easter, and particularly Good Friday, story, is one of the most significant distinctions between wartime and ordinary time presentations of Christianity. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are central beliefs of the Christian faith, yet their reappraisal in the First World War, particularly in the informal religion of the YMCA, is valuable in understanding the power of the narrative and the impact it could have on soldiers' lives in moments when they were most in need of reassurance and guidance. Recognising the significance, clergy, both of the Chaplaincy and the YMCA, manipulated conceptions of sacrifice in the pursuit of war aims, risking a conflation that was not always clarified. Given the extent of the war's upheaval it is difficult to come to any conclusion other than that which was posited by a Church of Scotland chaplain to the Gordon Highlanders, that 'the sacrifices of the past as we have learned them in the page of history are understood more clearly in the light of the present'.[611] Such understanding was facilitated by the YMCA, among others, by highlighting the similarities and through religious teachings that were equally empathetic and inspiring.

Conclusion

The liturgy of the huts was one tailored to the needs of the soldier, and specifically the poorly-educated, non-regular churchgoing ordinary ranker. Through a basis of social evangelism the YMCA was able to engage the men with an informal religion that highlighted aspects that were most relevant to them and the challenges raised in conflict. The formation of this fellowship, enhanced through the Association's ecumenical welcome and international network of huts, brought those of all

[611] Lauchlan MacLean Watt, *In France and Flanders: With the Fighting Men,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), p. 21.

backgrounds together in congregation and community, in a mutuality of morale and faith. This was a presentation of Christianity which was often not theologically nuanced and which did not require a formal understanding of scripture. At times theologians could find it too simplistic. Yet, developed through the turn of the century social missions, the YMCA was able to inspire a faith that was relative and rational. Like the parable of the Good Samaritan, its social religion was there to support and uplift. Although informal in style and accessible in nature, the YMCA offered in its social evangelism a more structured religion than mere diffusive Christianity, building in a pre-evangelism that encouraged a service-based faith inspired by the dynamism of God. In so doing, the YMCA was able to actively develop its ecumenism by drawing together in co-operation divergent strands of Protestantism from Congregationalists to High Church Anglicans through the commonalities of practice.

This broad-mindedness of denominational inspiration and involvement could by devout theologians be seen to dilute the Christian message of the YMCA. However, the Association provided an effective refutation of this, demonstrating not only how such ecumenism could draw more people together, but also how such freedom from structured church formats enabled a representation of Christianity that was dominated by the needs of the soldiers, drawing out the relevant and most resonant lessons of the Bible. The effect of this was that the masculinity of scripture was emphasised, particularly through examples of strength and courage, whether faced with battles of the temporal or spiritual nature, or with death itself. These principles, whether taken from the life of Christ or the actions of the early church, offered motivation and reassurance to soldiers, shaping religion to fulfil their needs on the battlefield. All of the evidence considered can therefore be distilled into this understanding of a liturgy that was audience-focused and needs-based, deliberately

targeting the hearts and minds of soldiers to draw in appeal and provide inspiration that was supportive and reflective, all while never proselytising.

Chapter Six: 'The Peace Programme'

The Post-War Years



Figure 8 YMCA village hut[612]

The YMCA came out of the First World War larger and stronger than it had ever been before. It had seized the 'supreme opportunity' of its war work to reach new classes of men across four continents, delivering to them comfort and support with a Christian ethos.[613] Throughout the war the YMCA had been keenly aware of what an important moment the war was in its institutional history, publishing a number of 'After the War' papers with ideas and policies for the future peace years. Soon after the Armistice they were aware of the need to capitalise upon their wartime popularity and the momentum with which they had finished the war.

The YMCA greeted the Armistice with exceptional optimism. In the *Red Triangle* journal's first editorial comment after 11th November, the author declared that 'the

[612] *The Red Triangle*, August 1919.
[613] 'Our Outlook', *The YM British Empire Weekly,* 15/01/1915, pp. 3-4, (p. 3).

Divine opportunism which has marked all our war work will mark the period of re-adjustment and re-adaptation that faces us'.[614] This is a bold commitment to the idea that the war was to some extent a God-given opportunity for faith-based work, such as that led by the YMCA. This quotation also demonstrates the balance between continuation and change which the Association hoped it could strike in the future. It would retain the opportunity, the momentum and the audience, but address these in new ways and with new practices that would better suit the post-war world. 'Activities' would change, they insisted, but 'the essential principles of our movement would remain unchanged'.[615] Such a seismic shift as the end of the war was, however, an appropriate moment for reflection and reassessment, going further than just the "re-adjustment" that had initially been expected. This chapter will investigate the YMCA's post-war programmes, first discussing its continued work on the battlefields and then its approach for the care of ex-soldiers, before moving to analyse the post-war culture of the Association, its context and limitations, comparing the increasingly negative picture in Britain with its growing international reputation.

Battlefields

While the Armistice undoubtedly caused a paradigm shift in the preoccupations and motivations of the world, in the immediate weeks and months that followed the YMCA's primary concern remained that of supporting soldiers. Suddenly left without their motivation or sense of urgency, 'most men simply wished to go home', as William Butler has argued in his analysis of demobilising soldiers.[616] This widespread sentiment changed the focus of the YMCA's work and presented them with a new challenge they had to attempt to overcome. While demobilisation did begin relatively

[614] 'The Editor to his Readers', *The Red Triangle,* December 1918, pp. 171-172, (p. 171).
[615] *ibid*
[616] William Butler, ''The British Soldier is no Bolshevik': The British Army, Discipline, and the Demobilisation Strikes of 1919', *Twentieth Century British History* 30 (3) (2019), pp. 321-346, (p. 327).

quickly, owing in part to soldiers' pressure, there were still some soldiers who were needed to complete clear up operations on the battlefields. During 1919 the YMCA's war work continued in more than 17 countries, including Palestine, Malta and Russia, as well as on the Western Front. One of the largest single operations for the Association was with the army of occupation on the Rhineland, in addition to its retained presence on the old battlefields of France and Flanders. The motivation of the YMCA was primarily a continuation of its war work, supporting those of – and connected to – the British Army. It had to refocus and recommit to the new post-war context, but the essentials remained consistent: social-based and religiously motivated care and support on the fields of war.

In the dull months between the cessation of hostilities and the demobilisation of soldiers, the YMCA's work became particularly important in helping to ward off the ennui of an army which had achieved its war aims. It was argued in the YMCA's journal that its role 'becomes almost greater than ever' during the 'tedious months of demobilisation', as morale became such a concern.[617] This is evident in Cologne, at the base of the British Army's occupation of the Rhineland, where the YMCA ran its largest single operation in the post-war years. For the first six months the work was led by Barclay Baron, who had previously served as the YMCA's regional secretary for the Ypres Salient. His task here was somewhat different than it had been in Belgium, focusing on occupying the bored minds of men and diverting them away from immorality. The YMCA considered that 'keeping straight in Cologne is not the easiest thing in the world' and they were therefore required to provide counter-attractions to the popular German beer gardens that filled the city.[618] This was akin to the role the

[617] 'The Hut of Many Colours', *The Red Triangle,* December 1918, pp. 143-9, (p. 149).
[618] 'In France, Belgium and Germany', *The Red Triangle,* September 1919, pp. 1-4, (p. 3).

YMCA had played in the base camps during the war, in that it was centred around recreation and morality, yet was heightened for the post-war situation, in which there was no perceivable end goal to the men's presence in camp. The predicament, as identified by an internal YMCA memorandum was that 'military duties are light, and our boys, placed amid an alien population whose life they cannot share, are exposed to all the dangers of idleness and boredom. It is a familiar sight to see them drifting about in groups in the streets gazing listlessly into shop windows, doing nothing but kill time.'[619] This is evidently a dramatisation of the situation faced by the soldiers in order to exaggerate the need for YMCA provisions on the Rhine. However, it does also speak to the unique nature of the Rhineland occupation, which had very different overriding concerns and culture of morale than that experienced during the war. David Williamson has identified that especially in the initial months of occupation, military training was only carried out in the mornings, with 'the most pressing concern' for the military authorities to be to 'keep the soldiers busy'.[620] The YMCA was cited alongside the Salvation Army as the prime agencies opening 'canteens and club rooms' to entertain soldiers during the afternoons and evenings. The need for such work here was clear. With 290,000 men garrisoned on the Rhine and without a clear purpose with which to fill their time, disorder and immorality were increasingly probable.

Within Cologne, the opportunities for vice were rife, much as they had been in Cairo. There were a reported 50 maisons tolerées within the city, with Keith Jeffery arguing that 'the incidence of venereal disease' was 'a constant concern'.[621] To combat this, as

[619] 'A Voice from the Rhine', *YMCA War Work* 16 (no date), YMCA Archive, Cadbury Research Library (CRL), University of Birmingham, YMCA/K29.
[620] David G Williamson, *The British in Interwar Germany: The Reluctant Occupiers, 1918-1930,* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 17.
[621] Keith Jeffery, '"Hut Ab", "Promenade with Kamerade for Schokolade", and the Flying Dutchman: British Soldiers in the Rhineland, 1918-1929', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 16 (3) (2005), pp. 455-473, (p. 461).

Michael Foley has recorded, the YMCA opened more than 100 establishments 'in the early days in Cologne'.[622] The largest of these was the Cologne Central, located on Friesenstrasse, which could accommodate up to 2,000 people for refreshments, entertainments and sports. Baron, who established the premises, described it as 'the largest beer-hall and variety-theatre in Cologne', in which they were able to host orchestras and 'Dutch acrobats', in addition to the more usual YMCA provisions.[623] The extent of these provisions was made possible by the peace conditions in which the YMCA was able to occupy permanent residences in the Rhineland. While 'most of the danger' of war work was removed, as Ernest Hornung, who ran the YMCA library in Cologne, asserted, so too had 'most of the glamour'.[624] This is not to say that he commended war in any way, but rather implies that the respected heroism of the YMCA's work was lost after the war. Their work was quieter and more stable, but while that eased the overall pressures of life, it meant in many ways that the YMCA was about to embark on 'its most strenuous campaign'.[625] Theirs was now a job of convincing and motivating, providing entertainment but also attempting to convince men of the continued need for moral duty without the language of war.

