

**The Children's War: British children's experience
of the Great War**

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Submitted for the award of PhD.



Abstract

The First World War placed children at the heart of the debate about Britain's future. In the face of the enormous destruction of human life and the sacrifice of the economy to the needs of war, children held the promise of a brighter future. Britain was looking not just to rebuild what it had lost but to rebuild a Britain better than it had been before. Children were seen as the key to that process of reconstruction.

To prepare them for the task children needed to understand the sacrifices that had been made for them and the importance of accepting their role as responsible citizens of the future. The ways war was represented to children through the school curriculum, their participation in school/youth organisations, and the production of toys and games highlight the way adults felt this could be achieved. Teachers and youth group leaders harnessed children's genuine interest in the war to teach them lessons at school and give them practical examples of the desired characteristics of obedience and self-sacrifice that would help Britain win the war and maintain its Empire in the future.

Children were surrounded by the war everyday, at home, at school and in their youth groups. They read about it in books, magazines and newspapers, studied it at school and re-enacted it in their private games. The separation from fathers and brothers, when they volunteered or were conscripted to fight, meant that the wider international conflict took on a personal significance, endangering the men these children loved. Children's experience explored through memory, personal documents, institutional experience and play, shows the diversity of children's response to war and the significance of war in the context of their lives. Children struggled to make sense of the war by combining what they learnt from adults with what they came to understand about it for themselves.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Department of History at Goldsmiths for granting me a bursary during the course of this research and thank the staff of the department for all their advice and encouragement. I received great help from the staff of several libraries and archives and I would particularly like to acknowledge the assistance of the archivists at the individual schools I visited who allowed me to use their collections.

This research would not have been possible without the support and encouragement I received from my supervisor Sally Alexander, and I would like to thank her for all her patient and wise advice.

I thank my family and my husband Ben in more ways than I can express.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The first European war in the 'Century of the Child' propelled children in Britain to the forefront of national debate and touched them personally on a scale never before imagined.¹ In the face of the enormous destruction of human life and the sacrifice of the economy to the needs of war, children came to be seen as the precious promise of a brighter future. The declining birth rate and fears over national efficiency in the years immediately preceding the war had provoked research and legislation designed to promote the health and welfare of Britain's future imperial leaders and workers. Now the enormous uncertainty and upheaval on the home front and the unparalleled level of carnage abroad, meant that the country was looking not merely to rebuild what it had lost, but to rebuild a Britain better than she had been before. Children were seen as the key to that success and the Reconstruction Committee of the Coalition Government considered everything from children's health and education to their job prospects and moral development.

But the war affected children not only in terms of legislation. Children experienced the pain of fear and loss just as the adults around them did. Four years of hardship, separation, uncertainty and grief took their toll on children too. It affected everything from their relationships with their parents to their experience of schooling and helped shape their memories of their childhood years. An exploration of the experience of children provides the possibility of understanding more about how British society saw itself, its children, and its future development at this pivotal moment in modern history.

The Great War coincided with, and encouraged, the development of a new and exciting conception of the child in Britain. Eighteenth century Rosseauian ideas about the 'naturalness' of childhood and the innocence of children were being complemented by a growing understanding on the part of psychologists, psychoanalysts and the medical profession of children's particular physical and mental development.² From the 1880s onwards, groups like the Childhood

¹ Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London: 1995) p 163.

² *Ibid.* pp 165-69.

Society and the Child Study Association, had been promoting the study of young children in an attempt to gain ' greater insight into child nature and securing more scientific methods of training the young.'³ For the relatively new discipline of psychology the study of childhood represented a significant opportunity for the professionalisation of the field. Psychologists were able to carve out a niche for themselves measuring and categorising children in schools that, in turn, offered the possibility that the scientific approach might elevate the status of the teaching profession.⁴

The influence of educational psychology on work in schools was in the development of child-centred teaching methods that were based around the discipline's understanding of child-nature. Old methods of instruction were abandoned in favour of new techniques based on the work of Froebel, Pestalozzi and others, that encouraged children to discover learning for themselves rather than having it imposed on them by adults. The physical environment of the child was also increasingly recognised as significant to their learning potential. Influential Independent Labour Party pioneer Margaret McMillan was key to the spread of this idea as she worked with, and wrote about, children transformed in health and well being by spending time at her open-air school camp in Deptford (opened in 1910).⁵

McMillan, an established campaigner on child welfare issues, used her skill as an orator and writer for the Labour press to advertise scientific knowledge about child health and development, by personifying it in fictional working-class children. Her work supported the findings of the 1904 Report of the Physical Deterioration Committee, which had been set up in response to fears over national efficiency prompted by Britain's poor performance in the South African War (1899-1902). The report was significant as it rejected the then popular eugenicists' view, which argued that degenerative stock was responsible for the perceived physical deterioration of the race. Instead it put forward a more

³ Hugh Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor - Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: 1991) p 198.

⁴ Ibid. p 199.

⁵ Carolyn Steedman, "Bodies, Figures and Physiology - Margaret Mcmillan and the Late Nineteenth-Century Remaking of Working-Class Childhood," in *In the Name of the Child - Health and Welfare, 1880-1940*, ed. Roger Cooter (London: 1992).

optimistic neo-hygienist view, which stressed that improvements could be made if attention was paid to the diet, health and hygiene of young people.⁶

The welfare legislation of the Liberal government after their 1906 election victory was in part a recognition of this view. The 1906 Education (Provision of School Meals) Act and the 1907 Education (Administrative Provisions) Act, provided for the feeding and medical inspection of school children, making the state partially responsible for the health and welfare of the nation's children. The 1908 Children Act was concerned variously with everything from the prevention of cruelty to children and young persons, juvenile smoking, reformatory and industrial schools, and the establishment of a separate system of courts to deal with juvenile offenders. Its significance was the public emphasis it placed on children's rights, representing:

a belief, incomprehensible to earlier generations, that children are citizens who have social rights independent of their parents, rights which the State has a duty to protect.⁷

So then, the outbreak of war in 1914 occurred at a time when State and professional interest in children had never been higher. Children were seen as both the problem and the solution for the strength and security of the British Empire. The war reinforced this vision, but with an added urgency that placed children at the heart of a national desire to both physically and psychologically repair the damage of war. It was hoped to replace the 'lost generation' with a happier, healthier, better-educated new generation, ready and willing to rebuild a stronger Britain.

For children themselves the war meant something different. It was at times the cause of both great grief and great excitement. It could mean the separation for years at a time from dearly loved fathers and brothers, or the opportunity to play an active role in helping the war effort through work as a Boy Scout or Girl Guide. It meant changes to life at home and at school, some welcomed and others

⁶ Harry Hendrick, "Child Labour, Medical Capital and the School Medical Service, 1890-1918," in *In the Name of the Child - Health and Welfare, 1880-1940*, ed. Roger Cooter (London: 1992).

⁷ Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, *Children in English Society Vol II - from the Eighteenth Century to the Children Act 1948* (London: 1973) p 637.

much resented. It provided new inspiration for everything from schoolwork to private fantasy. Some children followed the events of war closely, most had some personal connection in the form of a friend or relative caught up in the fighting.

The experience of the children therefore is a major focus in this thesis. Their experience is reconstructed as far as possible through personal testimony. Using their own words, both those written at the time in letters sent to friends and relatives, and those set down later in autobiography, we can attempt to understand how children made sense of the war around them. Their contemporary writing tells us that children accepted the war into their own lives through their relationships with men fighting abroad. Confronted with the separation from fathers and brothers children had no choice but to engage with the events and circumstances of war if they were to find any common ground on which to build a relationship with their absent relatives. For most this posed few problems, as fathers tried hard to make their war accessible to their children, who in turn were also becoming familiar with it through lessons at school and in the books they read and games they played. This childhood understanding of war becomes strengthened and altered when we consider children's experience reconstructed through autobiography. There we can access memories mediated by time and life experience, where the author attempts to recall their childhood but is forced to see it through adult eyes. This allows us to both glimpse the children's war, what excited and frightened them, what upset them, and what they did not understand, while at the same time suggesting ways in which those experiences shaped the individual telling the story. This then becomes both a history of individuals and a history of collective experience; there are themes common to autobiographers who remember similar feelings but interpret them differently just as there are amongst correspondents who allow the war into their letters.

Childhood, Memory and History

Arthur Marwick in the second edition of his influential *The Deluge* (1965/1991), a study of British society during the First World War, speculated on what aspects of the First World War researchers of the future might chose to investigate. He considers children and writes:

There is, I flatter myself, some logic in the notions of working-class, or female participation in war, but what about children? Can one talk of children's 'participation' in the war effort? - most children, some children? What exactly does happen to them? What, with respect to children, would constitute 'gains'?⁸

In *The Deluge* Marwick is concerned with the civilian population's participation in the war and the way in which he believes that participation led to the various economic and political gains that sections of British society, notably women and the working classes experienced. This thesis does not attempt to apply Marwick's reasoning to the situation of children during the war but his questions are still relevant. I *will* be talking of children's participation in the war, through both their active participation (cultivating allotments, sounding air-raids, saving war bonds and joining the Guides and Scouts for instance), and also through their participation as consumers of the media and as students of a wartime education. However it is not so much any 'gains' that children made, but rather the experience of growing up during the war itself and what that came to mean for the children concerned that is of interest to me.

The Deluge is typical of most social histories of Britain during the war in the way that it considers children. Marwick discusses the curtailment of school medical services after 1916, and wartime changes in the laws governing school attendance. Inconsistencies between the age children were required to attend school until (which varied from 11 to 13 depending on local legislation) and the child employment laws that allowed children to leave school or attend part-time if undertaking work of national importance leads Marwick to say

⁸ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge - British Society and the First World War*, 2nd ed. (London: 1991) p 43.

Even the total amount of the bare and inadequate instruction which was the main business of the existing elementary structure was allowed to fall away in face of demands that the national cause required the physical services of children rather than the development of their minds.⁹

It was often the same local magistrates, Marwick points out, who suspended the school attendance by-laws that then employed the children to work as agricultural labourers on their land. In cases of straightened family circumstance, where the sole family wage earner was on active service, pleas for the release of school children were hard to ignore.

Marwick and others have also noted the apparent rise in juvenile delinquency that authorities were faced with during the war. Marwick has looked at a 1917 National Council of Morals investigation into allegations that it was the cinema that was responsible for the increase in juvenile crime, with children (particularly boys) imitating the crimes they had seen, as well as stealing the money for their admission to the shows. The Council, Marwick explains, was against this theory believing the extent of the increase in crime was probably inflated and noting that children were now more rigidly supervised than ever before by a 'veritable army' of officials.¹⁰

What this thesis will do is to look at some of these areas from the point of view of the child. What was being at school during the war actually like? Did children's experience and understanding of the war depend on what type of school, or type of teaching they received? How was children's behaviour affected by the war? In terms of the areas that Marwick has looked at these are the kinds of questions this thesis is going to explore. Using autobiography and children's letters and diaries, these broader national trends and developments will be looked at from a personal level and through the eyes of the children themselves.

Anna Davin comments on the nature of childhood in the introduction to her study of working class children growing up in London in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Childhood, she ventures, is a social construction, varying from place to place and over time but:

⁹ Ibid. p 156.

¹⁰ Ibid. p 158.

In any culture or society, nevertheless, childhood is ultimately defined in relation to adulthood. Adults approach or reach adult status by leaving childhood; and frequently their adult authority is confirmed through their control or support of children (or both). 'Grown-ups' remind themselves that they are adult by reviewing the past they have grown out of. Children are always those who are not yet adult. Moreover, children's relative helplessness, especially in their early years, usually makes them dependent on and subordinate to their elders. Their survival depends entirely or partly on adults; adults in return exact obedience and determine how they spend their time.¹¹

This last sentence is particularly important to my research. I am interested in the way in which adults, both those children met in public like teachers and youth leaders, and those who cared for them in their domestic life, wanted children to spend their time. This is important not only in considering how the war influenced children's daily experiences, but also in looking at how adults during the period 1914-18 were preparing children to live in the post war era of reconstruction. What did these adults who controlled children's activities and directed what they read and learnt want children to understand about the war and Britain's part in it? How did they want children to feel about Britain's allies and enemies and ultimately how did these adults want young people to feel about their own position in society and the world at large?

Of course how adults directed children's time and energies varied enormously between different groups. In terms of children's participation in the war, be it through domestic tasks like knitting for soldiers at the Front, or through the militaristic activities of the Officers' Training Corps much depended on the sort of child concerned. Davin makes the point that when looking at childhood these differences must always be remembered,

What is seen as appropriate, at what age, for which children, varies between societies and also within them and over time. Conventions based on gender difference intersect with assumptions about age, and both operate within social and economic structures, so that much also depends on the specific situation of child and adult.¹²

¹¹ Anna Davin, *Growing up Poor - Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914* (London: 1996) p 2.

¹² Ibid.

One of the most important factors in my analysis of the representations and realities of the First World War in children's lives is that those representations and realities differed hugely between children, just as they did between adults. What was expected of a young upper class boy in wartime and how he reacted to the effect of war could be very different to the expectations and reactions of a young working class girl. But even between children of similar backgrounds the war did not always provoke the same reactions and outcomes making it all the more important to remember these children as individuals. While it is possible to make some generalisations about childhood during the war this study was never intended to represent one homogenous experience but rather consider as many experiences as possible to build up a picture of the whole range of childhood experiences lived during the First World War.

Davin's comments have also helped me to determine which children, or rather which groups of children I am considering in my study. Rather than defining childhood by age range, say between five and sixteen or eighteen, I came to realise, as Davin had suggested, that it was experience rather than age that identified someone more strongly with childhood. A young person of fourteen might still be at school, treated as a child by both their parents and teachers, or could be out at work full-time, no longer a dependent but a major contributor to the household economy. Because one of my main areas of interest is in the ways in which adults directed children's attention to the war I have chosen to concentrate only on children who are still treated as children by the adults around them. I therefore do not include children in full-time paid work or those who lied about their age to enlist in the army. I do however include children up to the age of eighteen while they are in full-time education. In the context of my chapter on uniformed youth groups this definition becomes more complicated. Many of the members of such youth groups were in fact young people in full-time paid work, and so in this context they have been included. I realise that this is an artificial definition and that young people at work or in the army deserve as much attention as those children who were not, but for the purposes of this thesis I am choosing to concentrate on those considered to be, and treated as, children.¹³

¹³ The one other group largely excluded from the thesis are infants due to the lack of appropriate evidence through which to reconstruct their experience.

Carolyn Steedman has discussed the idea of childhood in history, reflecting on both real children, and often literary depictions of children. She has explored social responses to questions concerning children as well as cultural understandings of what childhood represents for adults trying to recapture their own pasts. Steedman is interested in the way in which the modern idea of history, 'an account of the past told through the accumulation of documentary evidence', came into being around the same time as the modern idea of childhood, both, she explains, around the middle and later years of the 19th century.¹⁴

In *Dust* (2001), Steedman develops the theme further, describing the search for the past, both the public historical past and the individual's personal past. Autobiography is one medium for the individual's narrative of growth and development and these often begin with descriptions of childhood. The remembered childhood in autobiography Steedman explains, has become the dominant way of telling the story of how one came to be the way one is, and she compares this narrative of self-discovery with the narrative of 'history':

In the practices of history and modern autobiographical narration, there is the assumption that *nothing goes away*; that the past has deposited all of its traces, somewhere, somehow (though they may be, in particular cases, difficult to retrieve).¹⁵

Despite this similarity between the idea of history and the idea of childhood Steedman also believes that there is a contradiction inherent in the search for each. In *Past Tenses* (1992), a collection of essays on writing, autobiography and history, Steedman argues the study of history offers the fantasy that what is being searched for may be found, that by reconstructing all the evidence left behind the past may reappear. The search for childhood, on the other hand, Steedman believes is hopeless. For Steedman the very idea of childhood symbolises something that is gone and that

¹⁴ Carolyn Steedman, *Past Tenses - Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History* (London: 1992) p 11.

¹⁵ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: 2001) p 76.

the very search for the past in each of us changes the past as we go along, so that the lost thing is not the same now, as it was before.¹⁶

In terms of my thesis this idea of the changing meaning of the past is especially fascinating when considering the autobiographies of those who were children during the Great War. It is interesting to speculate about whether the emotions these autobiographers are recapturing on paper, years after the war, are the true ones they felt at the time or whether they are a product of the search for that childhood. Could it be that in fact the autobiographers are ascribing emotions to their childhood self, based on how they feel for that childhood self now? Has looking back on their past caused them to interpret their memories of childhood events as they would have interpreted them had they been adults? We see this process of revision in some of the memories of children witnessing planes being shot down during air-raids in chapter 2. Arthur Jacobs ascribes a feeling of horror to his memory of watching a man being killed while at the same time admitting that at the time he was merely frightened for himself. His childhood memory of his own fear is altered slightly by his adult sympathy over the death of the pilot.

Much of the way we understand the modern self to be is as a product of our childhood, with our child self always within us. For Steedman this means that the search for childhood, or the idea of childhood, becomes in some ways our search for ourselves. In *Strange Dislocations – Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (1995), Steedman stresses the part Freudian psychoanalysis played, between about 1900 and 1920, in developing many 19th century debates about the idea that at the core of an individual's psychic identity was her or his own lost past, or childhood. Steedman cites Freud's account of infantile sexuality and the process of repression during this period to explain how childhood became theorised and the idea of 'the unconscious' was born.¹⁷

In *Strange Dislocations* Steedman explores the search for the adult past, in the period in question, through representations of childhood and discusses the social and psychic consequences of embodying what is lost and gone in the form of a

¹⁶ Steedman, *Past Tenses - Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History* p 12.

¹⁷ Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations - Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (Cambridge, Massachusettes: 1995) p 4.

child, as was often done in the 19th century.¹⁸ Steedman ends her study in the 1920s because by then some of what this child figure represented had been theorised and that theory had been quite widely disseminated. She says:

By this time a certain understanding of selfhood had been formalised, most typically in the 'discovery' of the unconscious, and its connection as a formulation to the idea of the lost child within all of us.¹⁹

The children in my study were growing up as Freud's ideas about childhood and the unconscious were being disseminated. This was a time then when new ideas about the importance of childhood were being recognised not only in terms of securing the future of the race through raising healthy children but also as new psycho-dynamic theories of human nature were placing childhood at the centre of meaning. In considering adult responses to children at this time therefore, it is important to note that an understanding of the importance of childhood experiences in shaping the adult self (the adults of the future), was beginning to be recognised by psychoanalysts, psychologists, doctors and teachers all working for children's interests.

In his book *Soldier Heroes – British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (1994), Graham Dawson has looked at the image of the soldier hero as an idealised form of masculinity within Western culture. Dawson explains that although masculinities are lived out in the flesh, they are created in the imagination. Military virtues such as strength, aggression, courage and endurance are often seen as the natural characteristics of manhood and the ultimate display of these qualities is only possible through battle. Dawson believes that, through his depiction as an adventure hero in literature and on screen, the soldier has become the 'quintessential figure of masculinity'.²⁰ The sources I have used confirm Dawson's argument that it is through childhood exposure to the soldier hero that young boys learn some of the characteristics that typify the male persona. During the First World War children and particularly boys, were surrounded by militaristic images and messages. Chapter 5 'War as

¹⁸ Ibid. p ix.

¹⁹ Ibid. p 4.

²⁰ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes - British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: 1994) p 1.

Entertainment' looks specifically at children's fiction, toys and leisure pursuits, many of which concerned the recreation of the war itself. Battles and military leaders were fictionalised in literature, miniature copies of military uniforms were available in the shops, and as described by some of the autobiographers, children's imaginative play also echoed the war going on in the adult world.

Dawson also argues consumer products aimed at children have always been representative of broader cultural trends. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Dawson points out the link between the increase in availability of both adventure literature and war toys aimed at children and the popularity of Britain's colonial endeavour amongst the broader population. He says:

Boys' play, in the era of popular imperialism, was one of the wide range of cultural practices that provided an entry into the colonial imageries. As such, commercially produced children's culture participated in that wider cultural project which overtly set out to inculcate in boys the desirable subjectivities of imperialist patriotism and moral manhood.²¹

Similarly we will see in chapter 5 the ways in which wartime fiction and toys aimed at both boys and girls typified adult notions about the war, Britain's allies and enemies and encouraged children to construct a gendered identity around the military (for boys) or nursing (for girls) toys they were given.

In the final section of his book Dawson traces the part played by these images of the soldier hero in his own developing masculinity. To do this Dawson re-examines his childhood and discusses both the way in which memory helps in shaping the individual, but also the way in which memory itself is shaped by social context. In remembering his own childhood Dawson produced detailed descriptions of both past events, kinds of play, the forms of toys and games, and of the imaginative investments he once made in them. These investments from the past however, reappear in a quite different context in the present and Dawson's thoughts about the remembered past are in some ways close to Steedman's:

²¹ Ibid. p 235.

Memory is never simply a 'record' of the past made 'at the time', but is a constant process of reworking, driven by the needs of the present. Any account of our own childhood experience based on memory is necessarily an adult evaluation of that experience and a reflection on our own cultural formation.²²

Dawson is interested primarily in images of masculinity and their influence on the individual explaining that by this he means the processes that shape each of us subjectively into a 'boy' or a 'girl' and later into a particular kind of man or woman. The investment of the adult in her or his own childhood is intrinsic to a sense of adult identity. When looking at childhood memories of the First World War therefore it is important to remember that although the writer may have tried extremely hard to conjure up and record what they feel were their thoughts and feelings at the time they are as Dawson says 'an adult evaluation of that experience'. As a reflection of the author's own cultural formation, autobiographies are fascinating. As will be discussed when looking at the work of John Burnett and David Vincent the reasons why a person records their childhood memories and the type of audience they intend to read them have a significant bearing on what is recorded, with authors attempting to steer our reading of their own cultural formation.