This transition was more pronounced in the YMCA's continued work on the battlefields themselves, where the Association remained caring for those engaged in clear up operations. At the direct request of the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC; later the Commonwealth War Graves Commission), the YMCA turned some of its old war-time huts over to the support of the commission's teams as they were tasked with the colossal job of burying the war's dead and constructing the thousands

[622] Michael Foley, *The British Army on the Rhine,* (London: Fonhill Media, 2017), p. 162.
[623] Barclay Baron, 'Memoirs', in Michael Snape (ed.), *The Back Parts of War,* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), pp. 101-213, (p.210).
[624] EW Hornung, Notes of a Camp Follower on the Western Front, (London: EP Dutton, 1919), p. 215.
[625] *ibid*

of cemeteries and memorials that now cover the old battlefields. Philip Longworth has described the IWGC's work in the initial years as largely insular, with the early staffs accommodated in the Commission's camps, often repurposed from the war, with little outside interaction. He wrote of how 'the camps on weekend evenings would resound to heart rendering of war-time songs; there would be dances; a concert party was started at Bethune'.[626] It is clear here how the YMCA's work would have fitted in to support the workers. While the men had a day-to-day purpose, their evenings would have been quiet without this in-camp entertainment, which could take their minds off the depressing and strenuous nature of their work.

One of the most notable centres for the IWGC was the Ypres Salient, where a post-war YMCA hut was located in the Grote Markt. This city, whose protection had been the focus of fighting in this region throughout the war, remained the focal point of Flanders, now serving as the central hub of activity. The YMCA's continued presence in the city served all those who remained in the area after the war, not only the IWGC, but all those involved in the clearing of the battlefields and the reconstruction of the region as evacuated families began to return home.

While the focus on soldiers remained important, a new population was arriving on the Western Front from 1919, as families began to make pilgrimages to the graves of their fallen loved ones. The YMCA was among the first to offer a form of battlefields tours to the families. Travel agencies like Thomas Cook were quick to capitalise on the widespread desire to visit the battlefields, but these were often prohibitively expensive to families. The YMCA, in contrast, operated a charitable scheme whereby they made all necessary arrangements for travel, in addition to providing accommodation at the

[626] Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 1917-1984,* (London: Leo Cooper, 1967), pp. 62-63.

eleven specially established YMCA hostels to ensure a greater number of families could visit the newly established war graves. In October 1920 the YMCA journal reported that over 3,000 visitors had taken up the scheme in its first summer season.[627] Gerard De Groot notes that they were the first organisation to run such pilgrimages, before quickly being joined by the British Legion and the Red Cross, in addition to the Association's wartime comrades the Salvation and Church Armies.[628] The IWGC cited the value of these charities in fulfilling the needs felt by so many.[629] This work built upon the YMCA's transport network across Northern France, forming out of its wartime scheme of bringing families to visit injured soldiers in hospital. While this progression is evident, the Association's care for families post-war is something different from the rest of its service in that it was not aimed at supporting the soldiers and young men themselves, but rather their loved ones. It can therefore be suggested that the YMCA had an interest in supporting the community around servicemen, as well as through making most pragmatic use of their resources.

One such tour to Ypres was an all-inclusive cost of £5 10s, covering both journeys and a three day stay in Belgium.[630] A 'Pilgrim's Guide' recommended the tour with its guides to take visitors round the cemeteries, noting that day visitors could make use of this at a cost of 12s 6d.[631] This was cheaper than Thomas Cook, whose tours began in June 1920 with a starting price of £8, 11s. Richard van Emden suggests that those organised by the YMCA were more 'primitive' than the commercial offerings, with more basic amenities, yet it can be observed that they were fulfilling an important role

-[627] 'At the Sign of the Red Triangle', The *Red Triangle,* October 1920, pp. 63-68, (p. 67).
[628] Gerard J De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the First World War,* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 275.
[629] Minutes of Imperial War Graves Commission Meeting, February 1919, Commonwealth War Graves Commission archives, CWGC/2/2/1/9.
[630] *The Pilgrim's Guide to the Ypres Salient,* (London: Herbert Reiach Ltd for Talbot House, 1920), p. 50.
[631] *ibid*

on a more charitable scale and accessible price.[632] The Relatives Hostel in Ypres was a standard hut, repurposed from the Malvern School Hut, demonstrating both the simple nature of their provision and their suitability for providing such a service through the resources already in place from the wartime hut programme.[633] Regardless of this, the tours would have been deeply personal and unique to each family visiting. One grieving parent reflected on their experience travelling to Peronne with the YMCA in the *Lichfield Mercury* recalling that the hostel 'is most comfortable'. Yet, more importantly, in visiting their son's grave they exclaimed that 'as I looked round and saw what they had faced I never felt more proud of my own'.[634] Their trip with the YMCA was able to provide connection and give a new understanding to their son's wartime experience. It provided an important note of closure and connection with their son's resting place.

The landscape within which they were operating was also rapidly changing. When the YMCA began to run the battlefield pilgrimages, the cemeteries would have looked just as they had been left at the Armistice: often overgrown and disorganised, the graves themselves marked by simple wooden crosses. These tours were happening concurrently with the work of the IWGC to concentrate burials into larger cemeteries and to mark each grave with a permanent headstone. The photographs taken by Sir Arthur Yapp throughout his progress visits to the area in the early 1920s show the ongoing development of work that the families would have witnessed. For instance, Forceville Communal Cemeteries – one of IWGC's first three completions – had already been finished by Yapp's January 1920 visit, while the London Rifle Brigade

[632] Richard van Emden, *The Quick and the Dead: Fallen Soldiers and their Families in the Great War*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 284.
[633] YMCA Photograph, undated, CRL, YMCA/K/8/1/325.
[634] 'My Son's Grave', *Lichfield Mercury,* 04/06/1920, p. 5.

Cemetery at Ploegsteert remained untouched by the time of his 1922 trip.[635] Hand in hand with this, the culture of battlefields visits was also developing over the course of the 1920s, as increasing numbers of families made the journeys. Recognising the demand for Christian charitable trips, like that of the YMCA, the St Barnabas Society was founded in 1919 specifically for this purpose by the Rev. Matthew Mullineux, who had served as an Anglican army chaplain in both the Second Boer and First World Wars. As with the YMCA, St Barnabas took a non-proselytising approach. The subsidised trips were available for all, regardless of religious commitment, and there was nothing overtly religious about the visits, although families could opt to include traditional Christian funerary rites in their graveside attendance. Non-religious organisations were also established, including the Ypres League whose foundation in 1920 sought to bring together veterans of the Ypres Salient in collective memory. Interestingly, for an organisation which held no religious affiliation, their commemorative efforts led to the creation of St George's memorial church in Ypres, which remains to this day as an Anglican church.

The language of these battlefields visits soon became codified as pilgrimage, although the YMCA was reluctant to embody this. Britain had a complex relationship with the term, which can be identified in a 1920 article in *The Times* in which it was said that 'the French have a better term for what are described in this country as battlefield tours. They call them pilgrimages'.[636] Pilgrimage was thus seen as something outside of the British, and specifically Anglican tradition, better associated with French, Catholic-influenced traditions. The introduction given to the term in *The Times* article indicates an expected unfamiliarity and a novelty with the idea. David William Lloyd

[635] Arthur Keysall Yapp, 'Photographs taken in France on Official Visits', CRL YMCA/K/4/2/37 and YMCA/K/4/5/48.
[636] David William Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada, 1919-1939,* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), p. 15.

notes that there had been a 'renewal of the practice of Anglican Pilgrimage in these years', but that this was initially started by Anglo-Catholics before spreading in the years after the war.[637] The YMCA's reluctance to label its visits as pilgrimages can therefore be seen as an influence of its nonconformist heritage; a religious culture without the heritage of pilgrimage. However, the post-war years were a period of transition in which pilgrimage language came to take on a new role in the national psyche. Take, for example, the Ypres League's example. Initially, its tours were pitched as excursions to Ypres and 'reunions' for old comrades, thereby using language grounded in tourism, without the solemnity of the grave visits. But by 1923, they too were using the term 'pilgrimage', both in a collaboration with St Barnabas to subsidise family grave visits and for the veterans' reunions. Often, the trips came to incorporate elements of both, with typically the Sunday morning being given over to personal grave visits, before two or three days of group visits to the notable battlegrounds. It seems not insignificant that it was the holy day of Sunday that was typically devoted to paying respects to the fallen, although no overt connection was made here. Religious traditions influenced the secular and the secular adopted meaning through the religious, contributing to a Christian culture of battlefield respect in which the YMCA played a part.

In many regards the family tours were something quite different from the rest of the YMCA's service, yet their motivation for providing them can be identified as something beyond the mere practical context that the Association was already well established and connected on the Western Front. As a continuation of their trips for relatives to the hospitals during the war, this work sought to bring spiritual closure to families and pastoral support which was grounded in its principal values of Christian care and

[637] Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism,* p. 26.

fellowship. There do not appear to be many surviving accounts by those who attended these visits so their true impact cannot be seen. However, it can be observed that the YMCA was making an important contribution towards supporting families as they visited the graves of their loved ones in the immediate post-war years.

The Four-Strand Approach

The YMCA quickly found ways to adapt its work on the war fronts, yet back in Britain it faced a much larger task of readapting its work to suit the returning soldier. Soon after the Armistice soldiers began to be demobilised, with William Butler identifying that by the end of 1918, a mere seven weeks after the Armistice, more than 330,000 officers and men had already been relieved from service.[638] Another 130,000 joined them by mid-January 1919. This was a rapid shift in the population of Britain and the priorities of society, posing new challenges for the YMCA as they grappled with how best to support them in their transition back to their peacetime roles.

In July 1919 the Association released its 'immediate programme' for the 'ex-soldier', dividing its overall Peace Programme into a four-strand approach through which it could continue to support the men as they returned from war.[639] It outlined the recognised needs for new veterans, helping them not only in the initial transition to domesticity but also in finding a renewed purpose to life. The four strands were:

1. 'The Finding of employment for ex-soldiers'
2. To 'provide manual training'
3. The establishment of hostels and recreation centres for discharged men
4. The creation of outdoor training centres

[638] Butler, '"The British Soldier is No Bolshevik".
[639] *The Red Triangle,* July 1919.

Such a programme, it was hoped, would provide material support for veterans through aiding them with re-employment and the training necessary to achieve this, as well as continuing the YMCA's wartime ethos of running recreation centres for the social support of the men. The approach consisted of four tangible ways to improve the wellbeing of returned soldiers, making economic and social improvements that would also contribute towards their psychological and spiritual welfare. The four strands of the approach are defined in pragmatic terms, none of them in themselves suggesting a religious action. However, as was seen in the spirit of the YMCA's hutwork, it was through such provision that the Association was able to exert its Christian-motivated care and help men work towards self-improvement and a new life of redefined duty.

The first strand of the approach is the one where the YMCA's commitment to the men's duty can be seen most clearly. In 1916 the Association opened its Employment Bureau in London to help place discharged soldiers in suitable employment. After the Armistice its efforts were redoubled, working for both demobilised and injured soldiers, and establishing provincial offices to continue this work across the country, including in Nottingham. In the London office's eleven years of operation, it 'secured employment for 38,664 ex-servicemen', largely under the direction of TE Fulcher.[640] This averaged 3,515 positions found per year, although these were not evenly distributed throughout its operation. As of mid-1919 it had already found jobs for 'more than 21,000 men', indicating a rate of more than 5,000 per year in the initial four years of its operation, leaving a smaller average of 2,200 in the remaining seven.[641] These were men who were unable to return to their pre-war jobs, whether through circumstance or disability. The positions found covered a range of sectors and

[640] 'Work for Ex-servicemen', *The Times,* 11/06/1927, p. 9.
[641] 'Notes of the Month', *The Red Triangle,* July 1919, pp. 407-408, (p. 408).

salaries, implying that it served men from across the class spectrum. Among the National Executive Committee's statistics for the first half of 1921, it was found that 548 jobs filled were domestic workers, while 429 were clerks and shop assistants, another 474 were motor drivers and other skilled trades, with a final 246 being porters, watchmen and messengers.[642] Some secretary roles earned veterans '£300 or £400 a year', indicating that the YMCA's employment bureau was not just helping working-class men find manual labour, but also the middle classes with office work.[643] The work was supported through the offer of free advertisements in a range of newspapers, including *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Morning Post*, and the *Daily Express* on particular 'obligation weeks', to spur both employers and potential employees to make use of the bureau.[644]

The employment bureau closed in 1927, following Fulcher's decision to leave. It was at this time decided by the YMCA that there were diminishing numbers of men requiring post-war employment and therefore the bureau would not continue. This is not to say that unemployment was no longer a national concern – the 1927 unemployment rate of 9.7% was still above the 1919 figure of 6.0% – but it is indicative of the shifting perception of this away from it being a war issue, coupled with the YMCA's disinterest in continuing such work on a long-term basis.[645] Yapp stated in *The Times* that if it had not been for the bureau's demand by 'both employers and unemployed', it would have closed 'long ago', implying a general reluctance on behalf of the YMCA to run such an operation, yet a clearly felt need for the service to continue.[646] In many ways, the YMCA's desire to close the employment bureau can be understood as such an

[642] i*bid*
[643] ibid
[644] TE Fulcher, 'Helping Men to Jobs', *The Red Triangle,* January 1922, pp. 17-18, (p. 17).
[645] James Denman and Paul McDonald, 'Unemployment Statistics from 1881 to the Present Day', *Labour Market Trends* 104 (1996), pp. 5-18, (p. 6).
[646] 'Work for Ex-Servicemen', *The Times,* 11/06/1927, p. 9.

operation was widely different from its other services and did not directly contribute to its overarching mission of leading men to a knowledge of God or to living a Christian life. However, the YMCA did see a direct connection between employment and its wider aims for men in that through finding them a job, they could contribute towards helping them re-find a self-worth and motivation. In the monthly journal it was stated that 'it is not enough to give [a] man a pension, sufficient to live upon', as in doing so 'his character is bound to deteriorate with the uselessness of his days'.[647] An occupation could give a veteran, injured or otherwise, agency and independence. The YMCA was far from unique in holding this view, yet its advocacy for unemployed men was symptomatic of this wider mission to help men towards fulfilling societal duties and striving for self-improvement through the discipline of work.

Unemployment was a national concern following the First World War and throughout the 1920s, with Matt Perry arguing that 'joblessness on this scale had not been experienced before' in his study of interwar unemployment.[648] Its relief was an 'intractable problem', which the government were reluctant to solve alone.[649] Through the Employment Bureau the YMCA was one of a number of organisations actively involved in overcoming this challenge, successfully finding work for thousands of men. Its success can be identified not only in the number of positions it filled, but also in the governmental support it received. Between 1919 and 1921, the government partnered with the Association's Employment Department for the placing of disabled men in work, before transferring the work to a collaboration between the YMCA and the London Metropolitan Division. Such support for their work implies a recognition for the need of such a bureau, and approval for the Association's intervention to aid men

[647] 'The Job and the Man', *The Red Triangle,* August 1919, pp.465 -467, (p. 466).
[648] Matt Perry, *Bread and Word: Social Policy and the Experience of Unemployment, 1918-1939,* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), p. 40.
[649] *ibid*

in the finding of employment. Yet, as Perry has argued, in the initial post-war years the government relied on an 'ideology of self-help and thrift' that meant it was reluctant to intervene in employment issues.[650] This has also been identified by Bernard Harris, who described how the state saw it as its role 'to provide a basic level of provision in times of ordinary distress', but that 'this should be supplemented by voluntary effort during period of exceptional need' as a means of limiting public expenditure.[651] Both Harris and Perry acknowledge the limitations of government action on unemployment, which trod a fine line between the fear of backlash and despondency from the newly enfranchised working classes, but also a continued pressure for laissez-faire cuts to poor relief from those with comfortable employment. In the immediate wake of the Armistice Prime Minister David Lloyd George, in the words of Perry, 'spoke the language of reconstruction' with a positive outlook towards employment, yet this quickly waned as the recession of 1921-1923 took hold.[652] Arthur Marwick reinforces this transition in more condemnatory language, arguing that as 'reconstruction turned to retrenchment, the land fit for heroes became a waste land'.[653] Optimism was lost and unemployment levels persisted throughout the 1920s.

Voluntary organisations, such as the YMCA, were therefore required to fill in the gaps, with Carolyn Malone identifying that men had to navigate 'a mixed economy of welfare provisions' in which there were a number of schemes which could help individuals, often relying on state aid but operating independently from it.[654] The 38,664 men who

[650] Perry, *Bread and Word*, p. 198.
[651] Bernard Harris, 'Responding to Adversity: Government-Charity Relations and the Relief of Unemployment in Inter-war Britain', *Contemporary British History* 9 (3) (1995), pp. 529-561, (p. 533).
[652] Perry, *Bread and Word,* p. 39.
[653] Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War,* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1965), p. 284.
[654] Carolyn Malone, 'A Job Fit for Heroes? Disabled Veterans, the Arts and Crafts Movement and Social Reconstruction in Post-World War I Britain', *First World War Studies* 4 (2) (2013), pp. 201-217, (p. 202).

found work through the YMCA's London employment bureau made up just a fraction of those who needed employment in the post-war years. However, such a number is not insignificant, and the Association's operation of the office can be seen to have contributed to solving the 1920s employment crisis, through a demonstration of their commitment to support for the ex-soldier. Veterans' unemployment was, to them, a threat not only to the returned soldiers' finances, but also their identity and character. This was noted by Perry who described the use of the phrase "Mary-Ann" to insult 'unemployed husbands' who shared household duties and who had been stripped of their trade-based identities.[655] It is therefore, for this reason, that the YMCA saw the employment bureau as such a significant part of its Four Strand Approach, as it worked to support the welfare and character of young men, helping them rekindle a purpose for life, which could in turn aid them in all other areas of their well-being.

In order for men to be skilled enough for the jobs offered through the employment bureau, it was often necessary to provide them with manual training. This became the second strand of the Approach, directly working for the self-improvement of veterans. Such training was, in practice, both manual and educational, building on groundwork laid during the war. The YMCA had trialled schemes from 1917 for the development of invalided men's manual skills and run a whole programme of educational works across the base camps, hosting classes and lectures on a range of subjects. The post-war educational programme was led by Basil Yeaxlee, who left his position as editor of the *Red Triangle* in June 1918 to work in the education department full-time. With characteristic confidence, he hoped the YMCA could bring 'everything that will make men's life full and glad' through education, that could work to 'help them to make the

[655] Perry, *Bread and Work,* p. 63.

most of their lives in every respect'.[656] Beneath his idealism lay a comprehensive programme that would host 'classes and lectures dealing with history, economics, science, art and literature', as well as non-sectarian theological studies.[657] Such work was developed in association with local education authorities to ensure that it was pragmatic for the men and that it was working in their interests to aid their employment prospects. It also built upon that which had been developed in base camps through the Army Education Scheme. In early 1919 the Army Council resumed 'undivided responsibility' for this portion of the work, meaning that Yeaxlee was able to focus his renewed education scheme on the needs of veterans seeking employment, rather than those still serving in the army.[658]

It was this job-readiness that guided the YMCA's training scheme, working to a pragmatic end goal for the rehabilitation of soldiers to reintegrate them into civilian society. Often this manual training could be integrated into its general hut work, thus both condensing its effort and increasing its reach. Some manual training was even brought into its hospital-based work, for example at 5th General Canadian Hospital in Kirkdale, Liverpool where in early 1919 courses in 'electrical engineering' were being run by Henry Northcote for the benefit of still-recovering soldiers.[659] Providing this training at such a time meant that not only did it provide the patients with a productive way to occupy their time, but it also ensured that by the time they had been released from hospital – and in this case returned to Canada – they would have acquired a new skill which they could utilise in the finding of a job. All such work to aid employment contributed to the YMCA's commitment to self-discipline, which had been a priority

[656] Basil A Yeaxlee, 'The "Nebulous Hope" and our New Educational Programme', *The Red Triangle* April 1919, pp. 300-302, (ps. 300 and 302).
[657] *ibid*
[658] John A Corcoran, letter to Arthur Keysall Yapp, 26/02/1919, CRL YMCA/ACC15/1/12.
[659] 'Electrical Training for Soldiers: A Visit to Kirkdale, Liverpool', *The Red Triangle* January 1919, pp. 197-200, (p. 197).

of its war work, particularly through the Edwardian principles of duty and responsibility. The YMCA was not alone in this thinking, with Robert Snape and Helen Pussard arguing that 'training for citizenship was a major object of social service and consequently leisure became valued as a means to this end.'[660] The YMCA's work can be seen to fit this trend, particularly where manual training was integrated alongside social provision. Snape and Pussard also argue that the belief in Edwardian values was 'greatly diminished' after the war, yet at least in the case of the YMCA these can be seen to have endured, even if their delivery was reshaped into modern practice that utilised leisure as a tool for accessing morals.[661] For it was these traditional values of responsibility and self-improvement that motivated the YMCA's work in these areas.