Dawson believes that while the remembering adult is, in a way, putting her or himself back inside their childhood self, this discrepancy between past investment and the current social context renders the memory open to fresh examination and interpretation. Dawson says:

This active working at memory can establish a peculiar kind of double consciousness, both 'inside' and 'outside' childhood. What the investment once felt like and meant is recovered in order to be held at a critical distance, questioned and evaluated within the interpretive framework of the adult present.²³

This point is interesting when you consider the number of autobiographers who recorded their childhood memories of the First World War on the eve of, and during, the Second World War. If they were prompted to revisit their childhood experiences of war by the circumstances of the 1939-45 war, has that influenced

²² Ibid. p 241.

²³ Ibid.

their memories of the earlier conflict, or has their experience of 1914-18 war effected their response to the new conflict?

David Vincent and John Burnett, pioneering historians of working class autobiography and the use of autobiography as a historical source, have discussed the relative merits and pitfalls the historian must bear in mind when using an individual's account of their own lives. For John Burnett the overwhelming strength of autobiography as a source lies in the fact that it is a personal record written by an individual – unhampered by the voice of a third party who may alter the situation or misread the experience.²⁴

An individual's account of their past life is therefore much more than the sum of its parts. While an observer might be able to describe the same events and may even attempt a discussion of their significance, it is only a participant who will be able to truly comment on the meaning of those events in their life. While we already know much about the events of the war itself and its after effects on the social and political culture of the combatant nations, the use of autobiography allows us to learn more about what those events came to mean for different individuals in differing and changing circumstances. The personal validity of those memories comes from the very fact that each is different. With say, memories of the August Bank Holiday weekend when war was declared, the collective memory of the nation, the feeling that an idyllic summer was suddenly shattered by news of the war, is reinforced by individual memories of that weekend, each recalling its dramatic impact but also its particular personal significance.

Burnett believes that because the autobiographer is recording their private experiences, the occurrences considered the most important and significant in their lives, the historian has the chance to explore areas of experience not normally open to them. These experiences may not always be recorded in the depth of detail the historian wishes, sometimes, Burnett explains, because the author has deliberately omitted details, and sometimes because he or she may not

²⁴ J. Burnett, ed., *Destiny Obscure - Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (London: 1982) p 11.

possess the skills to do so, but always autobiography gives the historian a rare chance to investigate the emotional life of actors in the past.

In the introduction to his book *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: a Study of Nineteenth Century Working Class Autobiography* (1981), David Vincent discusses whether, when looking at autobiographical material, the historian can trust the author to tell the truth about themselves. What he concludes is that in actual fact the 'truth' is not necessarily what the historian is looking for; it is the author's interpretation of what is being described and the significance placed upon it that is of more interest. For the historian it is the autobiographer's subjectivity that is of the greatest value. For Vincent:

it is not a matter of honesty or deceit, but rather of a capacity to grasp imaginatively the complexity of the life-long interaction between the self and the outside world.²⁵

For Vincent autobiographies are like other forms of documentary material and, as such, are moulded by the specific conventions and preconceptions of their authors. All autobiographies are selective and can only ever present part of the picture. Elements may be left out because the author is sensitive to the feelings of participants who may still be alive, or because they are trying to preserve a particular image of themselves for future readers. For Vincent this is important because,

the interaction between the writer and intended audience means that a historian is always concerned with not one but two distinct events – the historical event which he is studying and the event of communication which has produced his evidence.²⁶

In terms of my thesis this point is interesting particularly when considering those autobiographers who recorded their memories of the First World War during the period of the Second World War. Is it possible to draw conclusions about the significance for the author of having experienced childhood during wartime from the fact that the 'event of communication' is taking place as another war is being

²⁵ D. Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: 1981) p 6.

²⁶ Ibid. p 5.

fought? Many autobiographers mention the part this new war has had in influencing them to write, often making them fearful for their future or keen to recall past places that may be being destroyed. It is tempting to see the context in which they are writing as significant to what they are choosing to recall. The earlier war looms large in their minds because they feel they are almost living through it all again. Indeed even for those who wrote after the Second World War, it is possible that their earlier memories were altered by the experience. The particularly vivid memories of air-raids recorded by many in chapter 2 may owe much to the far more widespread threat from the air that those who lived through the Second World War experienced.

While we cannot know this for certain it is interesting to speculate on the process of reworking at memory by autobiographers. It is significant for the study of history as it suggests a constant interaction by individuals with their own pasts and the idea of history. These autobiographers have lived through the First World War, which has been written about and remembered as a collective national experience. But they have still felt the need to separate and record their own memories of the time, perhaps suggesting a desire to identify a place for personal history and a need for the recognition of individual memory within the accepted collective record.

Youth, Literature and War

Peter Parker has explicitly tackled the subject of youth during the First World War in his book *The Old Lie – The Great War and the Public School Ethos* (1987). Using a mixture of literature and the records of individual public schools, Parker examines the development of public school education from the mid 19th century explaining how the schools grew in power and influence in the years preceding the First World War. Parker discusses the public schools' reputation both amongst social commentators and in popular fiction to explain how the image of the English Public School and the sort of boy who would be educated in one entered the national consciousness. The book then explains what effect the public schools' ethos had on the public's reaction to the war.

Parker's title for the book is probably taken from Wilfred Owen's '*Dulce et decorum est*' which includes the lines 'My friend, you would not tell with such high zest/ to children ardent for some desperate glory, / the old lie: *Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori*'.²⁷ The idea that it was sweet and proper to die for your country was, according to Parker, a central tenet of the public school ethos. That message coupled with school traditions like loyalty to one's house and school, the glorification of games and the classical education received meant that, almost universally, public school boys were 'ardent for some desperate glory' and flocked to the recruiting stations throughout the war.

Parker divides his book into three sections. The first looks at the traditions of the public schools, their history and the reforms that led to their increasing popularity in the years before the war. Schools that expounded the importance of service to empire and the superiority of the British gentleman readily produced boys keen to further their nation's cause while school traditions of loyalty to House, School and Country could be neatly transferred to battalion, regiment and army. Here Parker also describes the 'cult of athleticism' that existed in some schools and the general stress the schools laid on the importance of games in shaping the character of their young men. He explains that the idea of 'doing your bit' in the war and 'playing the game' fairly, as every British gentleman should, came easily to boys educated within a system that valued sportsmanship and physical fitness above almost everything else.

This section also examines the classical curriculum taught in the public schools and explains how, coupled with the influence of a Victorian revival of medieval chivalry and late 19th century romanticism it created a cult of youth and death where young men dedicated to duty and self-sacrifice were desperate to prove themselves on the battlefields. As Parker says:

Whilst few people can have been prepared for the nature of the War, there is no doubt that one section of the community was ready to meet the challenge: the English Public Schools Educated in a gentlemanly tradition of loyalty, honour, chivalry, Christianity, patriotism,

²⁷ *Poems of the Great War 1914-1918*, (London: 1998) p 31.

sportsmanship and leadership, public school boys could be regarded as suitable officer material in any war.²⁸

Indeed it is in the context of such an education that we can begin to understand how one young officer, Julian Grenfell, who was later to die of wounds in France was able to write to his mother during the First Battle of Ypres:

I adore war. It is like a big picnic without the objectlessness of a picnic. I've never been so happy or so well.²⁹

The second chapter of this thesis includes the memories of some young boys who longed to have the chance to go out to France and fight. Like Julian Grenfell they believed that they would be doing their duty and fulfilling the dream of adventure and self-sacrifice they had absorbed at school.

Parker traces the schools' message onto the battlefields themselves through, for example, the campaign to set up the Universities and Public Schools Brigade, designed to be battalions made up solely of men from a similar background, where a man could uphold the traditions of his old school amongst friends. Here Parker also considers the relationships amongst officers, and between officers and men, highlighting the similarity of life in the army with life at a public school. Separated from family, the hierarchical, all male environment of the armed forces was similar to the one they had lived in at school in the years immediately preceding the war.

The final section of the book returns to school and examines what life was like in the public schools during the war itself. Parker explores the reactions of teachers and pupils and explains how the schools maintained their contact with the war through correspondence with, and frequent visits from, old boys. Because the casualty figures for the schools were so high and because their support for the war had been so unflinching, commemoration of the war became a huge undertaking and Parker discusses this, pointing out how quick and generous old boys were to contribute to the schools' efforts.

²⁸ Peter Parker, *The Old Lie - the Great War and the Public School Ethos* (London: 1987) p 17.

²⁹ Nicholas Mosley, *Julian Grenfell - His Life and the Times of His Death 1888-1915* (London: 1999) p 358.

Parker uses literature and poetry throughout to explore how attitudes to the war were shaped both before and after. Central to his argument is the difference between the ideals of war as they existed before 1914 and the actuality of the unprecedented conditions of the Western Front and the first truly mechanised war. He discusses the literature of the war explaining that:

Vera Brittain wrote that ‘The work of Sassoon and his contemporaries was one long cry of protest precisely because they were the products of an extraordinarily fortunate social era.’ It is a cry of disillusion, and it is the process of disillusion which gives much of the literature of the Great War its impetus, its power, its poignance and its dominant mode of irony. Irony is a way of assimilating the unpalatable and the unthinkable; it is not merely an adequate response, but at times the only response possible. To be disillusioned it is necessary to have illusions in the first place. A major source of those illusions was the English Public School System.³⁰

The Old Lie explores those illusions in detail giving a strong sense of why the young boys educated under that system were so keen to enlist. The schools’ attitudes are made plain by Parker, and their influence can be clearly seen in his discussion of their former pupils’ wartime conduct. But Parker treats the young men in this book very much as the public schools themselves did – as young gentlemen – and you get very little sense of what growing up in such institutions was like for boys who were essentially still children. The chapter of this thesis that looks at childhood memories of the war years shows that in fact children’s understanding of this ethos and their reactions to it differed enormously. While some boys embraced the schools’ message and longed to be old enough to take a commission in the army, others were sickened by what they saw as the hypocrisy of the older generation’s entreaties to younger men to fight.

This thesis will also consider how the ethos of the public schools and other strong traditions including Imperialism and patriotism were imparted to children of all social classes through the media, the school curriculum and through the activities of various youth groups. The appeal of these messages in support of the war will also be contrasted with the more practical concerns of young people

³⁰ Parker, *The Old Lie - the Great War and the Public School Ethos* p 27.

who saw in the war an opportunity to move outside of the social and economic situation they were in.

James Walvin in his book *A Child's World – A Social History of English Childhood 1800-1914* (1982), also lays stress on the importance of the public school ethos and its dissemination throughout society in shaping national attitudes towards the First World War. Walvin argues that some of the elements of Edwardian jingoism, which characterised popular support for the war particularly in its early stages, can be traced back to childhood experiences. Central to Walvin's argument is what he notes as the strong sense of racial superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race that existed in Britain at the time and he discusses the reasons for this and the effect it had on young people's reaction to the war.

Walvin explains that it is understandable that this sense of superiority should exist amongst boys of the propertied classes, as they were the recipients of an educational and literary tradition that promoted this feeling. The ideal of 'muscular Christianity' that followed the public school reforms of the late nineteenth century and echoed the message of Thomas Hughes' hugely popular *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), represented a fundamental belief in the superiority of the British and particularly of the upper classes.

The popularity amongst upper class boys of the early books about public school life by authors like Hughes and Charles Kingsley is partly explained, claims Walvin, by the fact that some of these boys became public school teachers and housemasters in their turn. They passed on the image of the robust and healthy English public schoolboy, as one who loved danger and always played fair. But children educated within the public school system were not the only recipients of this message as Walvin notes:

The proliferation of public schools and the dissemination of their ideals into the grammar schools ensured the remarkable diffusion of a public school ideology throughout the private and endowed sector by the turn of

the century, and these ideals were spread even further a field by boys' comics and magazines, led by the *Boy's Own Paper*.³¹

Boys' adventure stories, in which the heroes displayed the very best of British character, began to take on an overtly imperialist tone by the end of the nineteenth century explains Walvin. Stories with an imperialist theme or the description of a national military contest between Britain and her European rivals may, Walvin believes, have unconsciously paved the way for the European conflict of 1914 or at least explain some sections of the population's euphoric responses to the war. He quotes from a very popular children's school story from 1905. H.A. Vachell, the author of *The Hill*, describes one of his character's attitude to death in battle:

To die young, clean, ardent; to die swiftly, in perfect health; to die saving others from death, or worse – disgrace – to die scaling heights; to die and to carry with you into the fuller, ampler life beyond, untainted hopes and aspirations, unembittered memories, all the freshness and gladness of May – is not that the cause for joy rather than sorrow?³²

This attitude, cultivated by adventure stories and fostered within a public school ethos of patriotism and self-sacrifice, lead to the massive support for the war amongst the young upper classes, Walvin believes. Not only were British schoolboys depicted as positively wanting to die a heroic death in battle but also the reasons for those battles were expounded and justified in children's fiction. Walvin explains that for years before the outbreak of the First World War British children of all social classes had been told of their nation's superiority over the rest of mankind:

Indeed this superiority was thought to be, in itself, an adequate explanation for the British global pre-eminence in economics and empire. Each new acquisition and foreign venture appeared not merely to mirror the fictional tales of Henty, Rider Haggard and others, but to provide still further proof of British superiority. Fact seemed to confirm fiction and, at times, to supersede it.³³

³¹ James Walvin, *A Child's World - a Social History of English Childhood 1800-1914* (Harmondsworth: 1982) p 172.

³² Ibid. p 173.

³³ Ibid. p 174.

Walvin sees such children's fiction as being extremely influential, both commercially and in shaping the historical and social perceptions of a generation of schoolboys. He believes that as the political and diplomatic conflicts of the Edwardian age were incorporated into children's fiction a new generation of protagonists were emerging, eager to live out their fictional fantasies.

The message of the boys' adventure books, written and bought for upper class children, was disseminated throughout society through the numerous comic books and magazines available at much lower prices to boys of all social classes. Parker noted this in *The Old Lie* explaining that while *The Captain* was aimed at public-schoolboys the magazines of the Amalgamated Press were written for office boys. It is the *Boys' Own Paper* however that is perhaps best remembered and has become a part of England's cultural heritage, its name synonymous with the cheery outlook on life all its heroes possessed. The BOP was aimed at boys of all social classes and was particularly popular with parents because it was published by the Religious Tract Society, suggesting a more moral tone than the penny dreadfuls of earlier years. Parker explains that the magazine's prices were low and that it was also often awarded as a prize in Elementary and Sunday Schools ensuring a wide audience for its message of adventure and patriotism.³⁴

Despite the wide readership of this literature with its powerful message of British superiority, Walvin believes that it is not enough alone to explain the enthusiastic rallying to the flag that occurred in the Boer War as well as in 1914. For poorer boys and men the promise of work, food and clothing, more than patriotic motives led them to volunteer. The more enthusiastic volunteers who supplied the ideology of jingoism both in the Boer War and the First World War came from the middle classes and upwards, Walvin argues. It came he says:

from the young men to whom the literature of national superiority had been specifically directed. The yarns were about *their* schools, *their* heroes and *their* values. Where were the stories of poor boys from the local board schools?³⁵

³⁴ Parker, *The Old Lie - the Great War and the Public School Ethos* p 127.

³⁵ Walvin, *A Child's World - a Social History of English Childhood 1800-1914* p 181.

Virtually ignored by Walvin children's fiction aimed at girls, will be considered alongside boys' fiction in chapter 5 - 'War as Entertainment'. As the perceptions about women's role in society were being altered by the economic conditions of the First World War we see female authors begin to embrace more active roles for their lead characters in the war effort. Heroines are given the opportunity to work on the land and in factories and some even make it to France as military drivers. They work hard, catch spies and rescue men whilst at the same time retaining all of their 'womanly' dignity earning them the admiration and occasional love of their male support cast.

Militarist and imperialist themes were not only to be found in children's fictional literature and John MacKenzie's book *Propaganda and Empire - The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (1984) contains a chapter on imperialism in the school textbook. He explores some of the attempts made by educationalists and teachers to use the school curriculum to inculcate young people with specific ideas and attitudes towards Britain's place in the world. MacKenzie is primarily interested in the imperial message contained within school texts and his discussion of educational literature and the shifts that took place in the late 19th century in the attitudes of these books has some explicit relevance for this study.

MacKenzie discusses the teaching of history and geography in the latter part of the 19th century explaining that on the whole geography was a more popular subject amongst both teachers and pupils. In practice geography teaching concentrated on political, economic and historical world problems with contemporary travel literature and the geographical fiction of writers like Kipling considered the source material most likely to stimulate children's interest. As late as 1899 only 25% of elementary schools taught history, with 75% believing geography to be more agreeable. MacKenzie explains however that history had grown in popularity in the secondary schools and that by 1900 it had become compulsory. New texts for use in schools were produced each time a new Educational Code was drawn up and MacKenzie believes that it was this constant

reworking of material in the 1890s that helped to produce such a dramatic shift in the tone of school texts.³⁶

As much history and geography teaching at this time focused on the examination of the works and achievements of great men it is significant that one of these dramatic shifts was in the attitudes of school texts to specific historical figures. MacKenzie explains that, from the 1890s onwards, warlike figures moved from denigration to respect while the reverse occurred for any politician who was considered to have failed to maintain the imperial momentum. Within the texts certain periods were glossed over – the Civil War, the slave trade and times of sexual licence – while, MacKenzie explains, patriotism, militarism, adulation of the monarchy and imperial expansion became the textbooks' major concerns.³⁷

It was also around this time that a change in the method of teaching history to children began to be suggested by educationalists. In *A New School Method* published in 1900, Joseph H. Cowham suggested that instead of beginning history teaching in the ancient past and working through to modern times, a better way might be to begin with the present and work backwards. MacKenzie explains the reasons for this:

It was only through the new technique that history could achieve its proper purpose, which was the inculcation of patriotism and good citizenship as well as the provision of moral training.³⁸

So important were these objectives, MacKenzie points out, they were included in all the works on teaching methods of the succeeding decades.

To impart this message of patriotism and national service the lives of great soldiers and significant figures in the expansion of the British Empire were held up as examples to school children of the sort of qualities to be emulated. MacKenzie explains that the ideal hero combined piety, adventure and military prowess in the best traditions of Christian militarism that developed in the 1860s

³⁶ John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire - the Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: 1984) p 176.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. p 177.

and '70s. With warfare seen in a positive light, war stories constituted a significant percentage of English and history 'readers' at the end of the 19th century. MacKenzie points out that in the 1899 Revised Code, twelve out of the thirty stories from 1688 to the present for Standard V were devoted to war and war heroes. By 1911 The Cambridge University Press readers contained twenty-four military figures out of forty historical personalities selected for study.³⁹

The significance of this emphasis in the school curriculum on warfare and military heroism cannot be underestimated when considering children's responses to the Great War. Some of the excitement and pleasure at the war remembered by the autobiographers in chapter 2 is explained by the atmosphere of martial enthusiasm in which these children were being educated. With war being taught at worst as a necessary evil, and at best as a chance for Britain to assert her physical and moral superiority over her enemies, it is unsurprising that children were often as enthusiastic about Britain's entry into the war as other sections of the population. Even if they did not possess the background knowledge to know why Britain had gone to war they would have been well versed in the importance of upholding British honour and serving the flag, ensuring that military recruiters of the future would have a ready and willing supply of volunteers.

The Boy Scout movement, founded by the former soldier and war hero Robert Baden-Powell, also made a substantial contribution to the preparation of a generation of boys for military service. John Springhall has investigated the Scouts and other British youth organisations in his book *Youth, Empire and Society – British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (1977) and believes that the First World War introduced the inevitable trial of patriotism, character and national survival for which Baden Powell had prepared the Boy Scout organisation. The war gave the Scout movement the opportunity to prove itself a dependable auxiliary service in a time of national emergency. In effect this had been one of the aims behind the initial formation of the Scout movement; to be prepared to contribute towards the defence and maintenance of the British Empire. As such the Boy Scout organisation made a significant contribution to sustaining and

³⁹ Ibid. p 181.

building on the patriotic and militaristic training of young people in Britain that was begun in the classroom and carried on through fiction.

Springhall explains that during the First World War Boy Scouts were co-opted into sounding air-raid warnings, acting as messengers, running mobile canteens, guarding reservoirs and helping with the harvest. In addition Scouts were often sent to railway stations to meet men on their way to enlist in case their resolve should falter on the way to the recruiting station. In addition to the activities of ordinary Scouts, Springhall points to the formation by Baden-Powell of the Scouts Defence Corps whose objective was to:

form a trained force of young men who would be immediately available for the defence of the country should their services be required during the war.⁴⁰

As well as the Boy Scouts there were other youth groups popular in Britain during the First World War that also involved young boys in martial activities, notably the Church Lads' Brigade and the Boys' Brigade. It has been argued, Springhall points out, that the Boys' Brigade in particular succeeded in instilling military values into hundreds and thousands of Nonconformist boys, who might otherwise have opposed the war and therefore paved the way for the success of the recruiting drives during the First World War.⁴¹ Research for chapter 4, 'Children in Uniform', shows that children in youth groups were keen to undertake unpaid war work in their spare time and after school. The children themselves were often more eager than their leaders to be involved in pseudo-military activities and took their work extremely seriously, believing it to be of national importance. Girls in female youth groups also relished the opportunity to serve the war effort as it gave them the chance to break away from the home centred, domestic activities of the pre-war years and take more public roles serving as messengers in public buildings and working in hospitals for instance.

This thesis then considers both how the First World War was represented to children by adults, and the realities of how they came to experience it for

⁴⁰ John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society - British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (London: 1977) p 63.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p 125.

themselves. The chapters *Memories of War*, *War as Entertainment* and *Dear Father*, look at how the war affected children at home, how it altered their family relationships, changed the food they could eat, the toys that they played with and books that they read. They explore how children came to interpret the war in their own world, how they made sense of the uncertainty and changes of the time. They consider what the children came to make of these experiences when as adults they sat down to record their memories of growing up and found that so much of what they remember of childhood was shaped by the war. In *Dear Father* this thesis looks specifically at children's contemporary writing. It uses letters sent between children and soldiers, sometimes relatives and sometimes complete strangers, to understand how and why children worked so hard to build relationships with men separated from them for so long. It also addresses how parents and children managed to continue to operate as family units despite the years of separation and asks how both came to interpret and accept the war as an integral part of their relationship with each other.

In *War in the Classroom*, *Children in Uniform* and *War as Entertainment* this thesis looks more explicitly at how adults focused and directed children's attention towards the war. They consider how teachers and youth group leaders harnessed children's genuine interest in the war to encourage learning and help with motivation. They also look at how children's energies were channelled into working for the war effort, how they became involved in everything from knitting clothes, collecting money, making bandages and splints to working in government departments and guarding bridges and reservoirs. These chapters focus on the way adults wanted children to interpret the lessons of the war, how they wanted children to understand the sacrifices that had been made for them and the importance of accepting their role as responsible citizens of the future. When war broke out social reformers, doctors, psychologists and teachers were already showing interest in children's physical and psychological development, their education, and their moral training. Now that pre-war fears over the threat from abroad had actually been realised there was greater urgency in the calls for a better-educated and trained youth. But the war also opened up opportunities for children, and particularly girls. It allowed them the chance to visibly contribute to the war effort in a way that guaranteed that their sacrifices would not go

unrecognised. It proved what they were capable of and meant that never again would they be confined to home centred activities to quite the same extent.

By using a combination of official documents, school texts, youth group material and literature these adult constructions of the war, produced for children, will be explored to identify ideas about the child in Edwardian society. By considering how adults tackled the subject of the war we can begin to grasp how they wanted the future generation to understand the adult world. Through their depiction of the conflict and the way they interpreted Britain's role in it we can reflect on how adult society understood itself and hoped to be understood by the coming generation. In contrast to this, by looking at autobiography and children's letters we can attempt to understand how this war became a part of individuals' lives. We can consider how children felt about events over which they had no control, but which changed their lives completely. These sources allow us to try to discover how young people reconstructed the messages they received from adults to develop their own understanding of the war. They show us how conflicting children's emotions could be and what a challenge the war was for them in coming to terms with their own feelings for the present and the future.

As part of my research I read many autobiographies, school log books, histories of local youth groups, children's books and letters that have not been included in the final thesis. The basis for my selection of what to include varied between chapters and is briefly outlined below.

Chapter 2, *War in the Classroom*, examines the response of three state, one girls' private and two independent schools (one pacifist, the other progressive). I wanted to find out about individual schools' attitudes towards the war, how it should be taught (if at all), how the children were expected to respond and whether the children's reaction reflected that expectation. Records of London's state elementary schools are held at the London Metropolitan Archive in Farringdon where the records of the former London County Council are held. Here the schools are organised by administrative districts and the card catalogue allows you to search the type of material held for each school. From government guidelines and LCC records I already knew something of the effect of war on the

administration of schools in general but was hoping the records of individual schools would reveal more of the daily effects of war upon school life. School records include log books, registers, timetables, punishment books and sometimes school magazines although these are rare. Timetables, punishment books and registers include basic information about school life; lessons taught and the names and offences of the children, but the school log books were more useful.

Fifteen school log books from around London were examined and the examples included in the thesis are amongst those which, in noting the visit of an old pupil returned from the Front, also made mention of the children's reception of the soldier, or recorded the Head's feelings about hearing news from former students involved in the war. The few school magazines in the archive gave details of school concerts in aid of the war effort and the news of former pupils fighting abroad. Sometimes as in the case of Cobourg Road Girls' School they told of the special relationship built up between the school and a particular regiment. What these records show is the ways in which the war entered the daily life of the school and how the pupils and teachers accommodated its presence within their usual routine.

Chapter 3 also contains details of three private schools chosen deliberately for a differing perspective on the war. Because chapter 2, *Childhood Memories of War*, based on autobiography, includes a good deal of information on boys' public schools I visited the archive of South Hampstead High School, a girls' private academic secondary school in North London. I wanted to see how the sisters of the boys at public school were being educated about the war and to understand its impact on daily life at a girls' school. This archive, managed by staff and pupils of the school, contains everything from class records, timetables, and photographs to school magazines and the records of prizes and competitions won by the girls. The school magazines proved the most revealing of the school's attitude which was to encourage the girls to support the war by honouring the sacrifices of their fathers and brothers as well as the work of former pupils of the school.

Leighton Park School, a private boys' boarding school run in accordance with the beliefs of the Society of Friends, was chosen because of the pacifist principles of the Head Teacher and many of the parents. The school archive, maintained by a former member of staff, included registers and prospectuses as well as the records of the debating society and school magazines. I wanted to understand how a school whose founders, and the parents who sent their sons there, were committed pacifists would respond to war and whether the response of the school would be matched by that of the boys themselves. Results of school debates and the candour of the Head in his letters to the school magazine highlighted the conflict felt by both staff and students faced with the challenges the war posed to their pacifist principles.

Lastly I visited King Alfred's School, a progressive, independent school in North London whose founders hoped to move away from the examinations led system operated by both the public schools and the state sector. The archivist at King Alfred's allowed me access to the school's collection of writing by its wartime Head as well as the school magazine, consisting mainly of children's artwork. Interest in new educational theories was keen at King Alfred's and its staff and governing body were rejecting many of the educational conventions of the existing system in England. I was interested to see how a school so committed to the progressive movement would respond to the war and whether the children themselves would be shaped in their understanding of the war by the attitude of the school. The children's artwork which was heavily dominated by wartime scenes highlights the way the children were preoccupied by the war and made it a part of the life of the school.

The starting point for my thesis was children's experience of, and response to, war. Marwick identified this gap in the historiography of the First World War fifteen years ago.⁴² My research focused upon attempts to reconstruct personal experience through both contemporary writing and memories recorded long after the events they describe had occurred.

⁴² Marwick, *The Deluge - British Society and the First World War* p 43.

I read over sixty autobiographies and memoirs, both published and unpublished manuscripts of which thirty-six have been quoted in the thesis. Published work was identified from library catalogues and bibliographic collections while the Working Class Autobiographical Archive at Brunel University holds the unpublished life histories used. Much of the material in the Working Class Autobiographical Archive was collected as a result of a public appeal by historian John Burnett through the media for autobiographical accounts of working class life. The catalogue of the material held at Brunel includes a brief description of each memoir, and gives, wherever possible, the date of birth of the author and main subjects recorded. Using this catalogue all those born in the first decade of the twentieth century were identified and each memoir searched for mention of the war.

From these life histories I was hoping to learn about children's emotional response to war; how it made them feel and how they reacted to its pressures. Many autobiographies recounted similar events or situations, such as air-raids or food shortages, suggesting that lots of children experienced many of the same things. After learning something of the sorts of situations children found themselves in what became most interesting to me was the difference in emotional response the children had to these situations. Some were terrified by the night visits of the Zeppelins while others were excited, keen to stay up and watch. In selecting the examples to give in the thesis I wanted to choose those which best described that emotional response; why was this child frightened, while another was thrilled? Why were emotional responses to the same events of war so various? In order to answer these questions it was necessary to select the quotes which best detailed those feelings, those which brought me closest to imagining how that child was feeling. My interest was in qualitative experience, this meant that many of the autobiographies are written by professional writers. Those included in the thesis are the ones which most effectively communicate to me how that particular author felt about the scene they are describing. The experience of the very poor is harder to access. There is very little documentary evidence available to assess the experience of those who were unable to leave a written record of their lives, and the very poorest were also less likely to join youth groups or afford the toys and books aimed at them. But that is not to say

that the examples in the thesis represent one homogenous experience, those included are drawn from a wide range of social classes.

For chapter 6, *Dear Father*, I read all the letters I could identify as being either written by, or sent to, children from the catalogue of the collection at the Imperial War Museum. Some were just individual letters while others were sets of correspondence. I have outlined many of the types of letter in the chapter itself and give examples of some. Many men wrote short, simple letters to their children revealing little of the war or their feelings. This may have been deliberate reticence because they felt their children too young to understand. On the other hand it is also possible that these short, infrequent letters reflect the family relationship, not all fathers were close to their children or may not have known how to address them. Letters home from the front to family and friends were often equally reticent. Indeed, as discussed in chapter 6, the postcard format available to soldiers encouraged men to use stock phrases and inhibited individual expression.

Most of the letters included form part of a collection of letters because these revealed more about a relationship and gave clues about changes of feeling over time. It was also sometimes easier to gauge strength of feeling through familiarity with a writer's style of expression. I was interested to learn about family relationships, of how the dynamics changed as the children grew older and had been separated from their fathers for longer. I wanted to understand how families used letters to strengthen and structure their relationships with each other and so included letters in which those developing relationships were revealed. The language used by fathers, for example, to describe their children's growth suggested to me that they were both trying to reconcile themselves to the fact that their children had changed in their absence, while still attempting to celebrate the excitement of growing up with their children.

A small minority of autobiographies and letters did not mention the war at all, or simply referred to it in passing. Its omission from letters sent between children and their fathers is discussed in chapter 6, but in the case of the autobiographies some writers admitted that the war hardly touched their lives and explain why.

They are usually the memoirs of those living in rural areas who experienced fewer problems with food supply and saw no bombing. Because of constraints of space I have concentrated on those whose childhoods were affected by the war, which has produced an over-emphasis on urban areas more susceptible to the direct effects of war.

The silence of others who recall their childhoods during the period of the war but afford it little space in their memoirs is more interesting. Is it that they feel the war was not significant to their experience of growing up? Did they feel little interest in its developments because they had no relative involved in the fighting? Do they not remember whether it caused them fear or excitement? Or do they deliberately omit references to it because of the bad memories it brings back for them? We cannot know for sure but I am not convinced that their silence alters my interpretation of the significance of the war in the lives of children in Britain. Because we cannot know why they are silent we cannot conclude that the war made no impression on them, while in contrast to their silence we have many more examples of autobiographies where the war looms large on the page.

There is more emphasis in the thesis on boys' education, and to a certain extent their toys and youth group activities. This is because of the closer link made at the time between their youthful attitudes and behaviour and their future as possible soldiers and defenders of Empire. Boys were more often associated by teachers, youth group leaders, toy makers and authors with the war than girls and so they appear more frequently in some sources. Autobiographical evidence suggests that boys did identify themselves with soldiers, either real or imagined, many desperate to take part in the war themselves. Girls however, also took pleasure in their association with fathers and brothers in uniform, Minnie Cowley, for instance, remembers pretending to be her Dad when her class marched around the playground at school.

Autobiographical evidence, in fact, points to far more similarities than differences in both girls' and boys' emotional response to war than do other sources. Experiences at school, in youth groups and in play were different for girls and boys, shaped by the desires and expectations of adults, but children's

emotional memories were often the same. Both girls and boys could be excited and terrified (and sometimes both at the same time) by the events of the war around them, and autobiographical evidence suggests that it was more often children's surroundings and family relationships, rather than their gender or age, which influenced their response to war. Similarly evidence from the letters sent between fathers and their children suggests that families' response to war was not divided by gender. Boys and girls wrote very similar letters to their fathers, enquiring after the progress of the war and detailing their own experiences. Fathers in turn did not distinguish between their sons and daughters when telling them of their experiences. Indeed some of the most vivid descriptions of war, including a gas attack and the Allied retreat from the Marne, were sent to girls, suggesting that fathers were communicating with their children as individuals rather than as boys or girls.

Chapter 2 - Childhood Memories of the First World War

Introduction

Infancy, I suppose, stopped with the war at least, home, London, became something different with the war¹

Beatrice Curtis Brown believes that the outbreak of the First World War marked a turning point in her life, a moment when she ceased to be a child and recognised for the first time the significance of the outside world. This chapter seeks to explore how children understood the war around them by using childhood memories recorded later in autobiography. It considers the common themes of wartime memory as well as the way issues such as gender and social class affected the way war was experienced and how it was remembered. The study of autobiography allows us to reconstruct the way in which children made sense of their own lives in the midst of war. For many children their development as individuals coincided with a time of great uncertainty and upheaval. During the war the emotional challenges they faced while growing up were intensified by a new set of stresses that provoked conflicting feelings that ensured that the war years would hold a central place in their memory of their childhood years and would shape the adults they were to become. Through autobiography writers compose a life for themselves based on the experiences they consider to have been significant. The memories they record are chosen from the vast store of remembered scenes, people and places that have made up their life and in selecting them the author is helping the reader to understand the events and experiences that they think have shaped them as an individual.

But in this selection of memories there are also problems for the reader; has the author remembered correctly? Have they recorded the memories truthfully? How has the significance of the moment described altered over the intervening years? The reader must always be aware that this selection of memories is a conscious act. The writer is presenting themselves and others on paper in a deliberate way, which might involve some distortion of events or emotions to protect themselves or others from the censure of a future audience. This may be particularly true if

¹ B.C. Brown, *Southwards from Swiss Cottage* (London: 1947) p 28.

the memoir was intended only for a family audience, where the writer may be attempting to record a family history for future generations to be proud of. Equally autobiographies written deliberately for publication may be influenced by the pressures of commercial demand – what sort of memories sell?

There is very little direct evidence for how children felt and behaved during the First World War, which makes autobiography an invaluable source for the historian researching individual lives. The fact that the memories recorded may not be precisely factually accurate, or may have been distorted over time, is part of the reason they are so interesting. As John Burnett, historian of working class autobiography in the period, points out,

The very partiality of the account is... part of its value, for the author has chosen his own ground, patterned his own experiences, and has painted a self-portrait which is more revealing than any photograph.²

Those who have recorded their memories of childhood during the war reveal a complicated mixture of emotions. They present themselves as being at times excited, frightened, bewildered and confused by what they experienced of the war going on around them. For many it features centrally in their autobiographies suggesting that those authors see the war as a dominant feature of their childhood years, one which shaped their experience of growing up and around which they construct the narrative of their childhood.

The autobiographies used in this chapter are a mixture of published and unpublished memoirs representing the lives of both men and women from a diverse mixture of backgrounds from the working classes through to the aristocracy. For each writer the war represented a significant experience of his or her childhood, but in different ways. The memories are not representative of all children's experiences; rather they show how the war affected some children's lives and give an idea of how the war has been remembered.

² J. Burnett, ed., *Destiny Obscure - Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (London: 1982) p 11.

Many of the published autobiographies are the memoirs of writers, including some of the most influential novelists and poets of the last century.³ This is significant when considering the influence some of these figures (which include the novelist Evelyn Waugh and the poet W. H. Auden) had on British culture and society in the twentieth century. From these autobiographies we have the opportunity to understand the part the First World War played in shaping the childhood experiences, and sometimes the later attitudes, of writers and thinkers who have shaped the way in which the twentieth century has been understood.

Professional writers are highly skilled at exploring emotions and attitudes through language, which allows them to steer their readers towards what they see as the dramatic scenes in their lives. In contrast to this some of the unpublished autobiographies, perhaps never intended for an audience outside of the family circle, touch on experiences clearly of significance to the author but which require the historian to look past a brief mention to speculate about the true emotional impact of the scene. Here again is the problem of using autobiography; has the writer deliberately not recorded their emotions to protect themselves, or were they simply not able to articulate them? If the historian chooses to read into the text, how does she know if she is reading correctly? By looking at these authors' reconstructed lives in autobiography I am choosing to see as significant what they have decided to recall. Perhaps there are details missing, whether consciously or unconsciously omitted, but what is there is a valid expression of that person's childhood experience. The language may not be so revealing as say that of Waugh or Auden but the writing represents an attempt made to record the moments and feelings of significance to the author.

Several of these autobiographies were written either on the eve of or during the Second World War. Many authors themselves make mention of this second major war in the introductions to their autobiographies. Although only in their forties they say that this new threat has reminded them of the war they experienced as children and made them feel it was time to set down a record of

³ In Appendix A I have included a brief introduction to each of the autobiographers in order to identify the range of experiences represented in this chapter, and also to provide the reader with a reference point for each author when they are encountered later in the text.

their lives. The historian A.L. Rowse, whose autobiography *A Cornish Childhood* was published in 1942, explains his motives for writing:

This book has been written now, not without thought of the uncertainty of the time, of dangers from another side, beyond one's control; there is the natural desire to leave some memorial of oneself whatever may come to us.⁴

Similarly Beatrice Curtis Brown began her autobiography, *Southwards from Swiss Cottage*, while living in New York in the winter of 1940 when the Blitz was at its height. She wrote it as a record of London as she had known it as a girl and as a young woman, but contemporary events affected her style. She writes:

The past tense is used throughout, even when I write of what still exists and will always exist, simply because it was possible to write with more detachment and with more freedom from contemporary emotion, if the subject were seen as a picture remembered, not as a living scene.⁵

Both of these writers have reflected on their memories of the First World War and concluded that the start of the war, for them, represented a new stage of growing up. Beatrice Curtis Brown wrote:

Though I was thirteen when it broke out, my memory of places, what we did and how we felt, is up to that time, tuned to the same key. Then some discordancy creeps in: one's world was no longer apart and enclosed by its own walls. The day before war broke out is the first day I remember walking about London, as apart from Hampstead, streets. That is, it was the first time that I was conscious of being there in the middle of the city. I remember the tension, the groups of people standing about, waiting. I remember the feeling of them waiting. My uncle, walking with me, said, 'I expect you will never forget this day.' I have not, though I have seen other, worse days since then.⁶

A.L. Rowse also believes that the start of the war was the point at which he realised there was a world outside his own:

That day was a great dividing line, and I used to think of this book as starting from that *point de depart*, which it was. It had a strange significance for me, which is not wholly explicable. It was a symbolic

⁴ A.L. Rowse, *A Cornish Childhood - Autobiography of a Cornishman* (London: 1942) p 4.

⁵ Brown, *Southwards from Swiss Cottage* p 9.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp 28-29.

day. For the first time I became aware of the outer world, a world beyond the village and the town. I was ten years old.⁷

For both these writers then the First World War was a dividing line in their lives. It marked the moment when a part of their childhood and innocence was left behind. For the first time the outside world entered their lives and they came to associate that moment of realisation with the outbreak of war. For these children and others on the cusp of adolescence the war sometimes coincided with a change of school, the separation from parents (if that school was boarding), and all the confusion and anxiety of puberty. The war then came to be associated with new experiences, for some the move to boarding school was their first encounter with austerity; loneliness, hunger and cold becoming associated as much with the war as with the schools themselves. That separation from parents and the new authority of strangers could lead to confusion and fear that linked the tales of war to the mysteries of sex and desire. The war may feature as so central an experience in their childhood just because it coincided with these changes. It became the backdrop against which they lived out their adolescence and the war's particular strangeness, the upheaval and uncertainty of the time, gave added drama to what was already a turbulent time in their lives.

But why have particular scenes been remembered more clearly than others? As well as coinciding with trying times in children's personal development the war also created new and stressful situations of its own. Many of the authors have especially vivid memories of particularly painful events like the poet W.H. Auden has of being chastised at school for eating too much, or as Arthur Jacobs has of parting from his father. Memories like these, of strong emotions including shame, guilt and pain are often more clearly remembered than others, which suggests that the war provoked unusual situations in which children's emotions were tested to the limit. As we shall see children came under increased moral pressure and censure regarding their behaviour at home and at school. They also experienced years of uncertainty, fearing for the safety of a father or brother, interrupted by bursts of pleasure and pain at the return and then departure of that relative on leave. They were also growing up surrounding by adults experiencing acute stress; family relationships were strained and difficult as women attempted

⁷ Rowse, *A Cornish Childhood - Autobiography of a Cornishman* p 97.

to be both mother and father to their children. It is hardly surprising then that we find many striking memories of painful and conflicting emotions as the children attempted to navigate their way through a world turned upside down by war.

A.L. Rowse says that the most important consequence of the war for him was that it took his father away from home, something he regarded as a great blessing, but not all autobiographers are so explicit about what they feel the importance of the war was for them.⁸ The novelist Henry Green's autobiography, *Pack My Bag*, contains long descriptions about how the war affected his school days, as well as his memories of the wounded officers that stayed at the family house after it was turned into a convalescent home. Green's son, Sebastian Yorke, in the introduction to the 1992 publication of the book, mentions not only that his father was inspired to write on the eve of the Second World War because of his vivid memories of the Great War, but also suggests that his father's humour may have stemmed from the deep impression those soldiers made on him as a child. He writes,

It is tempting to think that all the black humour that came out much later in my father's talk though never in his books – the wild stories about dentists, amputees and collisions at sea and so on – must in some way be linked to these wounded soldiers.⁹

Green's father was a wealthy industrialist and his mother's family had aristocratic roots, he therefore enjoyed all the privileges of the Edwardian age. Discussing the officers convalescing in his family's home he says that as a young boy, he learnt to recognise the 'half-tones' of class.¹⁰ As the war went on and high casualty figures amongst officers meant that men from the ranks were being given commissions, Green noticed that not all officers were necessarily 'officer class'. For Green this was an indication of how things were going to develop after the war. He writes:

As we let those officers in, not one of them with an idea of country life as we knew it, so we let in life as it was to be after the war was over together with its slang and put into their heads an idea of what it must have been

⁸ Ibid. p 188.