The third area of the Four Strand Approach is where continuity was most clearly sought, building upon the war's successful hut programme with the establishment of recreation centres across Britain. Arthur Yapp declared with confidence in the summer of 1917 that he felt certain 'that when the men come back they will want to find the Red Triangle'.[662] It was in this faith that the Association rolled out its programme of Red Triangle Clubs in the immediate post-war years, rejuvenating the simple army camp hut to be a warm and welcoming community hub. Symbolic of this post-war relaunch of the hut programme is the fact that the first full-colour cover of the *Red Triangle* in August 1919 bore the image of one such club, nestled in the heart of a village alongside the parish church and local shop. The sketch was specially commissioned from the YMCA's Art Department and used bright, cartoon-like colours to convey the ideas of modernism and optimism that the Association hoped their new club programme could embody. There was a high level of optimism within the YMCA that the "hut habit" of

[660] Robert Snape and Helen Pussard, 'Theorisations of Leisure in Inter-War Britain', *Leisure Studies* 32 (2013), pp. 1-18, (p. 11).
[661] Snape and Pussard, 'Theorisations of Leisure', p. 3.
[662] 'Increased YMCA Work', *The Times,* 23/08/1917, p. 9.

war would create a new peacetime social movement. This was encapsulated by Canon James Adderley, a wartime YMCA secretary, who stated that 'the YMCA knows its power and is about to flood England with huts and recreations rooms directly the war is over.'[663] This is representative of the end-of-the-war sentiment within the Association, that its hut programme had created a significant new movement that would reshape the landscape of associational belonging and recreational clubs in the new era.

Soon after the Armistice, such clubs began to be established in towns and villages across the country, often through the local impulse of communities who recognised the value of the YMCA's huts during the war. Examples include Skipton in North Yorkshire, where a hut was repurposed from the prisoner of war camp to be used as a YMCA for returned soldiers, and the village of Woodchester in Gloucestershire where a YMCA was built for the small community. In both places, the hut was built as a war memorial, a memory not only to the local men who died for their country, but also as a reminder of the men's war experience and the ambition for a continuation of the brotherhood and camaraderie experienced by soldiers. A memorial such as this helped, in the words of Keith Grieves and Jenifer White, to perpetuate a 'fictive kinship', of the ex-soldier tying them back to their war lives.[664] Such kinship, Jay Winter has argued, proliferated in the inter-war years as it became one of the 'key features of the social history' of the period.[665] Desires for utilitarian memorials, however, were not universal and, as Bruce Scates and Rebecca Wheatley have

[663] James Adderley, 'The Church of England and the YMCA', *Red Triangle Papers* 20 (undated), pp. 2-4, CRL YMCA/K/24/4.
[664] Keith Grieves and Jenifer White, 'Useful War Memorials, Landscape Preservation and Public Access to the English Countryside: Fitting Tributes to the Fallen of the Great War', *Garden History* 42 (1) (2014), pp. 18-33, (p. 21).
[665] Jay Winter, 'Forms of Kinship and Remembrance in the Aftermath of the Great War', in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds.), *War and Remembrance: The Twentieth Century,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 40-61, (p. 51).

identified, were in some places hotly debated, with a tendency for them to be supported by those who were 'Protestant and voluntarist in character'.[666] There is a high level of overlap here between these memorials and the work of the YMCA, which was similarly Protestant and voluntarist, seeking to support the living as much as it respected the dead. The war memorial YMCA could then serve as a tribute to the fallen, while supporting the kinship of the returned soldiers. Both examples had closed by the end of the 1930s, perhaps indicating that the critics of utilitarian memorials – who Scates and Wheatley suggest were asking 'who would remember the purpose of a memorial hospital?' – were correct.[667] There certainly appeared to be a time limit on the efficacy of the war memorial YMCA centre.

Other post-war huts, like that of Dursley, also in Gloucestershire, were corporately established. The rural town's largest employer, the engineering firm RA Lister and Co., built a YMCA on-site, building upon the positive experience the company had had with the YMCA's hut for munitions workers during the war. This hut remained as a facility for the town until after the Second World War, outlasting those at both Woodchester and Skipton. Its audience was less a fictive kinship, and more an organised community, but could nonetheless benefit from the social work given by the YMCA. This example stands out as notable, not only because it was an enduring site which developed directly out of the Association's war work, but also because it was rural. Before the war, the YMCA's work had been concentrated on urban areas, where large numbers of working-class men were viewed as a social problem. This post-war expanded work therefore moved in a new direction, bringing different communities into the association's work. AH Griffiths, one of the YMCA's organisers, identified the

[666] Bruce Scates and Rebecca Wheatley, 'War Memorials', in Jay Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War Volume Three: Civil Society,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 528-556, (p. 534).
[667] *ibid*

difference in this rural work, writing that 'an isolated village is quite a different psychological unit from a district in a town'.[668] He described how this new work should build upon their war experience, through serving as 'the means of contact between the resources of home and church'.[669] Within small communities, where the YMCA had the potential to serve as the social hub, this is clearly evident. As of December 1924 there were '284 Red Triangle Clubs in villages', suggesting that while there was a new trend for the clubs as Griffiths had suggested, this was not huge.[670] The YMCA saw itself as fitting alongside other post-war membership establishments, including that of the Women's Institute. It envisioned its huts as complimentary establishments, as Village Institutes for men at the heart of rural as well as urban life. This, for the most part, did not materialise, with the WI becoming less of a direct comparison as it took on a more enduring role, which moved itself away from the idea of a physical institute which could be visited and to more of a community group which inhabited other community spaces. There is no immediately obvious reason for the relative failure of the YMCA's Club mission. As Helen McCarthy has identified, 'the interwar decades witnessed the growth of mass membership associations', yet there was not a concurrent rise in the growth of the YMCA, which struggled to maintain the momentum with which it had left the First World War.[671]

Some explanation for this could be ascribed to the nature of the YMCA's recreation centres. The renewed hut programme was seen by General Secretary Yapp to be 'acting as a big brother to thousands of ex-servicemen', offering a good example and moral

[668] AH Griffiths, 'The Live Wire', *The Red Triangle,* October 1920, pp. 55-56, (p. 55).
[669] *ibid*
[670] Arthur Keysall Yapp, 'Difficulty. Opportunity', *The Red Triangle,* October 1924, pp. 287-290, (p. 287).
[671] Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain', *The Historical Journal* 50 (4), pp. 891-912, (p. 892).

guidance within a friendly space.[672] Moral guidance had always been a priority for the Association, yet its perpetuation after the war may have contributed to the slump in its support with a rejection of that which felt too paternalistic and puritanical. For a generation of men who had been subjected to the rules of the military, this rejection in favour of pure leisure makes sense, although little evidence is given of such overt reasoning.

Other hostels existed for a more specialised purpose. For example 61 Gower Street, London had 29 residents, who were all living with permanent injuries from the war. The YMCA described them as having been "broke in the wars", and aided them through teaching them handicrafts which it believed would 'keep themselves alive'.[673] The *Red Triangle* article's description of this work is very vague on what exactly was meant by keeping them 'alive', although from the range of activities – from accountancy to leather-working – it can be inferred that this meant both hobbies to keep their minds busy and training which would help them acquire a new occupation. This has already been discussed with the YMCA's commitment to manual training, but the hostels directly aimed at disabled ex-servicemen went further than this, providing recreations with which the unemployed could pass their time. Another example is the Pickwick Hut near the British Museum in London, which was described in the *Red Triangle* as a 'sad yet cheery place: sad because so many ex-service men, seeking work must use it; cheery, for the spirit of the voluntary lady workers who help the men to make the best'.[674] Another edition of the journal showed a photograph of ex-servicemen outside the hut, illustrating the range of injuries suffered by those who were using the hostel, including the loss of limbs. The YMCA's huts could, therefore, serve an important

[672] 'Difficulty. Opportunity', p. 288.
[673] 'Round Some London Hostels', *The Red Triangle,* February 1921, pp. 188-191, (p. 188).
[674] 'Round Some London Hostels', *The Red Triangle* February 1921, pp. 188-191, (p. 190).

purpose in the community and were cherished by many. In some communities they did become the social hub, yet this was not achieved on the scale that the YMCA had foreseen during the war and did not constitute a major movement in British society.

The final strand of the approach built on the hostels system to establish outdoor centres in Dorset, Surrey and Suffolk, with the ambition to provide opportunities for working-class men. The first, a farm in Woldingham, Surrey, was established in 1917, when the Association took it over to provide training in poultry farming for invalided soldiers.[675] Another in Suffolk soon followed. From their outset, it was clear that this was a trial of what a post-war YMCA could look like, expanding far beyond their pre-war urban priorities, to develop services to suit a new generation. Some centres also operated with a more specialised mission. For instance, in Kinson, Dorset a YMCA farm was established for ex-servicemen who were suffering from tuberculosis. This was made possible through grants from the Ministry of Pensions, indicating the level of support offered to the Association by the government following the war. This, even more than the government's backing of the employment bureau, is evidence of their active support for the YMCA's work through direct investment in its programmes. However, this funding was very soon determined to be insufficient and without it the project was unsustainable in the long term. In itself such establishments did not generate value for the charity and as resources diminished, it lost the ability to sustain such high-cost projects.

Interestingly, there is very little written in the YMCA's documents about the impact of its outdoor training work. The 'farm colony', as Kinson was referred to by the Association, was established as an 'experiment in the re-education of soldiers', yet the

675 'Increased YMCA Work', *The Times,* 23/08/1917, p. 9.

results of this study do not appear to have been drawn out.[676] This, in itself, could be indicative of the farm's lack of success and the fact that the YMCA were unable to roll out the model on a wider scale. Nowhere in either the *Red Triangle* journal or in the National Executive Committee's minutes is a more thorough analysis of this work given, indicating that it was only a minor area of the YMCA's work and not one that occupied much of the central organisation's attention. It is nonetheless an interesting example to note, as it represents the Association's desire to extend its provision beyond that which it had traditionally offered and a willingness to find novel ways to support particularly underprivileged men. The resulting closure of the outdoor centres, of which there had only been a few, does not necessarily suggest that the programme itself was a failure, but rather that the YMCA, whose main focus lay elsewhere, was not best-placed to operate such work. As Adrian Gregory has acknowledged, 'at the end of the war there were 6,000 charities for the war-disabled registered with the charity commissioners – almost one charity for every 100 disabled men'.[677] With this level of saturation in the market, it was sensible for the YMCA not to over-invest its limited resources in this area.

If the YMCA's motto at the Armistice had been "Behold, I make all things new", then by 1923 it was "be renewed in the spirit of your mind, putting on the new nature", at least according to the *Red Triangle*'s editorial.[678] Both phrases are biblical, with the first describing the peace and harmony of the new Creation as promised in Revelation 21. This paradise is then contrasted with the later phrase from Ephesians 4, which refocuses away from the rebirth of a new society, towards a personal and spiritual renewal. This transition is fitting for the shift in the YMCA's peacetime experience

[676] 'The Association's Farm Colony', *The Red Triangle,* March 1921, pp. 235-7, (p. 237).
[677] Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 265.
[678] 'The Association Outlook', *The Red Triangle,* January 1923, pp. 1-3, (p. 1).

which saw its initial optimism being reshaped within a few years to more of a consolidation of its effort. During the First World War the YMCA had become accustomed to a high level of support from across the echelons of society and had gained a momentum which it hoped it could continue into the peace years. However, it quickly became apparent that this new society would not materialise, with the YMCA's finances and decline in fundraising abilities soon curtailing the great ambitions of the Four Strand Approach.

For the YMCA this drop in support was most identifiable in the financial constraints which began to curtail the ambitious peace programme soon after its launch. The Four Strand Approach required half a million pounds in order to operate, yet the organisation was already overdrawn from its war work and found itself unable to raise such funds.[679] The YMCA's central committee admitted that in the months following the Armistice, 'the flow of subscriptions began to cease'.[680] Yapp interpreted the Association's situation as being that 'we are needed [for soldiers], but the public think the war is over'.[681] From this it can be understood that although the YMCA still identified the need to support soldiers, this recognition was no longer shared with the public who were turning away from the Association, measurably in the diminishment of financial support. The minutes of the National Executive Committee's meetings are filled with concern for the financial stability of the Association. In early 1921 the annual budget of the British organisation stood at £102,000 but this was to be reduced to £60,000 within the year.[682] Even this reduction was not enough and as of July 1923 the excess of expenditure over income in the first six months of the year stood at more than £24,000. The YMCA's Armistice optimism was quickly lost and Yapp was soon

[679] 'Notes of the Month', *The Red Triangle,* July 1919, pp. 407-408, (p. 408).
[680] 'Notes of the Month', *The Red Triangle,* October 1919, pp. 41-42, (p. 42).
[681] Arthur K Yapp, 'Notes of the Month', *The Red Triangle,* August 1919, pp. 445-447, (p. 446).
[682] 'Minutes of the Meeting of the National Executive Committee', 11/03/1921, CRL, YMCA/A151.

forced to insist that 'economy must be our watchword'.[683] It was considered that the true 'acid test' of the effectiveness of the Association's work would be in its ability to finance itself.[684] If this self-appointed measure, as published in the Association's journal, is to be used as the metric for their success, then it can be seen that the YMCA failed in its Peace Programme, given the rapid contraction of YMCA services throughout the early 1920s. Where new YMCAs were established, such as that in Nottingham, the local organising bodies were informed by the national executive that it would have to 'raise the sum of £50,000 for the development of its after-war work', without support being able to be offered from central office.[685] A house-to-house canvass was organised in Nottingham and in the initial period the money was raised. However, this is indicative of the constrictions on the YMCA's services which limited its post-war achievements. In a number of cases YMCA properties were closed and sold off. In February 1922 it was agreed that the Pickwick Hut in London would be sold for only £250.[686] The previous year this hut had been seen as an essential place for the support of ex-soldiers, yet it quickly became untenable, and seemingly was unsupported by Londoners as it could not sustain itself. A month later the Dug-Out centre in central Bristol closed, a symbolic moment in the move of the YMCA away from militarised establishments. While this transition makes sense in a nation that was moving into peacetime, it is also symptomatic of the Association's growing difficulty to maintain its programme of veteran support in the aftermath of the war.

In March 1921 Association worker JS Summers wrote of the difficulties associated with 'housing the fourfold programme' in the *Red Triangle*.[687] His conclusion was that 'the

[683] Arthur Keysall Yapp, 'Notes of the Month, *The Red Triangle,* August 1921, pp. 367-368, (p. 368).
[684] FJC, 'The Acid Test for Association Work', *The Red Triangle,* September 1920, pp. 3-4, (p. 3).
[685] '£50,000 wanted', The *Nottingham Evening Post,* 26/05/1919, p. 3.
[686] Minutes of the Meeting of the National Executive Committee, 10/02/1922.
[687] JS Summers, 'Housing the Fourfold Programme', *The Red Triangle,* March 1921, pp. 220-222, (p. 220).

difficult times in which we find ourselves', largely financially, 'are forcing on us a policy of consolidation rather than expansion', across the remit of YMCA services from recreation to religious work.[688] The National Executive confessed that both 1921 and 1922 had been years of 'holding on … from a financial point of view'.[689] This was far from the great hope with which the Association had envisaged the post-war years and demonstrates the years of transition in which the YMCA was forced to confront the limitations of its work and reshape itself accordingly. The Association was not alone in this. The 1920s, far from being a decade of regeneration, became a period of economic turmoil. Not only did the society of the early 1920s have to re-conceive its ideas of what post-war Britain would look like, removed from the idealistic dreaming of the war, but Britain as a nation also had to refind its place globally, amid a transformed world economy of which it was no longer the hegemon. Such a period of turmoil created severe limitations to which all areas of society had to respond and readjust. This is clearly evident in the changing nature of the YMCA's Peace Programme, as it transitioned from the promise of a New Jerusalem to a consolidated effort of spirit.

The most notable example of the YMCA's wartime optimism had been the Mildmay Training School in North London, opened in 1917 in order to provide up to a year's training for those wishing to become Association secretaries. This had been the great hope for the sustainability of the YMCA, which could make its work both more professional and more consistent across the country than it ever had been previously. KJ Saunders, one of the school's directors of studies, wrote on the importance of such a centre in October 1917, arguing that 'if the association is to rise to the opportunity before it of becoming a mighty religious force, it must have centres such as Mildmay

[688] ibid
[689] Minutes of the Meeting of the National Executive Committee, 08/12/1922, CRL YMCA/A151.

where men can study the practice of prayer and meditation.'[690] It appears somewhat of an overstatement to suggest that the only means of becoming a 'mighty religious force' was to have centres such as Mildmay, but nonetheless there is a clear significance in having a more formalised training structure, which could have enhanced professionalism and consistency across the Association. Basil Hewer, who was also involved in the training, wrote of the importance for such a programme in 'the days of reconstruction', highlighting the importance of the immediate post-war years on cultural formation.[691] Courses taught at the school included the 'association history, principles and methods', but also 'Bible study', 'social history', and 'practical psychology', demonstrating the Association's priorities for its secretaries and what it considered important for them to know.[692] Despite the ambition of this plan, on the third anniversary of the Armistice it was reported by the National Executive that these premises had been sold to the Salvation Army for the sum of £15,000.[693] Such an ambitious training scheme was unworkable in the post-war conditions of the Association and its closure can be seen as symbolic of the end of the enthusiasm with which the YMCA had celebrated the end of the war. The Four Strand Approach certainly aided a number of ex-soldiers in the post-war years, yet it was not enough to herald a new era of success for the YMCA which was quickly learning to temper its expectations of post-war society.

The Twelve Point Programme

In addition to its financial constraints, the YMCA also became increasingly concerned about the standing of the organisation in society, as it was quickly unable to sustain the level of support to which it had grown accustomed during the war. In a telling

[690] KJ Saunders, 'Mildmay', *The Red Triangle* October 1917, pp. 62-64, (p. 62).
[691] Basil Hewer, 'The Training of a YMCA Secretary', *The Red Triangle* March 1919, pp. 271-274, (p. 272).
[692] 'Our Platform – A 12-Point Programme', *The Red Triangle,* October 1919, p. 43.
[693] Minutes of the Meeting of the National Executive Committee, 11/11/1921, CRL, YMCA/A151.

article published by the YMCA in December 1920, Association worker George Chapman asked 'Is the YMCA Wanted Today?', worrying that 'with many the YMCA and the War is rapidly becoming but a memory'.[694] The Association, even in its own estimation, was failing to fulfil the potential it had envisaged at the end of 1918. It is also telling that Chapman linked the 'YMCA and the War' as together becoming a memory, indicating that the two were seen as intrinsically connected. Perhaps this is the root of many of the YMCA's post-war problems; that ex-servicemen were simply reminded of their military experience by the YMCA and did not see it as an Association that could benefit them in their civilian lives. Particularly for those from rural areas or for whom the YMCA had not played a role before 1914, they would not necessarily have felt the need for involvement with the Association as they resettled back into their home networks. During the transitional years of the 1920s the YMCA had to defend itself on a number of fronts in order to prove its value to society; its ability to compete with similar charities; its role in British Protestantism, and even its righteousness against Catholic criticism. This became for the YMCA a period where it both realised its standing in society and had to fight to conserve it, amid greater scrutiny than it had been subjected to in its prosperous years during the First World War.