⁹ H. Green, *Pack My Bag - a Self Portrait* (London: 1979) p xiii.

¹⁰ Ibid. p 64.

like before the war came in this way of living, of its owners not directly earning the full income their mode of life incurred.¹¹

From the other end of the social scale the novelist V.S. Pritchett in his autobiography, *A Cab at the Door*, wryly observed that,

In many ways for us, this most shocking of wars, a cattle slaughter, was a liberation. A hungry generation pressed forwards over the graves of the dead; great states and great families decayed and their certainties with them.¹²

Pritchett's father was a failed stationer and salesman and the family moved house repeatedly as money ran short and his father sought new business opportunities. For Pritchett the war introduced new opportunities for the working classes, and he saw the fresh ideas of a new generation as a liberation from the older established traditions of England before the war.

The social class of the family into which these children were born affected their experience of childhood in Edwardian England. It determined the structure and nature of their family arrangements, where they lived, their surroundings and diet, and where they went to school. Many of these writers were from upper or upper middle-class backgrounds and led extremely privileged Edwardian lives. In the case of boys particularly the formula was almost always the same. As very young children they were attended to constantly by nannies, who remained with the family when the child progressed to preparatory school. If the preparatory schools achieved their aim, at thirteen, the boy would progress to a public school. Attending a public school was an essential prerequisite for anyone hoping to be recognised as an English Gentleman. And turning out English Gentlemen was what the public schools aimed to do. As we have seen the curriculum was heavily focused on the classics, many schools often having an only thinly disguised contempt for more modern subjects like mathematics and science, and a large proportion of time was devoted to sports.¹³ In this way it was hoped by the schools and parents alike, that the young men educated in these institutions and destined for Whitehall or the Colonies, would learn all that was considered

¹¹ Ibid. p 67.

¹² V.S. Pritchett, *A Cab at the Door - an Autobiography: Early Years* (London: 1968) p 136.

¹³ Peter Parker, *The Old Lie - the Great War and the Public School Ethos* (London: 1987).

necessary, and that through sports they would learn about the great British traditions of fair play and sportsmanship.

For girls there were either genteel, non-academic, fashionable boarding schools, or they were taught at home by governesses. In either case there was little intention on the part of either the school or the parents that the girls would ever put this education to any occupational use, aside from entertaining their husbands' friends and associates.

Unlike children from middle or working class households, who lived at home and were schooled locally, for much of the year children from the landed or wealthy classes really lived at school. The school and its ethos therefore mattered more than family and home in shaping these children's impressions of and response to war.

This chapter is divided into six parts each looking at memories relating to different aspects of the war as it affected children's lives. The first part, 1914: The Shock of War, looks at the years leading up to 1914 and the initial months of the war. It addresses pre-war attitudes to the possibility of war, children's memories of hearing about the war, and the initial excitement and expectation often felt by children in the early days. It will argue that the war became a natural extension of children's existing understanding of excitement and adventure as it mirrored so exactly the themes of their pre-war education, literature and games. The second part of the chapter looks at memories of school days during the war, reflecting the various backgrounds of the autobiographers. Here memories of local elementary schools are contrasted with the memories of preparatory and public schools attended by those who experienced an upper class childhood. We see how children attending boarding schools suffered more from the moral censure of their schools, where they were expected to live up to the example of those who had volunteered to fight for them. These children were also often more confused by what they understood of the war and their fears grew unchecked in the close confines of the society of other children.

Section three looks at memories of food, or the lack of it, and discusses the differences between the experiences of children who remember a lack of food caused by real shortages and lack of money, compared to those who remember a lack of food caused by the self imposed rationing of their boarding school. For some the lack of food has become their overriding memory of the war years. It will be suggested that this is in part because as children their desire for food often conflicted so strongly with the moral prohibition being exerted on them to deny themselves its pleasures. The next section outlines memories of anti-German feeling displayed by society during the war years. It discusses children's involvement in anti-German actions, as well as their response to the attitudes displayed by others. Here adults are recalling acts of violence and bad behaviour that they as children directed towards individuals. It appears that they appropriated the themes of the adult war and acted out their understanding of the anti-German sentiments surrounding them in personal attacks on people they had often known and liked before the war.

The fifth sections deals with memories of air raids, the only way most children came into direct contact with the violence of war. Attacked in their own homes for the first time this section highlights the conflicting emotions of fear and excitement that children often seemed to have felt during the war. The final section concerns memories of the separation and loss children experienced during the war. We see how children's responses could vary enormously; some were distraught at the thought of being parted from their fathers, while others were resentful and angry at society's expectation that they should mourn their dead parent and live up to his example. It will be argued here that a child's environment heavily influenced the way in which they dealt with issues of separation and loss. Children living at home with close family relationships appear to have been able to feel and mourn their parting more freely, while those children living away at school felt unable to express their emotions, or even fully admit them to themselves.

There is more discussion of the influence of class on childhood memories than there is of gender in the following chapter. This is because the experiences and themes of the memories do not easily divide themselves along gender lines.

Unsurprisingly not all boys wanted to be soldiers, and not all girls were afraid during air-raids. It seems that a child's environment played a greater role in determining their responses than did their gender, and therefore class more often becomes significant. Clearly class affected where the children experienced the war, but it also affected other things like the provision of food, and the dynamics of family relationships.

But, for me, more important than dividing the children's experiences from each other along class or gender lines, was the commonality they had with each other as children divided from the adult world. So often in the autobiographies I got a sense of a young person seeing the world around them in a way they knew to be different from the adults they shared a home or school with. Whether through their actions to conceal their emotions from a grieving mother as a way of comforting her, or through their hidden fears of the war stories they are being told, these autobiographers remember consciously separating themselves from the adults around them through their thoughts. It is through these private strengths and fears, particular to their position as children, that I see these memories as representing the child's experience of war.

This thesis is concerned with the experience of childhood during the First World War, and it is by using these autobiographies that we will come the closest to hearing, first hand, what this experience was like. I have therefore quoted often in this chapter, believing these writers' own words to give a far clearer picture of what life was like for them during the war than any I could give by representing them.

1914: The Shock of War

When war broke out in August of that year, although I was only nine, I was acutely conscious of a dark and enshrouding shadow.¹⁴

While he may have been conscious of a negative connotation to the news of war he heard as a young boy, H. E. Bates was to become thrilled by what he

¹⁴ H.E. Bates, *The Vanished World - an Autobiography*, vol. Vol.1 (London: 1969) p 71.

experienced of military life just a few months later when the army arrived in his Northamptonshire village. This dichotomy of emotional responses, where children were at times frightened and at others excited by the war was not uncommon. While the fear may be understandable, it is to the pre-war years and the build up to war that we must look to understand why so many children greeted the war with pleasure and were so keen to incorporate it into their lives.

In the decade or so before 1914 there was a feeling among many in Britain that another war was on its way. The Boer War for some had highlighted the need for increased military preparedness and strength, and had prompted a wave of jingoistic hysteria among large sections of British society. Germany in the first years of the new century was frequently cited in the Press and on the platform as the most likely adversary. Marwick divides those who wanted and expected war into those that felt Germany was threatening British commercial and naval supremacy and thus forcing some inevitable confrontation, and those who simply supported calls for patriotism and service to King and country.¹⁵

Children were not immune from this spirit of antagonism and many autobiographers recording their childhood years have remarked on the heightened atmosphere of belligerence in the years preceding the war. C.H. Rolph, former director of *The New Statesman*, grew up in London as a child and remembers that even children's toys and games were influenced by the mood of the country:

Warlike weapons had begun appearing in the toy-shop windows and, in due course, in the streets. The Sidney Street siege of 1911 had aroused interest in that deadly and haphazard little firework, the Mauser automatic pistol... Imitation Mausers appeared as 'spring guns' with a tiny spring operated plunger for ejecting small marbles, ball-bearings or pebbles, and they appeared too as pocket torches and water pistols.¹⁶

But, he notes, this craze did not last indefinitely. As the clouds of war drew nearer in 1914 nervous parents began to forbid the more violent and bang-producing pastimes.

¹⁵ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge - British Society and the First World War*, 2nd ed. (London: 1991) p 27.

¹⁶ C.H. Rolph, *London Particulars* (Oxford: 1980) p 123.

Just as children's toys were influenced by events in the real world, so too was children's publishing. Like the adult press in the years leading up to 1914, children's magazines such as *Chum* and the *Boys' Friend* were full of the likelihood of war. Their perennial need for tales of adventure, foreign travel and battle were perfectly met by the possibility of war. In the case of the largest producer of children's magazines, the Amalgamated Press and its owner, the powerful Lord Northcliffe, Germany had always been the favourite enemy. For one group of children this depiction of a German threat led to the creation of a much loved game.

The writer Evelyn Waugh, who was born in 1903 and lived in Hampstead as a child, describes a game he played with some local children whose father later worked at the War Office:

The Rolands became my constant companions. We lived in expectation of a German invasion. I do not know what put this idea into our heads. The alarm was not shared by our parents. In 1909 P.G. Wodehouse published *The Swoop*, which describes such an invasion foiled by a boy-scout. None of us certainly ever saw that work. The theme must have been much in the air of the youth of that time.¹⁷

The children called their group The Pistol Troop, made a camp in Hampstead Garden Suburb, and stocked up with provisions. Waugh remembers that they drew up a code of laws and ordained savage corporal punishments, never to be inflicted for their breach:

We had some scuffles with roaming bands who attempted to enter our fort, whom we repelled with fists, clay-balls and sticks, but we were not provocative. We were reserving our strength for the Prussian Guard.¹⁸

People often remember the Bank Holiday weekend of August 1914. Along with the glorious sunshine of that summer, people have recalled the tension of those few days when the country stood on the brink of war before descending into the hysteria and excitement that characterised the first few months. Children were not ignorant of the heightened emotions of that time and their memories of it

¹⁷ Evelyn Waugh, *A Little Learning - the First Volume of an Autobiography* (London: 1964) p 59.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

share many similarities with adult accounts. But they also have a special quality of their own; they retain the sense of the outbreak of war as it affected them as individuals. As children they were instinctively concerned with how the war would affect them, and their fears and anxieties are personal, unlike many adult accounts that often reflect the broader fears and anxieties of a nation.

Eileen Hunter, who was born in 1908 and whose father owned a successful printing business, was staying in Norfolk with her mother and sister in the summer of 1914. She remembers exactly where she was and how she felt on hearing the news of war:

It was on one such day, a day that had dawned like any other, when my sister and I were playing at running a dairy in the garden with a pudding basin of flour and water and jugs set on a seat, that my mother, in her long dark skirt and high-necked blouse, ran towards us over the sunny lawn, waving a telegram from London and calling with a tremor in her voice, 'Children! Children! England's declared war on Germany!' Even to our young ears, unaccustomed to ominous tidings, these words had a sinister, a frightening ring, imprinting the scene indelibly on my mind, although the details of our hurried return to London, and the breaking up of what had seemed the eternal holiday in which we lived, remain obscure.¹⁹

The idyllic summer and 'eternal holiday' that this writer had been enjoying have become as strong a memory as the news of war because of the complete contrast between the two. Hunter remembers feeling that the news her mother brought her sounded sinister and frightening although she did not understand its full implications. Contrasted with her contented game with her sister, seeing her mother running towards them, and hearing the anxiety in her voice, conveyed to Hunter as a young child that something significant in the world of adults had occurred. This encroachment of the world at large into her happy and peaceful childhood ensured that the scene would never be forgotten.

In 1914 Loelia Ponsonby, aged twelve, lived a comfortable and sheltered life as the daughter of Frederick Ponsonby, secretary to the King. The family lived at St James' Palace. However when war was declared Loelia, her mother and brother were on holiday in Holland:

¹⁹ E. Hunter, *The Profound Attachment* (London: 1969) p 41.

In the middle of the night we motored to the Hook and boarded the steamer. It was still the age of privilege and we had no difficulty in getting cabins though all around us were refugees, the pitiful avant-garde of war. They lined the decks, the passages, the companionways, and in utter exhaustion, they slept. To us children it was too strange for comprehension and we were more interested in the warships which the next morning we saw outside Harwich and which made us nearly burst with national pride.²⁰

Even though as children neither she nor her brother understood the significance of what was going on, Loelia Ponsonby does remember the strangeness of what she saw on the ship because it was so unlike any circumstance she had ever experienced before. But their interest in the warships does suggest some understanding and alignment with the feeling of patriotic endeavour taking hold in much of the rest of the country. What is not easy to tell however is whether this feeling was a subliminal one felt at the time, brought on by the sight of the warships, or whether the feelings of pride have been added retrospectively as the writer tries to remember how she felt as a child.

For other children leading less peaceful, secure lives, the outbreak of war represented a welcome diversion from some of the troubles of home and school. As a young Jewish boy Gibson Cowan, the son of a chauffeur living in the English countryside, was often under attack from the anti-Semitic bullying of the boys and staff at his local high school. At the outbreak of war the Headmaster delivered an address to the whole school entreating the older boys to maintain the traditions of the school by enlisting at the earliest opportunity:

It was a very impassioned speech, attributing the war to a Jewish plot in the Balkans. I hardly noticed the war, except to hope that it would keep them sufficiently engaged to leave me alone.²¹

The writer V. S. Pritchett who was born in 1900 and had a very unsettled childhood in London where his parents' unstable marriage led the family to move lodgings repeatedly, had a similar wish that the war might divert attention from his turbulent home life:

²⁰ Loelia, Duchess of Westminster, *Grace and Favour - the Memoirs of Loelia Duchess of Westminster* (London: 1961) pp 66-67.

²¹ G. Cowen, *Loud Report* (London: 1938) p 27.

European war! Another case of 'prepare to receive cavalry'. This was good news, for us I thought, because it looked as though the worry of our household had spread beyond our garden fence and that our neighbours and the world in general had been infected by our example. Wasn't mother always saying Life was a fight? Until then we had seemed to be the only fighters. We were now the norm.²²

For Pritchett the outbreak of war was a welcome diversion from the fighting at home, but, as we have seen, the writer HE Bates, whose father was a successful shoemaker, remembered it quite differently. He was at first concerned by what he learnt of the outbreak of war but soon got caught up in the excitement of the military preparations:

War suddenly became glorified – or perhaps it would be truer to say that it merely became glamorized.²³

Soon after the outbreak of war an advance party of billeting officers arrived in the Northamptonshire town of Higham Ferrers where the family lived. Bates remembers that the town was soon full of the proud soldiers of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, complete with goat mascot.

But none of its soldiers could have been prouder than the small boy who positively worshipped at their parades, became a devout follower of route marches far out into the country and would have given his heart for the privilege of blowing a bugle or beating a drum. Mercifully he had never heard of the words cannon-fodder. All was glamour and glory, from the nodding head of the goat to the silvery jugglings of the magnificent drum major.²⁴

The Bates family was given the duty of billeting an upper-class lieutenant and his young wife:

And sometimes, when both were out, I used to creep into their room and lift the lid of the long black tin box and gaze down at the glittering grandeur of an officer's wardrobe, from the finery of mess kit to the flashing gleam of scabbard and sword.²⁵

²² Pritchett, *A Cab at the Door - an Autobiography: Early Years* p 136.

²³ Bates, *The Vanished World - an Autobiography* p 73.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p 74.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Commenting on how he has since remembered the time Bates goes on to say:

Often I wonder now what the thoughts of the cannon-fodder were, though I knew of no such wondering then. All was still glory: blow, bugles, blow, swing, rifles, swing. As I listened to the music of marching feet I longed, always, to be a soldier.²⁶

Crowds gathered in London and around the country to hear the news of war declared and for the most part it was met with enthusiasm. For the middle classes particularly it represented the chance for Britain to reassert herself on the world stage, while for the working classes it provided the opportunity for many individuals to escape dull jobs and poor living conditions to take part in what was believed would be a quick and glorious victory. Children were caught up in the highly charged atmosphere and shared this excitement, although for very different reasons. While the adults were concerned with the economic and political implications of the war, for children the war entered their imagination as an extension of their play, a grown up version of what was already present in their reading and games. Evelyn Waugh remembers that:

The war was at first a keen excitement to me. Travelling to Midsomer Norton immediately after its outbreak I delightedly counted the military guards at the mainline bridges. I followed the retreat from Mons to the Marne and drew countless pictures of German cavalry plunging among English infantry with much blood and gunpowder about.²⁷

By this point The Pistol Troop had been dissolved, and instead of armed resistance Waugh and the Roland children, perhaps encouraged by teachers or one of the many patriotic charities that sprang up in the first months of the war, devoted themselves to raising funds for the Red Cross by collecting and selling empty jam-jars, and cutting up linoleum to sole the slippers of wounded soldiers.

Similarly excited by the outbreak of war the novelist Graham Greene, the son of a Berkhamsted headmaster, and ten years old at the outbreak of war, remembers that in its early years he and his brothers hoped for German success so that the war might continue.

²⁶ Ibid. p 75.

²⁷ Waugh, *A Little Learning - the First Volume of an Autobiography* pp 87-88.

Herbert [a brother] bicycled in from Cambridge one day with the evening paper announcing the fall of Namur. My brothers and I were delighted at the speed with which it had fallen because the prolonged defence of Liège had threatened a speedy termination of the war. As long as the war continued, we might one day be involved, and the world of Henty seemed to come a little nearer.²⁸

For children like Greene, who had been bought up on a diet of children's fiction dominated by adventure and the promotion and defence of Britain's Empire, the war became quickly associated with the opportunity for adventure. The war fulfilled all the requirements of a Henty book or *Boys' Own* story. Britain was honouring her Treaty commitments and coming to the aid of a smaller, weaker, nation against an unpopular aggressor. The war promised the opportunity of foreign travel and battles in exotic locations. Throughout, it would provide the opportunity for countless individual acts of heroism and bravery. What more could a small boy want?

Recalling William Le Queux's famous 1906 documentary novel, *The Invasion*, Greene wondered whether there might be an invasion of England, and like Evelyn Waugh's Pistol Troop believed he might help repel it, this time on Berkhamsted Common.

Older boys like Evelyn Waugh's brother Alec, who was a month over 16 when war broke out in July 1914, sometimes felt that 'boyhood ended on that grey July evening'²⁹. As a boarder at a top public school, Sherborne, and a keen sportsman, being too young to enlist had a particularly bitter edge.

It infuriated me that a boy who had been my junior on the football field should be a commissioned officer while I was still a schoolboy; was I not his physical superior even if he was 17 to my 16? Through those hot August days when the British troops fell back from Mons to the Marne, there was for me one absorbing question, the same question that was exasperating my contemporaries all over Europe - 'How soon could I get to France?'³⁰

²⁸ G. Greene, *A Sort of Life* (London: 1971) p 64.

²⁹ Alec Waugh, *The Early Years of Alec Waugh* (London: 1962) p 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.* pp 56-57.

Hoping that the war would go on long enough that they would get a chance to participate is a common theme in the writing of those who were too young to fight at the start of the war. Many young men, especially those brought up within the public school system, expected and wanted to serve the Empire and were fully committed to the moral case for war which echoed the idea that an Englishman must always do his duty for his country. Young men under 18 often attempted to enlist by claiming they were older than they were, and many were successful. Indeed Alec Waugh writing in the early 1960s believes that in 1914:

Most young people hoped for war. There was none of the reluctant but resolved acceptance of an unwelcome fate with which twenty-five years later the country listened to Chamberlain's final broadcast. There was on the contrary the spirit of crusade that was to find expression a few months later in Rupert Brooke's 'Now God be thanked who has matched us with his hour.'³¹

Boys, educated at public school did indeed feel that the war was a crusade. It offered young men with high ideals of chivalry, honour, heroism and sacrifice the chance to be part of something truly great and they flocked to the recruiting stations in their thousands.

Longing to be a soldier however was not a desire confined to boys educated at public school. The writer Malcolm Muggeridge, who was born in 1903 was at Borough Secondary School in London during the war and remembers that he and his friends:

hoped that the war would stretch on until we, too, could participate in its glories and adventures. I even, on one occasion, went so far as to present myself at a recruiting office, tremulously insisting that I was in my nineteenth year. The NCO in charge was sympathetic, but sceptical. He told me to return with a birth certificate.³²

Not all boys however, were so keen to join the fighting and VS Pritchett recalls,

Romantically I saw myself going to the war and was depressed because I was too young, yet I was terrified too. It was all a daydream, of course, for if I had had more spirit and had been a less sickly-minded animal I

³¹ Ibid. pp 55-56.

³² B. Inglis, ed., *John Bull's Schooldays* (London: 1961) p 110.

might have got through by lying about my age. Many tough boys did. I was a small, thin, genteel and timid sentimentalist, dreaming the idea, afraid of the fact.³³

This conflict between wanting to go to war and knowing that he was actually too frightened to attempt it obviously upset Pritchett. Even though he was too young to volunteer he wanted to imagine himself as a soldier and was ashamed that he felt he lacked the courage live out his dream.

But it was not always the boys themselves that wanted to be soldiers. Sometimes it was their parents who wanted more than anything to see them in uniform.