Unveiling its focus for the new era, the YMCA published a 'Twelve Point Programme' in October 1919.[695] This list of twelve principles sought to continue the Association's good work, building upon its wartime experiences for the benefit of both the returning soldier and future generations. This supplemented the Four Strand Approach as

[694] George R Chapman, 'Is the YMCA Wanted Today?', The *Red Triangle,* December 1920, pp. 113-115, (p. 113).

[695] 'Our Platform – A 12-Point Programme', *The Red Triangle,* October 1919, p. 43.

instead of giving short-term pragmatic goals, it articulated the overarching principles which would guide all strands of its work. In brief, the 12 points are:

1. To serve as a 'communication trench' with the Churches
2. Serve men of all backgrounds
3. Be a unifying force between Churches and classes
4. Continue to work against intemperance and vice
5. Provide accommodation for those who need it
6. Serve 'every creed and nation' in the mission lands
7. Build on war work to serve all classes
8. The end goal is more important than any 'particular agency'
9. Provide sport and recreation to benefit physical health
10. Be a rallying centre for social service
11. Work for intellectual improvement of men
12. Continue 'leading them into the fellowship and service of the Churches'

Of particular interest here is the continued representation of the YMCA as a 'communication trench'. It did not seek to replace the organised churches, but instead to supplement them, to aid in bringing men towards the church and disseminating the teachings of Christianity. This was the means through which it saw itself as being able to provide a unifying role between the churches and classes (point 3), that could bring people together (point 7) and be a rallying centre (point 10). Through this wide net of service (point 2), they could continue the moral mission (point 4), provide necessary accommodation (point 5), and benefit physical and intellectual health through sport, recreation (point 9) and education (point 11). All of this would contribute to the end goal of leading the men 'into the fellowship and service of the Churches' (point 12).

While much of this is consistent with the YMCA's wartime mission, its recommitment to leading men into fellowship gave it a more explicit proselytising mission than it had had during the war. The YMCA's overall ambition during the war had been to lead men to the 'knowledge' of Christ, yet the 12 Points include a more direct goal of bringing them 'into the fellowship'.[696] This could be viewed simply as a rephrasing, yet it does suggest a refocusing on its proselytising aim, beyond the social service which preoccupied its wartime work. In its new post-crisis guise, the YMCA afforded itself a more explicitly religious approach which built upon its good works during the war. It was, after all, this extensive hut programme that had won it such acclaim and propelled the Association into the national consciousness. The 12 Point Programme simply aimed to consolidate this and motivate its work for the new era.

The optimism of the YMCA's programme of establishing Red Triangle Clubs across Britain was not entirely unfounded. The immediate post-war period saw a rise in rural associations and memberships for whom the new peace brought potential for expansion and development. Keith Grieves is among those to have investigated the club movement, noting the widespread establishment of village halls and local clubrooms, propelled by the Village Clubs Association which had been founded in June 1918.[697] Some of the stimulus for this he directly attributes to the 'hut culture' experienced by soldiers during the war, as organised by the YMCA, yet he does go on to acknowledge 'antagonistic sectional interests' hampered any of these trends from becoming national.[698] Jeremy Burchardt has also studied the village halls, arguing that they were conceived out of the post-war redirection of leisure away from the public

[696] Arthur Keysall Yapp, *The Romance of the Red Triangle,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), p. 235.
[697] Keith Grieves, 'Huts, Demobilisation and the Quest for an Associational Life in Rural Communities in England after the Great War', in Pierre Purseigle (ed.), *Warfare and Belligerence: Perspectives in First World War Studies,* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 243-264 (p. 244).
[698] Grieves, 'Huts, Demobilisation', pp. 245-246.

house.[699] For the YMCA this can clearly be seen as a success in their campaigning and influence of a club environment focused away from alcohol. Burchardt does credit the YMCA with having some influence, placing them alongside the Women's Institute (which had been founded in 1915) and the British Legion (not founded until 1921, and like the YMCA centred around veterans' work). However, the greatest influence Burchardt attributes to the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) which he describes as 'hostile' towards the individual organisations which built centres for their own use, rather than for a communal purpose.[700] This, like the argument of Grieves, places the YMCA as a contributing organisation, but not one that was at the centre of the village hall or post-war association trend. The extent of the YMCA's war work means that it must be seen as a catalyst for such a movement, yet it appears peripheral to the progress made in the early 1920s and is not emphasised in any of the literature in this area.

Grieves has acknowledged the importance of the YMCA as an undenominational organisation which could work across local communities, yet Burchardt has placed a greater emphasis on the need for 'secular' spaces, removed of connotations of religion.[701] This argument certainly carries weight, yet in itself cannot fully explain the YMCA's limitations as new religiously-motivated organisations were being developed in this same period. This will be seen with the example of Toc H, whose work was also conceived in wartime along ecumenical and social lines. Moreover, the immediate aftermath of the war did not see a dramatic shift towards secularisation, with Callum Brown arguing both that there 'was significant growth in the statistical indicators of religiosity', and that 'the inter-war years were when British Christianity became like

[699] Jeremy Burchardt, 'Reconstructing the Rural Community: Village Halls and the National Council of Social Service, 1919-1939', *Rural History* 10 (2) (1999), pp. 193-216, (p. 193).
[700] Burchardt, 'Reconstructing the Rural Community', p. 199.
[701] Grieves, 'Huts, Demobilisation', p. 256; Burchardt, 'Reconstructing the Rural Community', p. 213.

an old sofa – relaxing, unpretentious and less demanding on the user'.[702] This suggests that there was certainly a transition in the role played by Christianity in society, but not one that made it any less significant in daily life. Religion remained an influencing force, which retained an important role in shaping morality and community. For the YMCA, the explanation of religion in such comforting terms would have been viewed as a success. However, the persistence of the Christian influence did not mean that the YMCA could continue with unfettered success. Grieves has presented the YMCA's predicament as being one between a rock and a hard place: on the one hand, it did not fit with the open, non-religious and non-organised space of the village hall, while on the other, 'church people often feared their impact on denominational life'.[703] As such, the Red Triangle Club had a role to play, but it came into competition on both sides of its social and Christian work, and particularly when viewed in the small rural communities where resources and audiences were limited, the extent of the YMCA's potential itself became reduced.

Similar pressure was exerted against the YMCA from the very returned soldiers who constituted the organisation's primary audience. Throughout the war the YMCA believed, with good reason, that it was 'beloved by all soldiers', as Association worker Charles E Clift understood it to be, arguing in 1917 that 'it will be a household term amongst working men long after this war is over'.[704] Such a sentiment was widespread across the Association, which received positive reinforcement of this perspective throughout the war. However, this changed in the early peace years, with a shift among veterans away from their wartime identities as they reintegrated into civilian life. The

[702] Callum G Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain,* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), pp. 138-139.
[703] Grieves, 'Huts, Demobilisation and the Quest', p. 256.
[704] Charles E Clift, 'The Working Boy and the Red Triangle Club', *The Red Triangle* September 1917, pp. 17-20, (p. 17).

military association of the YMCA within the minds of men can therefore be seen as contributing to its post-war weakness. As Adrian Gregory has identified in the comparable case of the British Legion, less than 10 percent of British war veterans joined the organisation when it was formed, most likely owing to the fact 'it was too reminiscent of the army'. [705] The YMCA had re-stratified itself for the post-war era through both the Four Strand Approach and the 12 Point Programme, yet in the minds of many "the sign of the Red Triangle" would have indicated a continuity with war work, which many simply wished to move on from following demobilisation. This continual reminder of the YMCA's association with the war can be seen in the news articles which discuss its opening of the post-war Red Triangle Clubs. For example, the Cheltenham YMCA was opened in 1921 by Sir William Robertson, who had served as Chief of the Imperial General Staff from 1916-1918. Such a high-profile military figure certainly gave a ringing endorsement of the Association's work, yet this was necessarily militaristic, focussed on its success in the war. His speech focused on 'what the Association did for our troops in the Great War' and 'the cheerfulness and confidence of the men at the front' as a result of their work.[706] He evidently commended the Association, yet reinforced the connection between the war and the YMCA, restricting its ability to move forward with its work. The YMCA was, to some extent, aware of this. In a *Red Triangle* article, an unnamed writer warned that there 'is a danger of being satisfied with past achievements', while 'true success' can only come from 'pressing ever forward towards the goal'.[707] However, this was far more easily stated in theory than in practice, with the YMCA unable to remove itself from the connotations of its war work.

[705] Adrian Gregory, 'Peculiarities of the English? War, Violence and Politics, 1900-1939', *Journal of Modern European History* 1 (1) (2003), pp. 44-59, (pp. 51-52).
[706] 'The Work of the YMCA', *Gloucester Citizen* 07/12/1921, p. 5.
[707] 'The Present Day Need for the Association', *The Red Triangle,* p. 17.

In analysing the position of the YMCA in the post-war years, each of the suggested trends appear to have been counteracted by the comparative example of Toc H. The Toc H movement developed out of the work led by the Rev. Philip 'Tubby' Clayton at Talbot House in Poperinghe. During the First World War the House had run alongside the YMCA, working as complementary organisations for the benefit of social religion. Following the Armistice, Clayton developed the House's principles into the Toc H movement, seeking for it to become a living memorial to the war. As Toc H historian Linda Parker has investigated, the movement sought continuity with the themes of wartime social religion 'stressing the informality and Christian fellowship' that had been so cherished in Talbot House.[708] Callum Brown argues that the Toc H movement was 'based on principles of friendship, service, fair-mindedness and the Kingdom of God', which is much the same as the governing principles of the YMCA, especially as it was also 'a distinctly male site for religion that tapped into the complex emotions that combat enabled.'[709] It therefore seems incongruous that Toc H saw the interwar period as one of strong growth, while the similarly motivated YMCA comparatively faltered. Toc H was able to celebrate 1,000 branches during the 1930s, up from the original 70 branches in 1921, a period by which many of the YMCA's principal buildings had closed.[710] Moreover, Toc H rose to prominence, celebrating endorsements from the establishment in much the same way as the YMCA had during the war. This is in part because the organisation was conceived by Clayton alongside the Anglican bishop Neville Talbot, who was able to use connections from throughout the Church of England to support their work. There is no direct reason for why such

[708] Linda Parker, 'A Living Memorial – The Toc H Movement and Talbot House', in Frank Jacob and Kenneth Pearl (eds.), *War and Memorials: The Age of Nationalism and the Great War,* (Leiden: Brill Group, 2019), pp. 209-228, (p. 212).
[709] Callum G Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain,* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), p. 126.
[710] i*bid*

attention moved away from the YMCA and towards organisations like Toc H, but it can be suggested that this came from a gradual shift in charitable concerns following the war, in which prominent patrons moved on to support new bodies, Toc H and the Royal British Legion among them.

Interestingly, the former YMCA secretary Barclay Baron moved over to work for Toc H, run by his university friend Tubby Clayton, and in so doing effectively turned his back on the YMCA. He commented in his war memoir that 'I do not know the YMCA in peacetime. I have seldom even entered its doors, and then never without a welcome', demonstrating the distance between him and his old Association.[711] Baron offers us no elaboration of why this was, although Michael Snape has suggested in the introduction to Baron's edited memoir that it was likely Baron was drawn to the 'more comfortably Anglican and fraternal organisation' of Toc H and turned away from the more 'Free Church' YMCA which was also 'perhaps too tainted by commerce for his liking'.[712] This is speculation on Snape's part as Baron does not specify his exact reasoning, although it is likely that Snape is correct. Baron was a committed Anglican and had long been involved in the same religious circles as Clayton and the other initiators of Toc H, particularly the Oxford Bermondsey Mission, so it does follow that he would want to work with them in an organisation that shared their religious and social ideals. Parker argues that Clayton used 'his influential connection to the church, army and political establishments to promote the cause of Toc H', helping generate the movement's success.[713] With these pieces of evidence considered together, the success of the Toc H movement is therefore attributed to the societal connections of its leadership, in addition to the novelty of the organisation as starting fresh after the war. In this way

[711] Baron, 'Memoirs', p. 158.
[712] Michael Snape, 'Introduction', in Michael Snape (ed.), *The Back Parts of War,* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), pp. 3-100, p. 11.
[713] Parker, 'A Living Memorial', p. 223.

it was able to develop a renewed identity for the post-war era, which sustained it for the coming decades. However, comparisons between the two organisations do suffer from the perspective of momentum. While the 1920s saw great growth for Toc H, this was working from a very small base. The opposite is true of the YMCA, which entered the peace years at the peak of popularity from which some contraction was more or less inevitable, despite the value of the twelve-point programme.

Simultaneously, while the YMCA was struggling to maintain its momentum, it also began to face wider criticism than it had during the war. A *Red Triangle* Journal editorial of October 1919 admitted that not only had donations decreased, causing 'work at home and overseas' to become 'more costly and more difficult', but also criticism of the YMCA's work was becoming 'more pronounced' while their 'reserves were diminishing'.[714] This piece focuses on the financial ramifications of the loss of support, yet it clearly indicates the pressure under which this criticism was placing the YMCA's central organisation. One of the most notable criticisms came from the Bishop of Swansea, Edward Bevan, in March 1919. Bevan wrote to *The Times* complaining of the 'contrast between these idealised pictures' the YMCA had presented of the aims of its work, and the 'actual experience of the methods of the Red Triangle', complaining of its 'lamentable waste of money'.[715] The root of his criticism stemmed from the cost of such work which he considered to be higher than necessary, and its desire to build a Red Triangle Club on every village green in England to be anti-competitive. As has already been discussed, this fear was in vain as the YMCA could never have achieved that level of success, and never truly set out to, yet the sentiment of his criticism is nonetheless valid. After an exchange of public letters with the YMCA's General

[714] Arthur Keysall Yapp, 'Notes of the Month', The *Red Triangle,* October 1919, pp. 41-42, (p. 42).
[715] Edward L. Swansea, 'The Red Triangle', *The Times,* 29/03/1919, p. 7.

Secretary Yapp and novelist-turned Association supporter John Oxenham, Bevan did admit to the value of the 'great organisation', largely based on its war work.[716] But this acknowledgement in itself was part of the problem. It harked back to the recent history of the YMCA's war work and not to their upcoming Peace Programme, thereby further illustrating the difficulty with which the Association attempted to transition towards the post-war world. What Bevan's public criticism demonstrates is that despite the value generated by the YMCA's work, its means of achieving this was not universally appreciated. This could be connected, although not directly, with the departure of key YMCA figures like Baron to other organisations which similarly sought to support social religion but within a different organisational structure.

Without the emergency circumstances of the war, criticisms increased as society re-adapted to peace time, threatening to undermine the co-operation that had developed in conflict. In the initial post-war years there had been hope that this would be sustained. British Protestant rhetoric increasingly focused on the prospect of church unity and the potentiality of greater co-ordination between British denominations. Paul Avis has described how 'conversations' on such matters 'between the Church of England and the Free Churches ran from 1921 to 1925', with 'local ecumenism' often serving as 'the engine of Christian unity'.[717] Although this is not noted by Avis, the work of the YMCA can here be seen as influential, serving as one of the driving forces of ecumenism during the war. It was generally recognised that the war had seen an increase in inter-denominationalism and many Christian figures hoped this could be fostered in the post-war years. Some of this was motivated by an increasing secularisation, with Ross McKibbin arguing that 'the notion that the various Free

[716] Edward L. Swansea, 'The YMCA: Notes on the Commission', *The Times,* 24/05/1919, p. 8.
[717] Paul Avis, 'Anglicanism and Christian Unity in the Twentieth Century', in Jeremy Morris (ed.), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism Volume IV: Global Western Anglicanism, c. 1910-Present,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 186-213, (ps. 196 and 211).

Churches should compete for the same dwindling flock' seeming 'less defensible' after the war.[718] An element of this was certainly the case, yet as previously discussed Peter Catterall presents a convincing argument against 'ecumenism as a defensive response to decline' on the basis that this was not enough to break down sectarian differences, but rather puts the emphasis on the 'erosion' of 'social exclusivities' in this period.[719] The evidence of the YMCA certainly supports his stance, through its demonstration of the commonalities of particularly Protestant faith during the war, and of social connection overcoming theological discrepancies.

The YMCA took the moves towards unity as validation of its wartime mission, arguing that it 'is a welcome, if not altogether unexpected, endorsement of the main purpose for which the Association was founded', especially in the context of the 1920 Lambeth Conference.[720] However, as already seen in the ecumenism chapter, these efforts could not be sustained into the following decade. In a similar experience to that of the YMCA, this optimism for development and growth was not sustained, with 'ecumenical discussions', as Brian Stanley argues, waning by the mid-1920s.[721] This was certainly not a complete collapse of inter-denominational work, but did mark the end of the wartime impulse to co-operate as other influences took priority and attention.

Wartime alliances also seemingly broke down in the post-war world, with divisions between the inter-denominational YMCA and the Catholic Church raising their head. This came to the fore on 23rd December 1920 when the Pope issued a decree directly opposing the work of the YMCA for 'corrupting the faith of youths' on the basis that

[718] Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 284.
[719] Peter Catterall, 'Church Decline, Secularism and Ecumenism', *Contemporary Record* 5 (2) (1991), pp. 276-290.
[720] 'The Lambeth Encyclical Letter and the YMCA', *The Red Triangle* September 1920, pp. 7-8, (p. 7).
[721] Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 130.

they 'instil indifferentism and apostasy to the Catholic religion in the minds of their adherents'.[722] In many regards, the decree was not incorrect: the YMCA did seek to avoid denominational differences, and was opposed to the prioritisation of the Catholic Church over all others. Yet the decree went further than this, recalling 'clauses of canon law which forbid papers, periodicals, and organisations favouring religious rationalism and indifferentism'.[723] This was in turn picked up by Catholic representatives who condemned YMCA work further. Bishop Fallon of London, Ontario labelled the Association 'another sect of the Protestant heresy'.[724] The YMCA was Protestant in character, even if not in definition, with Catholic involvement only being marginal during the war. Despite what was alleged in the Catholic criticism, the association did not see itself as replacing the organised churches, but rather working as a "communication trench" between them. The YMCA throughout, and after, the war made continual statements welcoming Catholics into their work, but this in itself is indicative of a lack of integration in which it felt it necessary to restate their inclusion in a way they didn't for any other denomination. Even after the Pope's intervention, the YMCA clarified that 'members of the Roman Catholic Church in our national fields are regarded in the same way as the members of other Christian confessions, and no barriers are erected by the YMCA to prevent the fullest co-operation in the work of the Association on the part of the Roman Catholic who accept its basis and principles'.[725] The timing of the Pope's decree is interesting, with no official objection to the YMCA's work being made during the war, but rather in its aftermath when the Association had expanded. This indicates that the post-war years saw a resurgence in denominational disruption that had been put on hold during the conflict, yet was nothing particularly

[722] 'Pope's Censure of the YMCA', *The Times,* 24/12/1920, p. 10.
[723] *ibid*
[724] MF Fallon, 'A Statement on the YMCA', undated, CRL, YMCA/L66.
[725] Minutes of the National Executive Committee, 13/05/1921, CRL, YMCA/A151.

novel for the YMCA, which had never been able to fully involve the Catholic Church in its work.