Beverley Nichols who was born in 1899 and had an unhappy childhood at the hands of his over bearing and alcoholic father recalls an incident (while he was still a school boy) when his father, despairing that his two eldest sons had not yet joined up exclaimed:

Never mind!' His voice would become quite cheerful. 'There's still Master Beverley. 'He'll be in it all right!' My mother's face would cloud with distress. 'He's too young.' 'That doesn't matter. The war's going on a long time yet!' And he would look at me with a gloating smile. 'You'll be in it, won't you, m'young feller m'lad? You'll show them you're made of the same stuff as your poor old father.' Then he would sink back into his arm-chair, and close his eyes. Maybe life was going to be kind to him, after all. Maybe it was going to give him a long war, and the satisfaction of a blood sacrifice.³⁴

The desire amongst many adults, both parents and teachers, to see young people do what was expected of them and join the army was intense, and must have helped the British government's recruiting drive enormously. Other, unofficial recruiting drives were also sweeping the nation in the early months of the war, and C.H. Rolph remembers the pride he felt at being mistakenly targeted by one. After the summer of 1914, Rolph (then at school in Fulham) had graduated to long trousers but as was the fashion with his school friends never wore his school cap unless he had to. He remembers:

One consequence of this was that I began to receive white feathers in the street from vicariously patriotic young women. I was large for my age and probably looked seventeen or eighteen, but I made a practice of

³³ Pritchett, *A Cab at the Door - an Autobiography: Early Years* p 199.

³⁴ B. Nichols, *Father Figure* (London: 1972) p 143.

accepting the white feather before saying 'I'm only fourteen', and I think I must have been rather proud of being thought soldier like.³⁵

When he returned to his public school, in September 1914, Alec Waugh at 16 found the place transformed. There was scarcely a boy over 18 left and not many over 17 and a half. Most of those who were there were waiting for their commissions to come through. Younger boys were promoted to positions of authority within the school overnight. Waugh suddenly became a House prefect and Captain of the House Rugby team. He remembers the speech the Headmaster gave to all the newly promoted boys:

In the same way that Kitchener has called up his reserves, I have called upon you. I do not suppose that in the ordinary course of events any of you would have been prefects, but in the same way that, in the army, captains have become colonels overnight, so have you been raised to a position of authority. I know that you will prove worthy of it.³⁶

In spite of his newfound authority Waugh says that there was a sense of unreality in the autumn of 1914, before anyone knew how long the war would last, or what kind of a war it would be.

It was extremely difficult for a schoolboy to continue his studies in the same spirit that he had 6 months earlier. He could not tell whether he would continue his education to its end. Would he ever go to university? Would he indeed be alive after the war? There seemed a basic pointlessness about everything that we were doing. I felt that we were marking time.³⁷

How the educational establishment and individual schools dealt with the subject of the war is the basis of the second chapter of this thesis. In it we will look at how the war entered the curriculum and at how teachers used the war as a way of instilling lessons in citizenship and responsibility in their pupils. The war was used as an example for moral training by both public and state schools alike. Regardless of whether they were catering for boys or girls the war was used as a means of stressing the importance of discipline and hard work, and the children were extolled to live up to the sacrifice of those men who had volunteered to

³⁵ Rolph, *London Particulars* p 135.

³⁶ Waugh, *The Early Years of Alec Waugh* p 58.

³⁷ Ibid.

fight for them. But before moving on to the responses of the schools, the next section of this chapter deals with memories of school life during the war as experienced by the children themselves.

The early stages of the First World War were characterized by enthusiasm and widespread public support, illustrated by the success of Kitchener's recruiting campaigns. From these extracts it appears that many children were equally excited by the war. For younger children it echoed the themes and spirit of their adventure stories and private games. Children already familiar with the themes expressed constantly in their magazines and books quickly imagined battles, a foreign enemy, and the possibility of invasion. For older children the war held the possibility of becoming a real adventure in which they could one day become a part. Those boys educated by the public schools to believe that it was not only an Englishman's duty but also an honour to protect and promote the British Empire, desperately wanted the opportunity to be part of the action. They were not alone however as other boys, caught up in the excitement of the public outpouring of patriotic fervour, imagined themselves as soldiers also. But there is also fear and confusion expressed in the memories and a strong sense that the world, as they had known it, had changed forever for these children.

Memories of School

When war was declared in 1914 our hysteria became a fair copy of what could be found outside the grounds only larger, we displayed it in purer form.³⁸

For the novelist Henry Green born in 1905 and at a preparatory boarding school on the South Coast during the war, school was a strange place, like the world outside but with all the sentiments and emotions more concentrated. Separated from his family and surrounded by other children, Green and others attending boarding schools appear to have been more troubled by what they learned of the war than those children who lived at home and were schooled locally. Half

³⁸ Green, *Pack My Bag - a Self Portrait* p 39.

understood facts and myths, picked up from teachers and each other were internalised by the children and shaped their understanding of war and the outside world.

School is the one environment that is the particular preserve of children. Even the adults who share the physical space of a school and are responsible for its function do not have the same relationship to the place as the children who are pupils there. Memories of school days can be joyous and carefree if they represent a halcyon time in the writer's life, or painful and troubled, recalling days of loneliness and fear, and everything in between. But they are definitely unique. At school, children are separated from their families and forced to integrate with peers and teachers as an individual, and it is this standing alone which sometimes gives memories of school days their particular poignancy.

But what if your school days coincide with a period of intense national and sometimes personal turmoil? Many of the autobiographers included here have very vivid and sometimes disturbing memories of their school days. This may still have been the case even if the war had not been going on, since childhood memories are often fragmentary and loaded with meanings not always fully comprehended at the time or later, but it is also clear that the war was responsible for some of the added emotional pressure under which these children were growing up. The noticeable strain on the adults around them, the privations of food, and for many the enforced separation from fathers and brothers meant that they grew up under unique and difficult conditions.

These writers attended a variety of school including elementary schools, private preparatory schools, Grammars and famous public schools, and it is clear from all of them that war was very much a part of their school experience. Perhaps some of the most striking memories come from writers who as children (sometimes as young as seven) were separated from their families and sent to preparatory and public boarding schools. These children, from privileged backgrounds and used to the comforts of home, went away to schools where the regime was often harsh and austere. In addition it was often at such public schools that the impact of the war was most strongly felt. English public schools

maintained a tradition of training their pupils for service in the Empire and took the responsibility of providing officers for the British Army very seriously. Because of this, we shall see in the rest of this chapter that it was often at such schools that some of the strongest moral assertions and physical privations of the war were felt.

In the early decades of the twentieth century the image of boarding school life was that suggested by *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857) and Talbot Baines Reed's stories in the *Boys' Own Paper*. The constantly reproduced 'school story' displayed public school life as an endless round of sporting triumphs, midnight feasts and school master 'ragging'. The reality was often very different.

The image was strong however, and children from all sorts of backgrounds saw themselves as Greyfriars characters and imagined all the fun they were going to have at their school. After C.H. Rolph's father was promoted to police superintendent of one of the London districts the family moved from where they had been living to a house in the City of London, entailing a change of school for Rolph:

My father had already enquired about Christ's Hospital at Horsham, where the boys were all boarders and wore blue frock coats, knee breeches, and yellow stockings. I secretly rather fancied myself in these, and supposed in addition that Christ's Hospital might be something like Greyfriars, all kippers and toast, ragging and cricket.³⁹

Unfortunately for Rolph he was not eligible for a grant and the family could not afford the fees so an alternative school was found.

When she was nine years old Eileen Hunter's family moved to Surbiton to escape the London air raids and it was decided that she would be sent to boarding school in Buckinghamshire. Later she came to describe the short period she was there as

³⁹ Rolph, *London Particulars* p 147.

only six weeks, but six weeks that stretch in memory into an age of dark wintry discomfort that bordered on real suffering.⁴⁰

But before going Hunter had also imagined her prospective new school in the light of the stories she had read.

Until my mother was ushered out of the cold grim parlour by my new headmistress and I was left alone, straining my ears after the sound of her departing cab as though as long as I heard it I remained in contact with her, I had been greatly sustained by the colourful tales I had read by Angela Brazil - *The Madcap of the Lower Fourth*, *The Jolliest Term on Record* - and had pictured myself pretty, winsome and athletic, tossing my flying curls throughout a series of splendid adventures; but now in deepening twilight, in the ugly room, as I watched my tears drop onto the matted coat of a dog like a dirty doormat that had snuggled up to my hard rush-seated chair, Miss Brazil's picture of the headmistress's cosy study with cheery chintzes, silver framed photos, and leaping log fire began to fade, as did the chiselled profile of her silver haired headmistress with a twinkle behind her spectacles, which entirely vanished at the re-entry of drab Miss Cross with her nut-wrinkled features, baggy serge djibah and claw cold hands.⁴¹

Changing school at eleven was also a disappointment for the novelist H.E. Bates. Having done well at elementary school, Bates secured a place at Kettering Grammar School but found that the teaching was not to his liking. Most of the male teachers had enlisted, their jobs being taken by women:

But whereas this was something that in no sense bothered me at the elementary school I was presently to find it a source of extreme irritation at Kettering. I am now disposed to think that this in all likelihood has something to do with puberty; up to the age of twelve or so it would seem likely that a boy welcomes and indeed relishes a certain maternal touch in the attentions of a schoolmistress. But at fourteen he himself is about to become a man and it is to men that he then begins to look, in my opinion, for greater guidance.⁴²

The effect of the war on the quality of teaching will be discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, but from the anecdotal evidence included here it is obvious that, retrospectively at least, some pupils themselves felt that the war hindered

⁴⁰ Hunter, *The Profound Attachment* p 56.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bates, *The Vanished World - an Autobiography* p 78.

their education. Dame Barbara Cartland, who was born in 1901, says of her boarding school years:

We knew nothing! Our education had been scanty and inadequate during the years of the struggle. All the young masters had gone to fight, all the young and most intelligent mistresses were doing war work. We were taught by the old, the infirm, the men and women who weren't capable of getting better and more lucrative jobs in industry.⁴³

There were some teachers however, who commanded the respect of their pupils. Gibson Cowan speaking of his time at secondary school in London remembers:

In the last year, many of the masters who had left to go to France came back with wounds and took over their old positions. They were acclaimed with a great deal of fuss by the headmaster, and the boys regarded them with awe. Masters who, before they went to the front, could command no discipline, now found that the boys listened attentively to every word they said. None of the returned masters spoke of their war experiences. The whole of the school with the exception of an old botany master of nearly sixty, was still war mad.⁴⁴

Schools that appear, almost without exception (see chapter 3) to have been largely in favour of the war would have been keen to employ men back from the front. Not only because of the obvious staff shortages but also, as Cowan illustrated, because those men had fought, as the schools believed young men should, and thus they were the perfect role model for the young people they were to teach. They would command respect from their pupils, but also represent the very best possible ideal of service. Schools during the war, as we shall see, wanted to be seen to be supporting the war effort, and it was often those masters (and sometimes mistresses) who could not fight themselves that were most zealous in their efforts to impart to the young people they taught how important the prosecution of the war by Britain was.

The poet Christopher Isherwood was born in 1904 and attended St Edmund's Preparatory School in Surrey during the war where he was a contemporary of W.H.Auden. He remembers that near to the school was a common that had been transformed into a huge army camp for Canadian soldiers. The common was

⁴³ B. Cartland, *The Isthmus Years* (London: 1943) p 8.

⁴⁴ Cowen, *Loud Report* p 53.

partially dug up to create a series of trenches and while on their weekly walks with their masters the boys were encouraged to jump these trenches. Isherwood wonders whether perhaps the masters did this to bring home to the boys something of the physical reality of war, something he says they certainly succeeded in doing in his case:

Many of the trenches were seven or eight feet deep; it made me dizzy to look down into them. And though there were plenty of places where I could jump across, they seemed alarmingly wide to me, with my short legs. We also played hide and seek in them. This was fun. But one day, I got temporarily lost and experienced some of the terror of the trench-labyrinth which Robert Graves and other war writers have described.⁴⁵

It is possible that the masters believed that this exercise would help to shape the boys' character, (something particularly important to the public schools and the parents who chose them), and prepare them for war should they one day be called upon to take part. The schools wanted their pupils to be brave and adventurous, willing to have a go at jumping the trenches. Learning to confront fears was part of the character training the schools provided, and so the trenches granted teachers the perfect opportunity to encourage their pupils to be bold. It is also possible that they just meant to frighten the children as Isherwood says they managed to do. Whatever the case it is an illustration of the keenness with which adults, not taking part in the fighting themselves, made sure that the young public schoolboys, who were being groomed to take over the running of the Empire, understood and were part of Britain's involvement in the war.

It is also interesting that Isherwood remembers being lost in the trenches and likens it to the experiences of war writers that he has since read. It is as if he is remembering his own war in the light of what he has read of others' real war. Freud talks about this phenomenon in *Screen Memories* (1899) and suggests that a memory can in fact be made up of layers of different memories, with one memory sometimes suppressing another or, as in this case, the memory of an event being expanded by a later retelling of that same, or similar, events.⁴⁶ In fact many of the memories in this chapter have some of the qualities of screen

⁴⁵ C. Isherwood, *Exhumation* (London: 1966) p 169.

⁴⁶ S. Freud, "Screen Memories," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: 1962).

memories. These authors recalling their childhood have often attached meaning later. The earlier images have been reshaped by later events or by the mere act of recalling them. This is inevitable because of the fragmentary nature of memories; a scene or part of a scene may be conjured but its meaning at the time may escape the author, prompting them to invest the memory with a meaning drawn from later experience. This does not diminishes the importance of what is being remembered, but helps us to understand how that memory fits in with others that have shaped the development of individual character. We are seeking here to understand how these writers' memories of the war years have become part of the layers of memory that have made up a life - how their experience of war contributed to their developing sense of self.

For the poet W.H. Auden who was born in 1907 and was at the same school as Isherwood during this period, the war 'had no reality of any kind'. Even though his father was serving abroad at the time and took part in the Gallipoli campaigns, Auden says 'the thought never entered my head that he might be in any danger'. Although he remembers Christopher Isherwood coming to school with a black armband on and knew that this meant that his father was dead, 'the words 'killed in action' brought no image to my mind'.⁴⁷

In terms of his own participation in activities associated with the war Auden who was only seven when the war began, remembers them as being faintly ridiculous:

Our only 'war work' consisted of collecting sphagnum moss, when there was any, and knitting mufflers in the evening while she [his mother] read aloud to us. At school we drilled with wooden rifles and had 'field days' when we took cover behind bushes and twirled noisemakers to represent machine gun fire.⁴⁸

For Malcolm Muggeridge at the state Borough Secondary School in London, the war had become a daily part of the life of the school:

The very air was full of the hysteria of war. There were old boys who appeared resplendent in their uniforms. We ourselves had a school cadet corps which we were compelled to join. The headmaster was in charge of

⁴⁷ W.H. Auden, "As It Seemed to Us," in *Forewords and Afterwords* (London: 1973), p 504.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p 505.

it, with the rank of a major, and shambled along at the head of us when we had occasion to march through the streets, his uniform, as even my ignorant eye could detect, in strange disarray.⁴⁹

At Minnie Cowley's infant school in Whitton the teachers also wanted to get the children involved and interested in the war.

Lots of soldiers marched past our school almost every day, and the crunching sound of their heavy boots on the stony ground was so noisy that we could not hear the teacher. Taking us out to the playground to see them as they went by in a long line, she told us that they were all brave men who were going to stop the Germans making us slaves.⁵⁰

Cowley's father was a master plasterer who enlisted as soon as war was declared:

I was only a little girl of seven, but I almost burst with pride: my Dad looked just like a king ready to lead his armies into battle.⁵¹

Even at the age of seven, Cowley says that the ideals of patriotism, King and Empire were 'crammed' into them at school. The teachers would line the children up in the playground and, calling on them to march like soldiers, lead them in singing:

My Daddy's dressed in khaki,
He's gone away to fight
For King and Home and Country
For Honour and for Right.
We do not want the Germans
To get all over here
So Dad must go and fight them,
We'll never, never fear.
Now give three cheers for Daddy,
We would not keep him back,
For we are little Britons
And love the Union Jack.⁵²

⁴⁹ Inglis, ed., *John Bull's Schooldays* p 109.

⁵⁰ M. Cowley, *My Daddy Is a Soldier: A Working Class Family in the Lloyd George Era*, Local Studies Collection - Richmond upon Thames p 10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p 11.

⁵² *Ibid.* p 21.

Cowley says:

How I loved that part of the day! I would march along, all stiff and straight, singing louder than any of the others and imagining I was my Dad. Of course, there were some children whose fathers were not soldiers, and I would tell them they should not sing with us, because their dads were not fighting the Germans, but were cowardly custards.⁵³

For this reason the song was no doubt popular with recruiters and echoes many of the recruiting posters aimed at persuading women to encourage their men to fight. As with the 'Daddy, what did you do during the war?' poster it plays on the idea that children would want their fathers to go to the war. But perhaps more importantly it tells children that it is right for their fathers to leave them and that as good patriots who 'love the Union Jack' they should not be afraid or discourage their fathers from going. This is at a time when patriotism was actively *taught* in schools, through celebrations such as Empire Day. This was always a big occasion, and Cowley remembers the excitement the children felt when dressing up as Britannia and waving their Union Jacks during the singing of the National Anthem.

At Henry Green's school the children were also encouraged to follow the war. Using a map the boys marked out all the new army positions with pins and instead of the usual pipe rack each boy made his own dummy rifle in carpentry. They did drill instead of gym and bayonet practice instead of boxing. The school stood on a hill and was surrounded by anti-aircraft batteries. Green remembers being woken in the night by the sound of gunfire:

We stole to the windows, taking care in all that abyss of noise to make no sound ourselves and watched, awed but not frightened until as often came about shrapnel began to fall spent on the roof. When this happened we did feel miserable and ran back to hide beneath the clothes.⁵⁴

The boys were excited by the fighting until it got too close and Green remembers that they were actually proud of being under fire. It is easy to imagine how young boys instilled with stories of heroism and excitement could take pleasure in being so close to the danger while still remaining relatively safe. After the air-

⁵³ Ibid. pp 21-22.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p 44.

raids the boys went out in the morning to collect the shrapnel that had fallen during the night. They hid it in the trunks by their beds until it began to be stolen by the maids who cleaned their rooms.

As the raids became a part of their everyday lives Gibson Cowan, at day school in London, has a similar memory of boyhood excitement and of the importance accorded to the souvenirs of a night's raid:

On fine moonlit nights, many of the boys would go to bed as soon as they arrived home from school, in order to keep awake during the raids and not miss anything. Every morning we met in the grounds and swapped pieces of shrapnel and told stories of how they had fallen near us. North [a friend] became a hero for nearly a week. The complete nose-cap of an anti aircraft shell had fallen through the roof of his outhouse.⁵⁵

Henry Green tells us how another aspect of the war became central to the children's imagination, the story of the Angel of Mons. Paul Fussell explains that the tale, that originated as a fictional story published in the *Evening Standard*, was soon credited as fact. The story went that the ghosts of British soldiers killed in the Battle of Agincourt had come to the aid of their countrymen during the British retreat from Mons in August 1914, killing the Germans without leaving any visible wounds.⁵⁶

Our old tyrant, [headmaster] an Old Testament man, had been overwhelmed by this story and carried it to extravagance, it was proof for him, as it was for many others, that God was on our side. And as we followed him in everything he said we also utterly believed in this story.⁵⁷

Green remembers that every time they saw the flashes of headlights sweep over the grounds or of gunfire they were sure it was those same angels from Mons. But instead of feeling protected by them the boys were afraid. This was especially true after their formidable Headmaster claimed to have seen the angels. If he meant to frighten the children it certainly worked, and Green says that they behaved impeccably in Church after that and kept their belief and fear of the angels a secret. He writes:

⁵⁵ Cowan, *Loud Report* p 38.

⁵⁶ P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: 1975) p 116.

⁵⁷ Green, *Pack My Bag - a Self Portrait* pp 44-45.

I think it is interesting that because they had been through air-raids without one bomb being dropped within seventy miles boys should see what they took to be malignant ghosts of those who had died for them drifting across their playing fields.⁵⁸

As the boys at Green's school were repeatedly told that men were fighting and dying for them, feelings of guilt were common regardless of whether they had done anything wrong or not. In the children's imaginations those soldiers, who had died for them, were returning to see if their sacrifice was deserved. The children appropriated a popular myth, loved by their feared headmaster and subverted its meaning amongst themselves. A fantastical story of ghosts and heroes fired their imagination but took on a life of its own as the children's lack of understanding and fear of authority turned the angels into malignant creatures intent on punishing them for failing to live up to their example.

Green remembers that such confusions and fears were common in the closed and repressive atmosphere of an Edwardian boys' boarding school. But it is another memory of Green's that really highlights the way the emotive and highly colourful tales about the war being retold in the Press became entwined with another highly charged subject in the imaginations of the boys. The subject of sex, particularly at a school such as Green's was one shrouded in mystery. Boys' boarding schools, desperate to avoid scandals that might ruin their appeal to prospective parents, used threats and admonishments couched in the very vaguest terms to make it clear that any form of sexual expression or encounter was strictly disapproved of and could lead to expulsion. In the absence of reliable information the pre-pubescent boys turned the subject into one of dread.

Green explains the effect on boys living in this kind of atmosphere of the rumour, circulating amongst the British public, that the Germans were so short of fats that they were boiling down dead British and German bodies to make food.

This lie which we took for truth gave me exactly those awed feelings I had when we talked of sex. Sex was a dread mystery. No story could be so dreadful, more full of agitated awe than sex. We felt there might even

⁵⁸ Ibid. p 46.

be some connection between what the Germans were said to have done and this mysterious urgency we did not feel and which was worse than eating human fats; or so it seems now, looking back on what many call their happiest time.⁵⁹

Again, myth and rumour from the outside world entered the realm of the boys' private fantasies and became entwined in their minds with other tales and snippets of fact picked up from home and school. The boys, encouraged by each other, were able to form an understanding of the war, quite different from that their teachers and parents might have been trying to encourage. Their war took on a meaning of its own shaped by their individual and collective imaginations.