Conclusion

Contrastingly, the post-war period did see the YMCA consolidate its gains internationally. The most notable indication of this was the 1933 opening of the new YMCA in Jerusalem, an impressive hotel, dominated by its Jesus Tower, which at the time was the highest in the city. Plans for the new Jerusalem hotel had begun as early as 1920, when the *Red Triangle* published Dr AC Harte's plan for 'a memorial tower surmounted by a golden dome. In this tower would be placed the name of every YMCA man of every country, every creed and clime who gave his life in the great war'.[726] The grand scale of the building is indicative of the Association's success in the region and the level of its reputation. This has been studied by Inbal Ben-Asher Gitler who hailed the building as one of the YMCA's 'most impressive projects' that had 'superb architectural and artistic qualities'.[727] The hotel was largely funded by the American branch of the YMCA and was designed by the American architect Arthur Loomis Harmon, who around the same time was also involved in the architecture of the Empire State Building in New York. It can therefore be suggested that the Jerusalem YMCA was a symbol of the new Western influence on Palestine, yet at the same time it was planned, as Gitler has described, as a 'grand multi-cultural centre with a visuality expressing a space and place for Judaism and Islam'.[728] It was for this reason that the structure was given three main arches: one for each of the monotheistic faiths. As a Christian organisation it goes without saying that Christianity was given priority, yet the building's very design demonstrates the Association's non-proselytising stance

[726] FW Coffey, 'YMCA Openings in Palestine', *The Red Triangle* December 1920, pp. 107-108, (p. 107).
[727] Inbal Ben-Asher Gitler, 'Reconstructing Religions: Jewish Place and Space in the Jerusalem YMCA Building, 1919-1933', *Zeitschrift fur Religions – und Geistesgeschichte* 60 (1) (2008), pp. 41-62, (ps. 41 and 42).
[728] Gitler, 'Reconstructing Religions', p. 46.

to encompass the commonalities of the three religions. Engraved on the building are the three phrases, Jewish, Christian and Muslim, 'The Lord our God the Lord is One', 'I am the way', and 'there is no God but God'.

Field Marshal Edmund Allenby inaugurated the building in 1933, connecting it directly to the city's war history, in which Allenby had led the capture of the Holy City in 1917, ceremoniously entering its walls on foot through the Jaffa Gate, less than a mile away from the YMCA. He hailed it as an 'international monument of Peace and Brotherhood', a mark of what the YMCA was seen to represent internationally.[729] It was far from unusual for Allenby to be unveiling a memorial – Justin Fantauzzo has argued that he 'had participated near continuously' in such events throughout the inter-war years – yet this one was of particular poignance given his connection to the Holy City.[730] His speech at the unveiling had focused on 'life beyond the tomb' and 'called for a 'New Jerusalem' as a space of inter-ethnic and inter-faith collaboration'.[731] His use of religious language, blending with the current political situation of Jerusalem was typical of the war, as Fantauzzo has elsewhere argued.[732] For the city, recently relieved of the Ottoman Empire's control, there was a feeling of a new dawn and new opportunity, felt even more strongly than the war's victory in Britain. Peace became the priority, represented in the religious harmony the YMCA sought to symbolise. While by the early 1930s, the YMCA was struggling to maintain momentum and support on the home front in Britain, such international symbols gave it hope for the future, not only in its social mission but also in its religious: that it would be able to

[729] Gitler, 'Reconstructing Religions' (p. 45).
[730] Justin Fantauzzo, 'Dead Sea Fruit: Edmund Allenby, the First World War and the Politics of Personal Loss', *First World War Studies* 7 (3) (2016), pp. 287-302, (p. 293).
[731] Fantuazzo, 'Dead Sea Fruit', p. 296.
[732] Justin Fantauzzo, 'The Finest Feats of War? The Captures of Baghdad and Jerusalem during the First World War and Public Opinion throughout the British Empire', *War in History* 24 (2017), pp. 64-86, (p. 70).

represent Christianity on the world stage, and especially here in the heart of world religion.

The transition to peace was neither easy or straightforward for the YMCA. It applied its great organisational structure which had worked so well during the war, developing central policies including the four-strand approach and the twelve-point programme. These offered a centrality of mission that could motivate organisers to continue work and to develop new Red Triangle Clubs among communities across Britain. However, with the economic challenges of the 1920s and servicemen's desires to return to their normal civilian lives, the YMCA encountered challenges and limitations that ultimately resulted in a decline in its operations. It is unsurprising that its greatest post-war successes came in conflict-related provisions, from the war graves visitation schemes to the employment bureaus, where its mission was clear and it fulfilled apparent needs in society.

Conclusion

The pessimism of the YMCA's experience in the 1920s threatens to undermine the impact made by the Association during the First World War. The optimism of its War Emergency Committee's development from the early days of conflict saw it develop a comprehensive system of support for soldiers that cared for their whole being in mind, body, and spirit. Such a holistic programme was unprecedented, providing a vital role in the sustenance of both morale and religion. It is even more significant that this was developed by an independent charity, funded through public donations, and reliant on co-operation with military authorities. The remarkable achievements of the YMCA transformed the wartime experiences of millions of soldiers, providing them with a place to worship, to rest and to socialise, along with the reassurance of the constant line of support.

A testament to the success of the YMCA's hutwork, even more so than the many complimentary letters written to the Association by commanders, was the establishment of the Navy, Army, and Air Force Institutes (NAAFI) in December 1920. Although the Army had operated Expeditionary Force Canteens during the First World War (there had been one in Poperinghe), the NAAFI significantly expanded this provision and was the British Government's recognition of the need for such recreational and refreshments spaces in military operations. Its establishment formalised the provision of hutwork and by bringing it within the official military structure meant that it was no longer dependent on donations for its maintenance. At the outbreak of the Second World War the NAAFI expanded to incorporate the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) on the initiative of actor and producer Basil Dean to provide a full scheme of theatrical and musical entertainments for servicemen, just as the YMCA had pioneered.

The NAAFI and ENSA were descendants of the YMCA's First World War innovation, an argument reinforced by the fact that Lena Ashwell operated ENSA's musical plays section.[733] Her concert parties had been a much-celebrated part of the YMCA's hut provision and her ingenuity on this early scheme proved that it was possible to send civilians to the rear lines of the war zone to entertain the men. The official organisations may have been derided by soldiers to stand for 'No Ambition and Fuck-All Interest' and 'Every Night Something Awful', yet these nicknames are typical of soldier humour, indicating the endearing role they played in the entertainments landscape of Second World War military service.[734] They are an endorsement of the style of entertainments fostered by the YMCA and a demonstration of the ever-present need among servicemen for recreation from the strain of war that provided them with escapism and camaraderie. Although it may be a stretch to argue that none of this would have been possible without the example of the YMCA, the Association played a vital role in the development of military entertainment that supported millions of men throughout both world wars and was crucial in the development of twentieth century musical and theatrical culture in Britain.

However, it has been the argument of this thesis that secular support for morale was only one part of the YMCA's provision and studied in singularity, this neglects the deeper ambitions of the Association to provide soldiers with faith support and an understanding of the value of Christian morality. These formalised entertainment schemes were not replacements for the Association, but rather can be seen as an expansion of its social service. The YMCA itself continued into the Second World War

[733] Andy Merrimen, *Greasepaint and Cordite: How ENSA Entertained the Troops during World War II,* (London: Aurum Press, 2013), p. 13.
[734] Richard Holmes, 'NAAFI', in *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) Retrieved 7 Aug. 2022, from https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2460/view/10.1093/acref/9780198606963.001.0001/acref-9780198606963-e-879; Merriman, *Greasepaint and Cordite,* p. 278.

with a new emergency war programme, which saw it reinstate its continuous care, albeit through new approaches. The YMCA was there in training, there in Egypt, and there on the beaches of the Dunkirk evacuation.[735] The scheme was given official accreditation by the Council of Voluntary War Work which, Michael Snape argues, ensured that voluntary efforts were distributed to where they were needed without overlap or conflict.[736] Through this co-ordination, the YMCA once again ran a programme of refreshment, worship, education and entertainment alongside its old colleagues including the Salvation Army, Church Army and Toc H. Given the greater mobility of the battle fronts, and utilising greater technological advancements than had been possible during the 1917 Palestine Campaign, the YMCA's Second World War programme was characterised by motorised canteens that could move with the men wherever they were needed, continuing the vital support the Association devised throughout the First World War. The legacy of this work extends throughout the twentieth century, such as with the Corrymeela Community who sought interdenominational reconciliation during the Northern Ireland troubles, founded by Second World War YMCA worker Ray Davey.

Much of the First World War can be described as unprecedented. At the root of much of this was the scale of the conflict which drew in more personnel across more parts of the world than any previous war. The origins of total war are contested, but the period from 1914 to 1918 was the largest war ever fought by Britain and its Empire up until this point and forced a greater transformation of British society than any before. The YMCA similarly underwent a profound transition from its pre-war work in the urban missions to establish a hut network that sustained soldiers throughout the war. In so

[735] https://www.ymca.org.uk/about/history-heritage/ymca-and-ww2
[736] Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars,* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 222.

doing, the Association was able to develop a social care that inspired Christian morality and motivated self-improvement among the men. In bringing together a holistic emphasis on the mind, body, and spirit of soldiers, the YMCA worked as a reminder of home, a sustainer of morale, and a reassurance of the Christian mission to be and do good. This 'gospel in action' held the needs of the soldier at its core, offering a perspective on life and faith that was relational to their needs and relevant to their war experience.

Although the YMCA was not alone in its support for soldiers' faith and morale, it held a unique position which enabled it to become the largest network of its kind. The ecumenism of its work, coupled with its commitment to non-proselytisation, enabled it to be both broad-based and broad-minded, welcoming in men from across the British Empire, whether they were Congregationalist, Anglican, or even Muslim, and equally offering the same level of support. For this reason, it is difficult to imagine a First World War without the YMCA and without its Red Triangle signal of welcome comfort. Efforts of those like Tubby Clayton at Talbot House may have also been able to deliver the magic of social ministry, but none did to such an extent as Sir Arthur Keysall Yapp, knighted for this very work. Through relentless work generating funding and fostering connections, grappling challenges both logistical and authoritative, the YMCA sustained the faith and morale of an empire, from outbreak to victory and beyond. One cup of tea at a time.

Appendix

In support of this thesis I have created an interactive map, detailing the locations of more than 1,300 YMCA huts, hostels, and other establishments from throughout the First World War. It brings together archival information from a broad range of sources to produce the most extensive available list of YMCA locations. It cannot claim to be comprehensive, and due to limited documentation, some locations are only approximate, yet it does demonstrate the breadth of the YMCA's work across five continents in the First World War.

The full introduction to the mapping process is available at this link:
https://www.kathrynshistoryblog.com/2020/02/ymca-world-map.html

The full, interactive map is available here:
https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1saV6vU791KG94xZPFa2sficMrminMKxW&usp=sharing

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