The memories of the writer William Plomer, (born in 1903), on the other hand concentrate on the distance he felt from the war-fever that surrounded him as a child. He writes with some anger of what he remembers as the hypocrisy of the message of war he was being taught at school. His feelings were perhaps heightened because he spent his holidays helping out and trying to amuse the soldiers in army hospital:

At one moment we might be listening to the Sermon on the Mount; at another we might be watching bayonet practice on the common, where overgrown errand boys in khaki were being taught by a sergeant to stab sacks filled with straw and painted with a rough likeness of the Kaiser. I do not say that we boys were unaffected by war-fever, nor do I say that at the time I was able to explain my feelings to myself as I have explained them since. What I do say is that powerful feelings were there in my heart, of resentment against those who taught me and their teachings, and of pity for the wounded soldiers, of sympathy and love, as if I were on their side, somehow taking their part against the huge forces that had filled this man's lungs with gas, driven this one mad, and torn away that one's genitals. 'Onward Christian Soldiers' we sang in chapel.⁶⁰

Plomer is accepting here that his memory of his feelings has developed over time. While he was troubled at the mixed messages he was receiving at school and identified with the soldiers he met, it was only later that he was really able to explain these feelings to himself. It was only as he developed understanding through exposure to a greater range of experiences that Plomer was fully able to recognise the strength of his feelings as a child.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p 47.

⁶⁰ G Greene, ed., *The Old School* (London: 1934) pp 133-34.

From these accounts it seems as though the war provoked a greater degree of confusion and fear for the children who spent the war years at boarding school. We cannot know how these writers would have remembered the war if they had not been away at school, but it is likely that some of the fear and mystery might have been alleviated had they not been surrounded by other children. In a situation with little adult - child communication outside of school matters, fears, such as Green's of the Angel of Mons, could grow unchecked. It is because it is often feelings like fear, shame and guilt that are remembered most clearly that their school days have provided these writers with such a rich store of memories. Between the efforts of the schools, with the drills and mock battles, and the children's own games and fantasies, the war was a central part of their school experience. Because the schools responded so forcefully to the war, and worked to ensure that Britain's position was understood by those in their care these children were exposed to all the propaganda and hysteria of war.

Memories of Food

It was in 1917 that the submarine blockade became effective. Adolescents were not as tenderly treated by the rationing authorities of the first war as in the second; my introduction to public school life coincided with my first experience of hunger.⁶¹

For Evelyn Waugh and others memories of hunger are intrinsically linked with their memories of war. Authors have been able to conjure up very vivid memories of particular instances when their hunger, or desire for food was unrequited. It is perhaps because their desire was so strong, and their disappointment so great, that these memories have become some of the strongest of childhood. Here is another area where we can see some significant differences in the experiences of children who were at boarding school compared to those children, often from poorer working class backgrounds, who lived at home with their parents during the war. The differences are not necessarily in the *level* of hunger or lack of food they experienced, but in the reasons for that privation and associated feelings of guilt and shame that often seem to accompany it. Britain,

⁶¹ Waugh, *A Little Learning - the First Volume of an Autobiography* pp 99-100.

during the First World War, experienced a severe shortage of food, and it was not until 1917 that rationing was introduced for important commodities like meat and butter. Prices however, began to rise almost as soon as war was declared, which meant that in poorer households budgets were stretched even further and malnutrition became a very real concern.

But whereas the lack of food in such households was unavoidable, it is not from the memoirs of children from these backgrounds that the strongest memories of hunger come. Instead it is from the autobiographies of some of the most privileged children, attending exclusive, fee-paying boarding schools, that we get the clearest impression that the war brought real deprivation and some traumatising experiences to the lives of children. From the earliest days of the war the public schools, almost all of whom supported the war whole-heartedly, wanted to do anything they could for the war effort. To conserve food many of them instituted a system of self-imposed rationing on their pupils and in some schools parcels from home, once a regular occurrence during the term, were all but forbidden.

W.H. Auden remembers the seriousness with which the masters at his prep school took the question of food shortages and the moral censure with which they chastised the boys for any small lapse in self-discipline,

I also remember that when I once took a second slice of bread and margarine, which was permitted, a master remarked, "Auden, I see, wants the Huns to win".⁶²

To be told that his actions threatened the whole outcome of the war clearly had a strong impact on the young Auden. He vividly remembers not only the master's words but also the fact that he was allowed to eat the bread and that therefore the accusation was unfair. Memories of humiliating experiences and feelings of guilt and shame often feature largely in memories of childhood but this example shows us that memories of injustice can leave an equally strong mark in a child's mind.

⁶² Auden, "As It Seemed to Us," p 505.

The authorities at the school of the poet Stephen Spender took the issue of food shortages so seriously that they felt their own usual punishments were not enough to maintain the standard of self-sacrifice desired:

One day, I and a few other boys, being hungry during the "break", ate four quarters of a slice of bread, instead of only a quarter, as we were allowed to do. This was discovered. The housemaster assembled all the boys, and standing on the platform, said words to the effect: "These boys are worse than Huns, they're FOOD HOGS. I'm not going to try and discover the culprits. I leave it to the remainder of you to do what you like with them. I outlaw them." We were soon discovered. Some boys tied pieces of rope round my arms and legs and pulled in different directions.⁶³

The school clearly believed that the way to ensure that children lived up to the required standards of self discipline was to make that discipline a part of the children's own moral code. By encouraging the children to police themselves and each other the adults made sure that the children had absorbed the school's attitude to the food crisis and made it their own.

For one child the school's message had the desired effect. When Eileen Hunter was nine years old she was temporarily sent to a boarding school recommended to her parents by some friends. The vegetarian food was appalling and the school freezing but for the young Eileen it was a sacrifice to be made for the war:

Despite these torments I wrote cheerful letters home. I felt, vaguely, I was helping to win the war by not complaining, and I could also look forward to seeing my parents often as they, having realised, I think, that the vegetarian friends of my mother's who had recommended the school had not known it in its war-time aspect, cheered my exile with as many visits and parcels containing nourishing food as possible.⁶⁴

Eventually Eileen's parents removed her from the school, presumably feeling that the danger from air-raids she was there to escape was preferable to the harsh conditions their daughter was experiencing at school.

The Anglo-Irish novelist Elizabeth Bowen who was born in 1899 has troubled memories of her time at Downe House School and she remembers the war years

⁶³ Greene, ed., *The Old School* p 185.

⁶⁴ Hunter, *The Profound Attachment* p 57.

as ones of unhappiness and stress. She emphasizes the power the war exerted over the girls' behaviour and attitudes.

The moral stress was appalling. We grew up under the intolerable obligation of being fought for, and could not fall short in character without recollecting that men were dying for us. During my second year, the *Daily Mail* came out with a headline about food-hogs, and it became impossible to eat as much as one wished, which was to over eat, without self-consciousness. If the acutest food shortages had already set in, which it had not, meals would really have been easier. As it was we could over-eat, but it became unfeeling to do so. The war dwarfed us and made us morally uncomfortable, and we could see no reason why it should ever stop.⁶⁵

These feelings of guilt and obligation may have been worse for Bowen as a woman, never expected to play a serious role in the prosecution of the war. Too young for war work in the factories or any kind of nursing, Bowen may also have been aware of the fairly low opinion many men had of women's possible contribution. As workers women often aroused suspicion, and to the men at the Front women sometimes represented the worst kind of non-combatant, lacking any real understanding of what the war was really like.

Graham Greene, who attended Berkhamsted School where his father was the Headmaster, considers that:

I suppose we were always a little hungry in the war years. There were no potatoes and little sugar and we grew deadly tired of substitutes - rice and honey-sugar.⁶⁶

Greene was deeply unhappy at his father's school and felt that:

I had left civilisation behind and entered a savage country of strange customs and inexplicable cruelties: a country in which I was a foreigner and a suspect, quite literally a hunted creature, known to have dubious associates. Was my father not the Headmaster?⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Greene, ed., *The Old School* p 50.

⁶⁶ Greene, *A Sort of Life* p 34.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p 72.

Illustrating the hierarchy and symbolism running through children's society
Greene remembers the efforts younger children would make to get extra food at school:

Magic and incantation play a great part in childhood. There was a tuckshop by the fives-court which was only open, because of war-shortages, to boys of the senior school. As a junior I would stand outside reciting an accepted formula, "Treat I", to any older boy as he came out, and occasionally one would detach a morsel of bun and hand it over.⁶⁸

For the novelist Henry Green at prep school, it was a simple case of hunger:

Food, always on our minds, began to haunt our dreams. Not that we were unhappy or obsessed only that there was not enough and what there was of bad quality.⁶⁹

However Green was a large child, a fact cynically utilized by the Headmaster when showing prospective parents round the school;

I became an advertisement for their cooking and would be beckoned up to be examined by inspecting parents, to be thumped and fingered like fat stock at a show. He [the headmaster] was too clever to say my size was due to his table what he said was, "well, this little nipper seems to get on all right".⁷⁰

In 1917 however Green's family house in the country was turned into an Officers convalescent home taking in about 20 wounded officers at a time, and he remembers the benefits such a situation had for the family during rationing.

There was as well the delicious food we had because of them, clotted cream and any amount of butter, things in those days that were so impossibly remote as to seem barbaric delicacies of which one had read and yet would have no chance of tasting.⁷¹

Loelia Ponsonby was a child who had no experience of hunger and whose luxurious lifestyle was little affected by war. Not sent to boarding school she

⁶⁸ Ibid. p 69.

⁶⁹ Green, *Pack My Bag - a Self Portrait* p 41.

⁷⁰ Ibid. pp 18-19.

⁷¹ Ibid. p 72.

was schooled by a governess along with the daughter of a Mrs Hunter at Hill Hall. She recalls that the war ‘touched us children very little’:

We had ponies to ride, cars to carry us to London and masses of good food. For a short while as a concession to the times in which we were living, Elizabeth and I had cooking lessons from the French chef. The only two things I can remember him teaching us were brandy snaps and mashed potato: the latter, according to him, required a pint of cream and half a pound of butter. Not a very basic curriculum.⁷²

For other children such a luxurious diet could only be dreamed of. Molly Keen, the daughter of a master sign writer, was eleven years old when the war broke out and lived in Hounslow on the outskirts of London. She describes the situation, after strict rationing came in and shortages were extremely severe, where people would join a queue outside a shop not knowing what they were queuing for, and always dreading that whatever it was would have run out by the time they got to the counter. She says that:

As schoolgirls we would go into town just in case there was something going. We even tried to make ourselves look grown up by putting our hair up etc. We stood a better chance of buying something then.⁷³

For the service men home on leave the food shortages were sometimes a shock. Dora Hannan remembers her father’s anger when home on leave he discovered that his family couldn’t get any potatoes, he shouted:

“What on earth am I fighting for, when my wife and children can’t get enough to eat?” He walked all over the town until he found a shop selling seed potatoes, and he signed a paper to say that he had an allotment, and bought some. I suppose he felt justified in telling what he thought was a white lie, as of course, he had no allotment.⁷⁴

Although these children come from a variety of backgrounds and experienced quite different degrees of food privation, they have all recorded various memories relating to food in their memoirs. Children’s appetites are very powerful and, as we know from the writings of those who experienced the

⁷² Loelia, *Grace and Favour - the Memoirs of Loelia Duchess of Westminster* p 74.

⁷³ M. Keen, *Childhood Memories 1903 - 1921*, Working Class Autobiographical Archive - Brunel University (London) p 27.

⁷⁴ D.R. Hannan, *Those Happy Highways: An Autobiography*, Working Class Autobiographical Archive - Brunel University (London) p 25.

starvation of the Russian gulags or the German concentration camps, hunger and lack of food can become the overwhelming memory of any experience. Some of these children experienced voluntary restrictions on food imposed by the public schools as a response to growing food shortages, while others experienced real shortages as food prices rose and the German blockades became more effective.

Because these children were sometimes partially deprived of something as important as food, and particularly of just the types of food children like the most, these memories are some of the strongest and most vivid in the autobiographies. The feelings of hunger and the guilty and shameful emotions aroused when they did indulge in eating more than they were supposed to, were so intense and came at such an important time in the development of their characters that these memories stand out clearly when these writers remember their years at school. Around the issue of food children's desires came face to face with real and artificial prohibition. What they wanted most was just what they could not have. And when that prohibition came in the form of moral censure the children were forced to wrestle with themselves over their conflicting desires to indulge and live up to expectations at the same time. During the First World War it was the issue of food perhaps more than any other that defined the Home Front experience. Britain experienced real shortages, undermining morale and threatening the health of those at home. In the light of this it is easy to understand how food has become one of the most overriding memories of the war for these writers.

Memories of Anti German Attitudes

I went out to find one of the German boys down the street. I found him outside the iron-mongers where he had just bought a wash-leather and, shouting 'Dirty German' I hit him, without more warning.⁷⁵

V.S.Pritchett remembers his response to the outbreak of war as this direct attack on a former friend. As a boy of fourteen, brought up playing and reading of

⁷⁵ Pritchett, *A Cab at the Door - an Autobiography: Early Years* p 137.

battles, his German peer fell immediately into the position of enemy. Just as they may well have fought against each other in mock battles, Pritchett now cast him in the role of opposing army and transferred their private games into the public world of real war. For children then perhaps there was no line between the enemy presented in the press and anybody who appeared to share characteristics or nationality that they came across in every day life. They responded unilaterally, striking out against the enemy where they found him, thinking little about whether that individual really fitted the role or not. Although their motivation may have been more direct, less metaphorical, children were not alone in attacking their German neighbours, and we must presume that some of their behaviour was prompted by the actions of the adults around them who turned so vehemently against German nationals living in Britain.

Although sections of the press and many politicians had been openly hostile to Germany before the war, Germans in England had rarely been the target of aggression. But with the declaration of war in August 1914 the position of Germans in England became increasingly uncomfortable as the campaign to expose the 'enemy in our midst' was pursued relentlessly by unofficial organisations and in the press. There were calls for all Germans to be interned, German businesses were attacked and individuals were subjected to fierce suspicion. Enemy aliens were all removed from 'prohibited' areas like coastal towns and areas of military operations; they had to register with the local police and later Orders of Council prohibited the ownership of carrier pigeons and wireless sets as well as the dispatch of letters abroad. Many families, with German sounding names, including the Royal Family, quickly anglicised them, street names were changed, shops belonging to Germans were attacked and even German music was no longer played.⁷⁶

Cate Haste explains that 'in wartime the intricate patterns of politics are refined into simple and crude images of right and wrong. Germany was the aggressor, Britain the crusader for the rights of small nations, for democracy and freedom'.⁷⁷ If the public were to continue in their support of the war, this image had to be

⁷⁶ Cate Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning - Propaganda in the First World War* (London: 1977) p 110.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p 79.

maintained. Anti-German propaganda served to emphasise and illustrate this, giving the public a picture of the Germans they could truly hate. Not wishing to let the war effort down, most newspapers and magazines were willing to print reports of German atrocities with very little, if any, basis in truth. With hardly any actual detail about the fighting coming through to the British public, people were understandably desperate for information and many believed most if not all of what they were told. Even a soldier like Robert Graves, was taken in by the propaganda. Writing in his autobiography, *Good-bye To All That* (1929) Graves says:

it never occurred to me that newspapers and statesmen could lie. I forgot my pacifism - I was ready to believe the worst of the Germans. I was outraged by the cynical violation of Belgian neutrality, I wrote a poem promising vengeance for Louvain. I discounted perhaps 20% of the atrocity detail as wartime exaggeration. That was not, of course, enough.⁷⁸

The propaganda of the day succeeded in stirring up and exaggerating the fears and suspicions of the population. It resulted in an almost fanatical hatred of all things German and heightened the already fervent patriotism sweeping the nation, as people went to great pains to demonstrate their loyalty. The result for Germans in England was, Haste explains, that it:

legitimised the expression of vindictiveness and hatred against a minority whose actual activities had, in fact, never warranted such abuse. The war against the enemy on the home front was a triumph for hate propaganda.⁷⁹

Eileen Hunter describes the situation, as she understood it as a child of six at the outbreak of war:

To my sister and I, shielded as we still felt ourselves to be by the all-powerful, larger than life figures of the grown-ups, the first months of the grinding progress of the war appeared to bring little alteration; though, it is true, we obediently learned to hate the Kaiser - so recently a 'fine figure of a man', and our revered royal family's respected relative - and I remember ceremoniously spitting on his portrait in an illustrated paper, and jeering at his weak chinned offspring, 'Little Willie'. Dachshunds -

⁷⁸ Robert Graves, *Good-Bye to All That* (London: 1960) p 99.

⁷⁹ Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning - Propaganda in the First World War* p 139.

renamed German sausage dogs' - Beethoven, Vienna bread, and Wagner were referred to with contempt and spurned with equal contumely.⁸⁰

Clearly Eileen and her sister were encouraged to turn against all things German by their parents. She says that they 'obediently learnt to hate the Kaiser' suggesting that there was a concerted attempt made in the family home to turn the children against a figure they had previously been taught to admire. Here, unlike V.S.Pritchett's response, the children's attitude to the Germans is being directly mediated by their parents. It does not appear that Eileen harboured any ill feeling of her own, just that taking a negative stand against the Germans became a learned response as the adults around her rejected all German connections.

For Beverley Nichols too it was a parent who championed hatred of the Germans. Here he describes his father's reaction to the war as typical:

The word 'German' was forbidden in the house; a German was a 'Hun' and as such must be described. This made intelligent conversation about the war even more difficult than in most British households, particularly for my mother. The least vindictive of women, the word 'Hun' came uneasily from her lips, and she was constantly offending him. When she did, he would stick in his eyeglass and stare at her, asking her who these 'German friends of hers' might be? He knew no 'Germans'. He only knew 'Huns'.⁸¹

Nichols' father was an alcoholic and terrorised his family with his behaviour and moods throughout his life. As we have already seen he was keen for his sons to join the army and wrote regular letters to the War Office offering his services in every capacity he could think of. This violent stance against the Germans then does not seem out of character although we can see from this extract that not everyone was so comfortable with such language.

Gibson Cowan describes both the extent of anti-German feeling and the lengths those with German connections would go to to avoid being thought of as anti-British. At the outbreak of war Cowan's father was working as a chauffer for an

⁸⁰ Hunter, *The Profound Attachment* p 41.

⁸¹ Nichols, *Father Figure* p 138.

elderly Austrian man named Schmidt. Cowan describes him as ‘a typical Teuton, with a fine close-cropped bullet head and a thick German accent,’

He [Schmidt] kept a dachshund called Johann. One day Johann came home tarred and feathered by the villagers. This was the first incident that made the war real to me.⁸²

Cowan describes Schmidt’s attempts to avoid aggravating his English neighbours:

At the end of 1915 Schmidt asked my father to enlist under the Derby scheme. Being an Austrian he wished to avoid the gossip that would arise if he employed a man within military age. My father refused and was dismissed. We left the country and moved to London.⁸³

If the Cowans had left the country for London in the hope that they would find its inhabitants more tolerant they were likely to be disappointed. C.H. Rolph describes the attitude that prevailed amongst the children he played with in West London after war had broken out:

The percussion cap pistols came out again, old walking sticks were converted to dummy rifles, and the Prussophobia of the past ten years became so universal among my street urchin comrades that no one along the whole road wanted to be a German and it was difficult to arrange battles.⁸⁴

Rolph had a friend, David Blumberg who had never made any secret of his father’s German nationality but was bullied mercilessly at school and in the street. Blumberg was renamed ‘Hunberg’ and later, ‘von Zeppelin’ by the other children and on one occasion fish glue was smeared on his chair at school, causing his skin to peel off his legs when he tried to get up. Rolph remembers the situation:

It was David’s lot to be in the right place at the right time for a persecution which even the mildest of the boys was willing to tolerate, and I felt I had never seen anything so degrading or so productive of vicarious and helpless anger. His school satchel was thrown over a high

⁸² Cowen, *Loud Report* p 29.

⁸³ Ibid. p 30.

⁸⁴ Rolph, *London Particulars* p 126.

wall into a factory yard, his school cap was filled with horse dung, he was shouted and sneered at, his parents and his country were abused. And I wish that I could remember that I stood up for him at the time, or ranged myself at his side to share the torment. To my shame, I recall nothing of the sort.⁸⁵

Before the war Blumberg is mentioned as a close friend and it is a mark of the strength of the other children's persecution of David that Rolph failed to stand up for him. The sudden cruelty of the other children to their long-term classmate is shocking but not unsurprising. In the press and in the streets Germany and Germans were being vilified, here in the classroom and playground the children had a real German of their own on whom they could act out their understanding of the prevailing mood. The adult Rolph is ashamed of the fact that he did not support his friend as he remembers the viciousness of his classmates to the innocent boy – able now as an adult to understand how truly miserable that must have been for him. He is perhaps also ashamed because he knows that not all children were so cowardly. His own brother Harold was attacked by an angry mob as he tried to stop a group of children throwing lighted matches into the open basement window of a German hairdresser's shop.

It is clear that some children were quick to copy the anti German behaviour and attitudes of the adults around them. Few children, like the adults around them, were keen to defend Germans from attacks probably for fear of reprisals, but it is also interesting that some of them have remembered with shame that they did not stand up for their friends. Children can be especially cruel, often for no obvious reason and so when presented with a seemingly legitimate target for aggression and bullying, children, lacking a full understanding of the situation in any case, appear to have taken up the cause passionately.

Memories of Air Raids

I was scared and excited at the same time. Scared in case the German aeroplanes came down in our road and lots of soldiers got out and killed us all, excited because there were so many people in our house.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ibid. p 127.

⁸⁶ Cowley, *My Daddy Is a Soldier: A Working Class Family in the Lloyd George Era* p 73.

Just seven years old when war broke out Minnie Cowley experienced a real conflict of emotions whenever an air raid warning sounded near to her home in Whitton. Although she loved the party atmosphere with family and neighbours gathered together in the middle of the night, she also knew why they were there. The fact that the Germans were coming, flying literally over her home, terrified her, but she misunderstood their intention. Perhaps aware of pre-war talk of invasion Minnie believed that the Germans were going to land and that the soldiers would come for her and her family. But this is understandable, for the first time the First World War saw British civilians attacked in their own homes.

The Germans had begun air raids over the UK in December 1914, using both aeroplanes and Zeppelins. By June 1918 108 raids had been flown over Great Britain, with the South East the most heavily targeted area. By the end of the war civilian casualties reached 5,611 with 1,413 people being killed by air attacks.⁸⁷ More significant perhaps than the attacks themselves was the fear they provoked among the general population. The relatively new and exciting world of aviation was transformed into a terrifying and violent menace. For adults and children alike this was a new experience and coming under attack often holds a very significant place in their memory of the war.

Minnie Cowley was not alone in finding the war exciting. Other children also revelled in the disruption it brought to their everyday lives and for many Zeppelin raids were the apotheosis of that excitement. Taking place usually at night and meaning a move to a safer place, sometimes accompanied by artillery fire to light up the night sky, Zeppelin raids were a spectacle that held all the promise of an exciting night.

Kathleen Betterton whose father was a liftman on the London Underground and had been declared medically unfit for active service, lived in Fulham as a child. Betterton despite being only an infant during the war remembers how excited she and the daughter of a family they sheltered with were at the prospect of a raid:

⁸⁷ Marwick, *The Deluge - British Society and the First World War* p 198.

Those nights held for the two of us all the fun of midnight picnics, and my hopeful question, as I was tucked up in bed, was always – “do you think there’ll be an air-raid?” In the morning on our way to school we hunted for bits of shrapnel to pass from hand to hand round the class, and we would swap our stories of the night’s doings like any grown-up.⁸⁸

The writer V.S.Pritchett remembers being similarly excited when a stray Zeppelin began to drop bombs on the nearby Bromley Recreation ground. Although his mother was terrified he wanted to watch:

Someone seemed to be driving nails into the sky with a hammer and knocking sparks off it; and now and then a lorry with a gun on it started rapid fire, just over the fence by our silver birch trees. Mother screamed. So we all came downstairs and she grabbed us in her fierce arms while she moaned, dragging us round and round in a circle with her, while we twisted our necks and struggled to get away in order to see the gun flashes and to hear the shrapnel coming down (we hoped) on our garden path. What we were really waiting and longing for was to hear the great naval gun go off at Pickhurst Green, across the fields, for the flash of this superb gun lit up the country for miles and the majestic detonation shook the whole town. Now, it fired and fired again, as we rocked together in my mother’s grip, so that we were like some moaning animal with five heads and ten legs struggling with itself.⁸⁹

Arthur Jacobs was born in 1907 and lived in Hampstead as a child. He remembers being woken in the night by his parents in order to watch the first Zeppelin being brought down. As the Zeppelin fell to the earth he heard a cheer go up amongst his neighbours but remembers that their landlady shouted:

“For God’s sake don’t cheer, there are poor devils dying up there!”⁹⁰

It was a dramatic event and Jacobs recalls being confused about his feelings on the night:

I couldn’t take in the tragedy of it, feeling the situation to be no more real than if I had been at the cinema. If I had any feeling at all it was one of selfish relief – for now there wouldn’t be a horrible bang which shook the

⁸⁸ K. Betterton, *White Pinnies, Black Aprons ...* Working Class Autobiographical Archive - Brunel University (London) p 24.

⁸⁹ Pritchett, *A Cab at the Door - an Autobiography: Early Years* p 152.

⁹⁰ A.P. Jacobs, *Just Take a Look at These*, Working Class Autobiographical Archive - Brunel University (London) unpaginated.

crockery on the kitchen dresser and made me jump nearly out of my skin.⁹¹

Having been woken to witness the Zeppelin brought down and hearing the cheers of his neighbours Jacobs was aware as a child that he was supposed to feel something about what he was seeing. However he remembers that it did not seem real to him and was only pleased that no bombs would be dropped. It is only in retrospect that he considers his feelings of relief to have been selfish. At the time, as a small boy, he could not comprehend the enormity of what he saw and was preoccupied with his own fears about the noise. But as an adult it is the memory of his landlady admonishing her neighbours for their callousness that sticks in his mind. Knowing now the horrors those men in the plane must have gone through Jacobs recalls his own feelings as selfish, although they can't have seemed so at the time.

Molly Keen who was eleven at the outbreak of war and lived in Hounslow on the outskirts of London, was also frightened by what she understood of the war going on around her:

Newspapers showed pictures of refugees fleeing from the horrors of war. I dreamed of seeing the advancing German hoards marching up the road with their spiked helmets filling the Bath road as the cavalry had done when I was small, thank God it was only a bad dream.⁹²

Similarly, Dora Hannan whose father was in the Royal Navy, remembers that she was terrified of the war having seen pictures of fierce looking Germans in spiked helmets and carrying bayonets.

I went to bed thinking that when I woke in the morning the Germans would have landed and captured us all. My mother tried her best to calm my fears, though heaven knows it must have been difficult for her with her man, brothers and brothers-in-law in the thick of the fighting on sea and land, but she said, "Now don't you be frightened of those dirty old Germans, Daddy in his battleship with the big guns will take good care they don't reach us".⁹³

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Keen, *Childhood Memories 1903 - 1921* p 27.

⁹³ Hannan, *Those Happy Highways: An Autobiography* p 25.

In the cases of Keen and Hannan both girls were particularly frightened of the Germans they had seen in photographs and pictures, presumably in the Press. They were frightened of the possibility of invasion, and feared that they would be captured. For other children, these fears which could be expected as a normal reaction to the events around them were compounded by particular incidents which made the frightening Zeppelin raids even more alarming and caused them to stick in the writers memory as being of particular significance.

C.H. Rolph remembers why one such raid stuck particularly in his mind:

One evening in October as I was getting in to bed we heard distant anti-aircraft guns firing at something – or it may have been at nothing, we never learnt what had happened. I remember only that they sounded like distant drums, and that I was ashamed to discover that I was thoroughly frightened, the fear being greatly increased by the fact that I was standing in my extremely short under-vest and struggling in the dark to find the way into my flannelette nightshirt.⁹⁴

Syd Metcalfe, whose father was a painter and decorator but was serving in the army, experienced the full terror of an air raid when a firebomb fell directly in front of the building his family were living in, setting it on fire. This was understandably a traumatic event, but interestingly it was not the fire that Metcalfe remembers particularly:

As we emerged from the passage door onto the pavement we were suddenly caught up in a jostling crowd and I became separated from my mother and the others. This started me crying and it was then that someone took me by the hand and led me across the road. What my thoughts were at that time I have clean forgotten but what happened next will live with me to my very last day. I trod with my bare feet into a heap of still wet and warm horse-dung.

This nauseated me. I can sense it yet. I was defiled. From that moment on I could think of nothing else. The house on fire, I had lost trace of my mother and the others, my clothes were in the burning house, but all I could think of was the fact that I had sunk my bare feet into that heap of mire.

I don't know whether I would have remembered that occasion at all were it not for that one fact. So strangely works the mind of a child.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Rolph, *London Particulars* p 139.

⁹⁵ S. Metcalfe, *One Speck of Humanity*, Working Class Autobiographical Archive - Brunel University (London) p 9.

The fact that this is what Metcalfe remembers puzzles him and he goes on to say:

There is no pattern to the memories that one retains. They are not made up of the same elements – some are happy occasions, some are sad, some when worried, others when just naughty. There must have been many happenings of far greater importance in between that I have completely forgotten. The fact is we just never know what is important to a child and what isn't.⁹⁶

Metcalfe was born in 1910 and was still very young when this incident happened, perhaps suggesting why he felt he might not have remembered it at all had it not been for the accident with the horse dung. But later in the war Metcalfe witnessed a Zeppelin being brought down and recalls clearly:

As a spectacle it was simply brilliant. Oohs and ahs came from everyone there. We were winning the war. The might of the British Empire was on display. What a moment for a young boy.⁹⁷

Through Metcalfe we can see the diverse ways the war affected young children. On one occasion he is possibly so traumatized by what is going on around him that he suppresses his memory of the night his house was bombed with one of stepping in horse dung but on another occasion he remembers feeling inspired by the sight of a British success and felt proud to be a British child during the war. Other children were sometimes both excited and frightened at the same time by the presence of Zeppelins so close to their homes and although the Zeppelin raids were nowhere near as dangerous to the civilian population as the air raids of the Second World War they were the first time Britain had come under attack from the air and brought the enemy amidst the general population. Many of these memories have acquired added meaning over time. While as children most responded instinctively to what they found frightening or exciting, evident in the direct and simple scenes they recall, these memories have gathered intensity in the intervening years. Perhaps as a result of the more numerous and dangerous air raids of the Second World War these authors have invested their earlier memories with a significance they couldn't have fully comprehended at the time. What this produces is a recall of events coupled with a revision of feeling which

⁹⁶ Ibid. p 10.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p 16.

allows authors like Metcalfe and Jacobs to challenge what they felt as children in the light of what they have since learnt.

Memories of Separation and Loss

The joy and excitement when they arrived quite unexpectedly was overwhelming. Those seven days went on so quickly, then came the dreaded time for departure... How we hated that awful moment for goodbye not knowing if we would see them again.⁹⁸

Jack and Percy were Molly Keen's elder brothers, both of whom enlisted in the army as soon as they were old enough. Coming from a close family, this separation from her two beloved brothers brought joy and pain to Molly as they left and returned several times during the course of the war. It is in the detail of such family relationships that we must look to understand why it was that children reacted so differently to the separation and loss caused by war. For while some children, like Molly, were deeply hurt by the absence of their fathers and brothers and expressed their emotions openly, other children felt confused and ambivalent about being parted, sometimes permanently, from their close relatives. The First World War required the vast deployment of troops, first through voluntary enlistment and then, after 1916 through conscription. After that any man between the ages of 18 and 41, considered to be medically fit and not exempt on occupational grounds, was deemed to have enlisted. This meant that huge numbers of children were separated from their fathers and sometimes their brothers for several years during the war.

As we have already seen, having a father involved in the war effort was a cause of great pleasure and pride for some children. Edith Hall's father was in the Royal Army Medical Corps during the war and while he was away her mother lodged girls from the nearby munitions factories (canary girls). Hall remembers the impact these girls had on her childhood and how she associated her father with the young men they were seeing away at the Front:

⁹⁸ Keen, *Childhood Memories 1903 - 1921* p 27.

The Canaries must have been with us for about three or four years and were no doubt a great influence on my formative years and it pleased me that I received pretty French postcards from my Daddy as they also did from their soldier boys.⁹⁹

For Hall having a father involved with the war then held a certain sense of relief and allowed her to identify with the older girls she so admired that were living with the family at the time. Hall's father was captured during the war and spent some years in a prisoner of war camp, but rather than being upset by this she remembers that:

I was secretly glad that he had been taken prisoner because my friend had been told by her father that RAMC men weren't really in the war and didn't face the dangers of the fighting men.¹⁰⁰

It was important for Hall that her father faced danger like the fathers of her friends and like the boyfriends of the munitions workers who lodged with them. But for other children there could be nothing worse than being parted from a father. Arthur Jacobs was deeply affected every time his father, a Post Office worker, had to return to the army after a period of leave:

It was hard to tell which of us was the more wretchedly unhappy – mother or me. In a way it was a relief when he was out of reach, because some of those Sunday evenings when the three of us walked through the mocking sunshine down through Frognaal to Fortune Green, where he would catch a bus for Woolwich, were the unhappiest I have ever known. We were all brightly cheerful, of course, and probably no outsider could have sensed the underlying misery; for father rarely showed signs of any kind of emotion and insisted that mother and I followed suit.¹⁰¹

An only child, and only seven years old when war broke out, Jacobs was obviously deeply affected by the separation from his father and remembers that:

The worst part of all was walking back up from Frognaal with mother – springtime and the Hampstead we both had known for all our lives, and shared, of course, with father. Walking back with lagging footsteps, I making useless, inane remarks in an effort to be funny, and trying

⁹⁹ E. Hall, *Canary Girls and Stockpots* (Luton: 1977) p 10.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p 6.

¹⁰¹ Jacobs, *Just Take a Look at These* unpaginated.

desperately hard not to think about the put-off homework awaiting me back in that strangely empty flat, with father's books and pipes and other personal belongings still around the place to rub their own peculiar salt into fresh wounds.¹⁰²

For many children the war meant a permanent separation from family members. Joseph Armitage's brother had joined the Army in January 1915 and in the June of that year his family received notification that he had been killed in action at Gallipoli.

I shall always remember the morning that the long buff coloured envelope came by the early post. Mother sat down and opened it then her face seemed to freeze like a mask. I remember asking her what the letter was about, after a while she said in a strange quiet voice – "George is dead, he's been killed".

She said nothing else for what seemed like hours, she just sat there at the end of the long white deal table staring straight in front of her.¹⁰³

The death of George meant that for some time, until his war pension came through, the family was in financial difficulties. Armitage remembers how his mother had to go to one after another of her relatives to borrow money and believes that that experience, coupled with the loss of her son, changed his mother completely. He felt that she seemed to hold a grudge and began to treat everyone with suspicion and distrust, shunning her neighbours and almost all her relatives.

As for myself, I was not allowed out of her sight, for the next two years I was almost a prisoner at home, it was a relief to go to school and mix with other boys.¹⁰⁴

Armitage remembers hearing other people tell his mother that as he was young, (in fact only seven years old when his brother was killed), he would soon get over the death, but he felt that it was not that easy.

More especially was this so because mother had developed a habit of talking to herself when she was alone and I was (or she thought that I was asleep) or otherwise out of earshot. If there had been another child, or

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ J.H. Armitage, *The Twenty Three Years. Or the Late Way of Life and of Living.*, Working Class Autobiographical Archive - Brunel University (London) p 59.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p 60.

someone else that I could have talked to, it would have been a great comfort to me, but all that I could do was listen and say nothing.¹⁰⁵

The death of her son had a profound effect on Armitage's mother and he remembers her grief rather than his own after the death of his brother.

C.H. Rolph was deeply troubled when his older brother attested under the Derby Scheme and became a member of the Honourable Artillery Company:

By September 1917 he was in France, and my heart and my alter ego went with him. The occasion of his departure to France remains in my memory indelibly, distressing me to this day.¹⁰⁶

Rolph was close to his elder brother making his identification with him all the more powerful. He felt that he too should be in France, sharing the experiences and fate of his sibling. In a close family, where what happens to one has a profound effect on all, this separation must have been particularly traumatic. At this time in the war the British were heavily involved in the third battle of Ypres – Passchendale. The casualty figures were appalling and those back in England were beginning to realise the full tragedy of the event. When the time came for his brother to leave Rolph remembers that the reaction of his father greatly surprised him at the time:

My father knew only too well that anyone 'going up the line' at that time stood a poor chance of surviving, and when Harold said goodbye I was severely shaken to see my father embrace him in tears. Just as though they were both foreigners.¹⁰⁷

Arthur Jacobs has described how some of the teachers at his junior school in London dealt with children who were going through some extremely difficult times:

Children in Mr Hill's class (to which I was soon promoted en route for the scholarship class) brought their domestic burdens to school to be shared. Fathers and brothers were "missing" – fathers and brothers were dead. Some of the children seemed stunned and uncomprehending; others – sensitive and afraid – were told to put their heads on their arms

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p 62.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p 176.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

and “rest”. Sometimes their sobbings became unbearable and a prelude to the despairing youngsters being sent home – to what additional misery?¹⁰⁸

So far all memories of separation and loss have been those of children from lower middle class and working class backgrounds who lived at home with their families during the war. All were deeply upset and affected by the separation from close family members reflecting the close family groups of which they were a part. Such a change to the domestic environment, where a once constant presence was suddenly gone must have had a profound effect on these children. Knowing that that much loved father or brother might be leaving for the last time put acute strain on relationships and meant that the time they did have together was always touched by sadness. The following set of memories on the other hand all come from those who as children were sent to boarding school and lived most of the year separated from family members. These memories are very different from the ones just discussed. Instead of real sadness at the loss or parting of a relative these children often appear confused about what they were supposed to feel when the war separated them from fathers and brothers.

As the intention of the British public schools at this time was to educate future British gentlemen (and women), it was important that the children educated at them were able to control their feelings and handle whatever misfortune befell them. As such the children were not encouraged to display emotions that might be construed as a sign of weakness, instead they were expected to put on a brave face and cope with their grief alone. The war, in most of these schools’ eyes was a necessary evil and one that should be supported wholeheartedly. The schools were proud of their old boys in uniform and children were expected to be equally proud of their fathers and brothers for defending the empire.

In *Exhumation* Isherwood talks of how the boys at his prep school had what he refers to as a cult of the dead:

Several boys, including myself, had lost their fathers; many of us had lost a near relative. It is untrue to say that we were callous; I think we mourned in our own barely conscious way. But the concept of Grief, as

¹⁰⁸ Jacobs, *Just Take a Look at These* unpaginated.

practiced by adults, was almost meaningless to us. We could only understand it in terms of drama, over which we gloated, and of social prestige, which commanded our sincere respect.¹⁰⁹

Isherwood also remembers that when boys were called out in the middle of a lesson to be told that a father or brother had been killed, the standard response of his friends, when he finally returned, would be to ask 'did you blub much?' Following the death of a relative, boys wore black crepe armbands 'with grave pride' and this brought with it the privilege of not being 'ragged' by the other boys.¹¹⁰

On one occasion during a friendly, laughing scuffle, a boy's armband got torn. Immediately he burst into tears of indignation, crying, 'look what you've done, you swine!' and we let go of him at once, equally shocked at this violation of taboo.¹¹¹

Perhaps most upsettingly Isherwood recounts the story of a boy who pretended to the others that his father was dead.

He was unpopular and lonely, and I suppose he was desperate for some recognition.¹¹²

The boys discovered his lie and subjected him to what was in their system of justice the equivalent of capital punishment - they threw him in to a gorse bush. This suggests that the prestige associated with losing a father was sufficiently great to elevate an unpopular and clearly very unhappy boy to a level that would demand if not the friendship, then at least the respect of his schoolfellows. Equally, this status was revered and respected by the boys and anyone abusing it was dealt with brutally.

The reverence for death amongst both schoolboys and British society alike created particular emotional difficulties for Isherwood and his brother. On returning to school after the death of his father Isherwood found that he had

¹⁰⁹ Isherwood, *Exhumation* p 170.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid. p 171.

acquired a new social status, and one that commanded the respect of everybody he met – he was now an ‘Orphan of a Dead Hero’.¹¹³

Isherwood found that his new status as a ‘Sacred Orphan’ had grave disadvantages; he always felt under obligation to be worthy of his Hero-Father. Isherwood explains that he eventually came to feel that those feelings of guilt that the people close to him and society as a whole created in him, caused him to reject his father and ultimately the authority of all the symbolic institutions of the time, Flag, School, Unknown Soldier, and Country.¹¹⁴

Isherwood’s younger brother had similar feelings of guilt and remembers:

I did so hate being everlastingly reminded of him, when I was young. Everybody kept saying how perfect he was, such a hero and so good at everything. He was always held up as someone you could never hope to be worthy of, and whenever I did anything wrong I was told I was a disgrace to him. You know I had a recurring nightmare that he wasn’t dead at all and that he was coming back to live with us! And then I was horrified, and I wanted to run away from home and hide somewhere before he arrived. I used to simply loath him.¹¹⁵

A constant theme in Henry Green's reminiscences is the strange closed world of the boys' mutual society, with its own hierarchy, laws, morals and codes of conduct. These were unchanged by the war and displayed themselves in the most unlikely of circumstances. Green recounts how when boys' mothers came down to the school to take them out to tea in the town they often had news of relatives who had lost their lives. At this time the boys had made a rule between themselves that on these occasions they would take a friend with them:

This rule was unbreakable and it so happened that when a friend's father lost his life and his mother came down to read out his last letters home I went out with them and after tea we sat in the park I have described and they both cried over his letters as we sat with our backs against the tree. You would have thought this rule could be relaxed at such a time but there was no question of it. We always had boiled eggs when out for tea.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ C. Isherwood, *Kathleen and Frank* (London: 1971) p 356.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p 357.

¹¹⁶ Green, *Pack My Bag - a Self Portrait* p 43.

When his own brother died, not in the war but while still at school, Green remembers worrying that he was not feeling as he should and was preoccupied with worrying about whether he was looking sad enough.

For death, in our school at least, put a plate glass window between those whose family had been visited and the other boys; we shunned anyone thus afflicted, and when it happened to us were shunned in our turn. The reason was, I remember perfectly, that any boy was made strange to us, he was set apart by the occurrence as though he had turned overnight into an albino. This in individual cases did not last for long but during the war the grounds usually had one forlorn minute figure walking alone not feeling anything most likely but left to himself because he ought to be.¹¹⁷

Green, and others he suggests, were often unsure of their feelings or lacked the confidence to show them. Even faced with the death of his brother, as a child, Green was confused by his feelings and doubted his own ability to respond to the death as he felt those around him expected him to. With personal bereavement rarely discussed amongst the children or with their carers, they were forced to rely on symbolic etiquette, and learned patterns of behaviour, to get themselves through emotionally very difficult times. With so many expectations placed on them to behave and respond in particular ways children like Green did not have the opportunity to practice grieving. Fear of failing, or getting it wrong, meant that children trying to conform to what was expected of them by their schools, held back from expressing any emotions at all. This conformity which existed before the war, and was indeed a hallmark of what public school education was all about, meant that children had lost the ability to mediate their feelings to themselves. Instead of responding naturally, expressing their emotions and navigating a path for themselves through their grief, these children were confused by what they felt, not sure whether it was appropriate or not.

Elizabeth Bowen's memory of death amongst her classmates' relatives appear more troubled than those of Isherwood and Green. This is perhaps due to the fact that, unlike the others, she was in her teens during the war and therefore possibly more sensitive to the emotions of others than the young schoolboys. Bowen remembers that a death was a cause of great embarrassment.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p 82.

If a girl's brother were killed or wounded we were all too much embarrassed to speak of it. Though death became familiar it never became less awkward: if heroic feeling ran low in us I think this was because the whole world's behaviour seemed to be travestying our own: everywhere, everyone was behaving as we were all, at our ages, most anxious not to behave. Things were being written and said constantly that would have claimed any one of us: the world seemed to be bound up in a tragic attack of adolescence and there seemed no reason why we should ever grow up, since moderation in behaviour became impossible.¹¹⁸

For older boys, schools became places surrounded by and associated with death. The public schools had responded overwhelmingly to the need for officers, and throughout the war strong ties were maintained between old boys at the front and their school. Officers, only recently out of school, often returned to visit while on leave, and younger boys were encouraged to correspond with old boys at the front. In this way the schools were continuing to encourage their young people to support and identify themselves with the war and those fighting in it and ensured that every sacrifice and act of bravery were honoured by the school. As the war went on the casualty lists must often have resembled the class rolls from earlier years.

Evelyn Waugh was sent to Lancing in 1917, unable to follow his older brother to Sherborne following the publication of Alec's highly controversial, semi-autobiographical, account of his own school days there in *The Loom of Youth*. He remembers how a shadow of death hung over the school:

On Sunday evenings the names were read of old boys killed in action during the week. There was seldom, if ever, a Sunday without its necrology. The chapel was approached by a passage in which their photographs were hung in ever-extending lines. I had not known them, but we were all conscious of their presence. It was not uncommon for preachers to refer to the sacrifices which were being made for our benefit. This did not seem humbug. It is said that an exhortation of this kind now raises derision. It was not so in 1917.¹¹⁹

Public schools began the process of commemoration and celebration of the sacrifices of their pupils almost as soon as the war began. A Roll of Honour

¹¹⁸ Greene, ed., *The Old School* p 52.

¹¹⁹ Waugh, *A Little Learning - the First Volume of an Autobiography* p 133.

would be started, listing both the names of the dead but also of all those who served. After the war was over most schools produced books of remembrance, including the war work of all their former pupils. Funds were set up to support the dependents of soldiers killed in action, and money was raised to erect permanent memorials to the fallen. As with memorials across the country these were designed to be both a public statement of recognition for the cause for which the young men died and a lasting celebration of their sacrifice. For the schools that lost such a high number of their former pupils (Harrow for example lost 516 old boys, an average of one every three days of the war) the need to remember was particularly strong.¹²⁰ The ideals of the schools had encouraged these boys to join up and throughout, the schools had supported the war, so that now when all was over and the horrible reality of what they had lost was really settling in, they commemorated the war with vigour.

Death is so present in the memories of these writers' school days because of the carnage of the First World War, but it may also be because these are the memories of childhood, that death is remembered in such different ways. For some it held little meaning at all, while for others it caused great confusion of feeling and self doubt. Those children who were emotionally close to their fathers and brothers seem understandably more distressed by the war's effect on their family group. But at the same time children from the upper classes away at boarding school seem to have suffered more from the moral pressure exerted on them to feel and react to the war in a particular way. The death of a close relative was an almost universal experience in Britain during the First World War. The whole country's grief and loss were visible in all sorts of ways from the sight of the boys from the Post Office delivering their terrible telegrams by bicycle, to the hastily erected Rolls of Honour in schools, public buildings and churches. Children were aware of these public displays of grief just as they were of their own private feelings and whether they understood it fully at the time or not they shared in the nation's experience of mourning.

These memories are direct, personal recollections of childhood lived during the Great War. They possess a validity quite different to that of adult accounts as

¹²⁰ Richard Van Emden and Steve Humphries, *All Quiet on the Home Front - an Oral History of Life in Britain During the First World War* (London: 2003) p 101.

they allow us to understand something of how the war touched children developing as individuals. These simple scenes are the fragmentary images of childhood experience that have gathered meaning over the intervening years as the authors have mediated these memories with knowledge and symbolism acquired in later life. We see how the war created new circumstances in which children's family relationships, their environment and their every day lives were challenged by separation, food and money shortages and by the loss of siblings and fathers. Children coped with these changes and others by pairing what they understood of the war and the outside world with their own constructions of it in play, fantasy and ritual. The results could be confusing and contradictory sometimes provoking fear and excitement at the same time. But it was only later when these memories were re-examined that the authors began to place the meaning of these experiences in the context of their developing sense of self.

Chapter 3 - War in the Classroom

Introduction

I conceive that it is part of the duty of our generation to provide some means for compensating the tragic loss which our nation is enduring, and that one means by which some compensation may be provided is by the creation of a system of education throughout the country which will increase the value of every human unit in the whole of society.¹

H.A.L Fisher, President of the Board of Education promoting the 1918 Education Act

As the First World War drew to a close and the country began to reflect on the extent of its losses, attention turned to the future and the means by which the nation could rebuild itself. Just as they had been after the disastrous South African Wars, children were seen as the natural resource that promised hope to the injured Empire. It was through education that the Reconstruction Committee of the Coalition Government felt that hope could best be realised. The war had revealed dangerous limitations to the school curriculum with Britain lagging behind her German rivals in the fields of science and technology, and there was concern that so many children had been driven out of school and into industry to meet the demands of the wartime economy. During the war these concerns informed the education debate, and reformers sought to use these new issues to build on pre-war interest in educational psychology and teaching methods to inspire an Education Act that would cater for both the needs of the child and the needs of the economy.

But what was happening in schools? This chapter will consider the impact of the war on the daily lives of children and their teachers at work in the nation's classrooms. Schools had an important role in protecting their pupils both physically and psychologically from the dangers of war, and this chapter will explore the ways in which schools and teachers tried to minimise the threats to their pupils' safety. It will also consider how the war entered the curriculum to inform lessons on history, geography, and citizenship. The war proved how important it was that the population be willing and prepared to fight and work for

¹ John Graves, *Policy and Progress in Secondary Education 1902-1942* (London: 1943) p 110.

the Empire's survival, and it was increasingly felt that much of that preparation should be done in schools. Children were encouraged to work for the war effort as a way of teaching them the value of participating in a national endeavour. They could learn important lessons on citizenship by being citizens, collecting, saving and making things for the war effort. The chapter concentrates on State education, both at the elementary level and secondary level, but also considers a small number of private schools when it looks at how individual schools met the challenges of war.

The nature and structure of public education in Edwardian Britain was undergoing some significant changes in the pre-war years, and the types of schools and age to which children attended varied widely throughout the country. In general elementary schools catered for children from the age of 5 up to, but not necessarily until, 14. The schools were arranged in Standards, I-VI, through which the children progressed as they reached the required level of attainment. There was no uniform school leaving age, with children in some areas being allowed to leave as early as 11 while other not until 12 or 13. For those seeking post-elementary education there were fewer opportunities within the State sector and again the provision varied widely. For those who could afford it there were fee-paying grammar schools that offered a general curriculum carrying on from the subjects studied at elementary level but these were beyond the means of most working class parents. Alternatively there were in some areas, predominantly the industrial centres of London and Manchester, the emerging higher grade schools and Commercial and Technical Schools which sought to provide a more vocational curriculum for children intending to enter industry or commerce at 16.

Elementary education in Britain had been transformed since the end of the nineteenth century by a number of factors that had promoted a new understanding of both the role of the teacher and the purpose of education. The end, in 1895, of the system of 'payment by results', whereby school funding and teachers' salaries had depended on the performance of their children in a narrow range of examined subjects, allowed for a broadening of the curriculum, from its narrow focus on the 'three Rs', to include the humanities and sciences as well as

drawing and handiwork.² In addition the progressive influence of educational psychology gained ground amongst ordinary teachers and the theories of pioneers like Froebel and Pestalozzi lead to the gradual rise of the child-centred approach to education.³

Heavily influenced by Rousseau both Friedrich Froebel and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi had developed their theories of child development and education in the late eighteenth century. Pestalozzi accepted Rousseau's assertion of the 'innate goodness' of the child and developed his idea of the child's world being significantly different from the adult's world. His writings stressed that teachers should pay attention to the particular qualities of the individual child and organise education so as to fit in with the child's innate intellectual, moral and physical development.⁴ Froebel also advocated harmony between education and individual development, and his main contribution to the education debate in the early twentieth century was his emphasis on the processes of learning. Froebel believed that children learnt best by doing things for themselves. Through activity and play they learnt about the world and the people around them so that the work of the school should be geared around their needs rather than the knowledge of their teachers. As such no curriculum could be planned, only general principles laid down.⁵ Although state elementary schools were not run entirely along these lines, the theories and methods discussed were influencing teachers and policy makers, particularly in London as we shall see, who were increasingly stressing the importance of concentrating on the needs of the child.

New guidance was given to schools and teachers after the introduction of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) which replaced the School Boards after the Balfour Education Act of 1902. In the light of fears over national efficiency the Board of Education examined the failings of the existing locally elected school boards, and concluded that what was needed was a central authority to oversee the entire nation. The 3,000 or so ad hoc school boards and school attendance

² Peter Gordon, Richard Aldrich, and Dennis Dean, *Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century* (London: 1991) p 278.

³ Keith Evans, *The Development and Structure of the English School System* (London: 1985) p 84.

⁴ Peter Gordon and Denis Lawton, *Curriculum Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: 1978) pp 59-60.

⁵ *Ibid.* p 65.

committees were replaced by 318 LEAs with responsibility for all forms of State education within their area. In 1904 the Board of Education issued a new set of Regulations for Elementary Schools which conveyed the sense of the new liberal and purposeful thinking on education:

The purpose of the Public Elementary School is to form and strengthen the character and to develop the intelligence of the children entrusted to it, and to make the best use of the school years available, in assisting both girls and boys, according to their different needs, to fit themselves, practically as well as intellectually, for the work of life.⁶

This marked a clear departure from the emphasis on mechanical rote learning of the previous century, as well as an acknowledgement of the role of the school in developing individual children, not merely keeping them off the streets until they were old enough to enter employment. Even more constructive was the advice given in the handbook of *Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers and others concerned with the work of Public Elementary Schools*, published in 1905 by the Board of Education. The *Suggestions* are considered a landmark in both the official acknowledgement of a more child-centred approach to education and in the State's recognition of a more independent role for the elementary teacher.⁷

They advised that:

The teacher must know the children and must sympathise with them, for it is of the essence of teaching that the mind of the teachers should touch the mind of the pupil ... and though the teachers can influence only a short period of the lives of the scholars, yet it is the period where human nature is most plastic, when good influence is most fruitful.⁸

Despite this advice and the efforts of individual reformers however, change in the classroom was slow to come. Teachers, some after decades of teaching under the old 'payment by results system', were not all able or willing to adopt this new child-centred approach to education. New impetus came however in 1911 with the publication of Edmond Holmes' *What Is and What Might Be*. Holmes, a retired HM Chief Inspector, rebuked the majority of elementary teachers and local inspectors for maintaining their teacher-centred approach.

⁶ Gordon, Aldrich, and Dean, *Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century* p 280.

⁷ Peter Cunningham, "Primary Education," in *A Century of Education*, ed. Richard Aldrich (London: 2002), p 14.

⁸ Board of Education, *Handbook of Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers and Others Concerned with the Work of the Public Elementary Schools* (London: 1905) pp 14-15.

Holmes advocated progressive attitudes to the education of children particularly at the elementary stage and influenced by Froebel and Herbart (who emphasised the need for a broad curriculum to both respond to and encourage children's natural desire to learn) stressed the need for physical as well as mental development.⁹

Holmes was also a keen supporter of the Italian doctor and educator, Maria Montessori, and was influential in the growing interest in and acceptance of her theories in Britain in the years leading up to the First World War. The 1911 publication of the English edition of *The Montessori Method* aroused both public and professional interest in a system of education for young children that stressed the importance of self-learning and rejected the traditional reliance on instruction. Increasing calls were made for education authorities to set up classes within the state school system to try the method on English school children.

The authorities in London were particularly interested in this new method of schooling for very young children and, in 1912, the London County Council (LCC) sent one of its infant school teachers, Lily Hutchinson, to Rome to train with Montessori. The Montessori method was the main topic of discussion at the 1913 annual conference of teachers held by the LCC, where the chairman suggested that by virtue of their position of authority in education, council members 'ought to know all there is to know about the Montessori method'.¹⁰ Although sceptical to begin with, Hutchinson, when she returned, reported enthusiastically and believed that much of what she had learned in Rome could be applied beneficially to the English system. Persuaded, the Council set up its first experimental class in Hutchinson's own school on the Hornsey Road.

In the summer of 1914 the Montessori Society in Britain held a conference to discuss 'child emancipation', announcing that its purpose was 'to unite educationalists in a movement for freeing children of the country from useless and cramping restrictions and devitalising pressure'. During the course of the

⁹ Edmond Holmes, *What Is and What Might Be: A Study of Education in General and Elementary Education in Particular* (London: 1911).

¹⁰ Rita Kramer, *Maria Montessori - a Biography* (Oxford: 1976) p 239.

conference it was estimated that over two hundred and fifty visitors from around the country visited the demonstration class, and the method was discussed at length in both the educational and national press. Later publication of *The Advanced Montessori Method – Spontaneous Activity in Education* and *The Montessori Elementary Material*, which appeared in English in 1917, extended the method beyond nursery age, applying it to the elementary school and including the teaching of grammar, reading, arithmetic, geometry, drawing and music. Other leading progressives at this time included H. Caldwell Cook the author of *The Play Way* and Homer Lane, director of the Little Commonwealth Community in Dorset.¹¹

Secondary education was slower to benefit from the progressive attitude towards elementary education fostered by the 1902 Balfour Act. Initially the Act put an end to the Higher Grade elementary schools, begun by some school boards, which allowed for the further education of elementary school children past Standard VI. The intention of the classically educated administrators, like Robert Morant, Permanent Secretary at the Board of Education (1903-1911), was to maintain the emphasis on classical education in the secondary schools, in essence reserving post elementary education for the children of the middle and upper classes. There was little encouragement from the Board for the technical and vocational subjects designed to meet the needs of pupils entering industry at 16, offered by the new junior technical schools and central schools springing up in the urban centres of London and Manchester.¹²

However some moves were made to increase access to secondary education and in 1907 the Liberal government, in response to demands from labour groups and trade unions, introduced a major free-place scheme to the grant-aided secondary schools. Under the scheme up to one-quarter of the pupil intake was to come from elementary school pupils who passed the qualifying examination. By 1911, over 82,000 former elementary school pupils were at secondary school, about 60

¹¹ William van der Eyken, ed., *Education, the Child and Society: A Documentary History* (London: 1973) p 175. and H. Caldwell Cook, *The Play Way : An Essay in Educational Method* (1917).

¹² Gordon, Aldrich, and Dean, *Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century* p 282.

per cent of the total intake and roughly a third of those received free education.¹³ For the mass of the population however there were still few opportunities for secondary education. By the beginning of the First World War, of every 1,000 pupils aged between 10 and 11 attending elementary schools, only 56 went on to a secondary education. This situation has led the historian, Brian Simon, to conclude that the odds against such children receiving a secondary education stood at 40 to 1.¹⁴

Newspaper coverage of the new educational theories and a growing awareness amongst labour groups of the significance of educational provision lead to increased calls for further reforms to education immediately before the war, including an extension of the school leaving age, a broader curriculum and an increase in the scholarship funds available for children to progress on to secondary education and beyond. Educationalists' calls for an increase in the school leaving age to 14 without exception came in part from the inconsistencies under the existing law, allowing children in different areas to leave school as early as 11, but in other areas not until 12 or 13. This confusion was compounded by the continuing practice of the half-time system, where children attended school for half the day and then went to work for the other half of the day. This system was mainly found in Yorkshire and Lancashire, where children were employed in the textile industries, and as agricultural labourers. By 1914-15, the Board of Education estimated that there were 69,555 half-timers in England and Wales, although there were difficulties in establishing the accuracy of these figures.¹⁵ In addition to extending the school leaving age to 14, LEAs were calling for the introduction of continuation schools, where children who left school at 14 would attend for a set number of hours per year until they were 18.

Continuation schools were designed to combat the growing problem of adolescents who left school and entered 'blind alley' occupations where they were employed on relatively high wages for a couple of years, before being fired and replaced by another school leaver. It was felt that these young people,

¹³ Gary McCulloch, "Secondary Education," in *A Century of Education*, ed. Richard Aldrich (London: 2002), p 36.

¹⁴ Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement, 1870-1920* (London: 1974) p 104.

¹⁵ Board of Education, "Report of the Board of Education 1917-18," (London, 1918), p 13.

predominantly boys, were escaping the reforming influence of both school and serious employment and after losing their jobs were likely to become delinquent. This attention on the plight of the adolescent was in keeping with the social reforms of the Liberal Government, and the concerns of the Imperialist lobby. Both sought to remedy the perceived deficiencies in the health and moral well-being of the population following the evidence provided by the 1904 Committee on Physical Deterioration which was set up after the Boer War. The next 10 years saw the issue of Britain's strength and 'national efficiency' constantly connected to the condition of her future citizens. Children were seen as both the hope and the downfall of the British Empire and, as will be discussed in the following chapter, all sorts of movements developed with an interest in shaping the future leaders and soldiers of the Empire.

Successive legislation including the 1902 Midwives Act, the 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act and the 1907 Education (Administrative Provisions) Act, had been enacted to secure and improve the health and well-being of infants and young children and now attention was being paid to the content of their education and that of their older siblings. Declaration of war in August 1914 forced aside plans for a new Education Bill in 1914. Soon however the progress of the war itself came to influence the education debate. After a crisis in the supply of munitions to the Western Front in 1915, which almost brought down Asquith's government and threatened the successful prosecution of the war, attention again fell on the curriculum. Leading industrialists and scientists mounted a campaign under the title the 'Neglect of Science' group and pursued the government over the poor status of science teachers in most schools and colleges. They then challenged the general principles behind the curriculum, arguing for greater emphasis on the subjects required by industry. The officials at the Board of Education were sensitive to this criticism and responded by launching a series of investigations on a whole range of subjects in the secondary curriculum.¹⁶

Reporting to the Reconstruction Committee that consisted of Asquith and seven cabinet colleagues, these sub committees considered four subject groups, the

¹⁶ Gordon, Aldrich, and Dean, *Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century* p 35.

Natural Sciences, Modern Languages, Classics and English. Although they took a long time to appear, some not until the early 1920s, the reports were enlightened documents, opinion having been canvassed from industry and commerce as well as academia. The Science Committee recommended the inclusion of the subject in all general courses up to the age of 16. The Classic Committee unsurprisingly felt that classics teaching should become a part of the elementary curriculum. The English Committee meanwhile advanced the centrality of the subject within the curriculum, with its chairman Sir Henry Newbolt declaring that 'every teacher is a teacher of English'.¹⁷

Placing English at the centre of the curriculum emphasised the desire for a strong sense of national character and identity amongst the nation's school children in a time of war. In schools the characteristics of the English, their sense of right and wrong, their observance of fair play, their strength under adversity were spelled out for the children again and again. Just as the newspapers stressed Britain's moral imperative for going to war, and favourably contrasted her methods with those of the enemy, this was an attempt to fortify and unite a population confronted by a war more terrible than any they had ever known.

Shock at the deficiencies in the curriculum which had left British industry weak in comparison with Germany and fears over the wastage of young people who had left school early to support the wartime economy, had forced education onto the political agenda despite the ongoing war. Educationalists, socialists and now industrialists too argued for greater attention to be paid to the schooling of working class children in order to supply a better educated work force to compete internationally with both military and trade rivals. Increased spending on education was now not only a priority but a necessity and campaigners hoped for a bill that would see government involve itself in every stage of education and introduce truly progressive measures to ensure a workforce fit to rebuild the country after the ravages of war.

¹⁷ Peter Gordon, "Curriculum," in *A Century of Education*, ed. Richard Aldrich (London: 2002), p 192.

And they were not ignored. Education continued to be debated throughout the war and a new Act finally became law in 1918. The Act gave the Board of Education powers to compel local authorities to develop their educational provision, while in turn it committed the state to providing aid in proportion to local expenditure. This provided for the establishment of nursery schools, continuation schools and more post elementary provision, through both secondary schools and the 'trade' schools. The half-time system was completely abolished and 14 became the uniform compulsory school leaving age.

Passed on a wave of optimism many of the provisions of the Act were to be short lived. The economic depression of 1921 forced the government to form a committee, under Sir Eric Geddes, to consider cuts in public spending. The 'Geddes Axe' reduced funds for education by a third.¹⁸ The major sacrifices were the abandonment of the idea of continuation schools and a curtailment of the increased spending on nursery provision, reflecting the need to concentrate resources on the core elementary and secondary aged pupils. Despite this much of the thinking behind the 1918 Act went on to inform the education debate up until the Second World War.

The rest of this chapter will assess the more day-to-day details of school life as they were affected by the war but first it is important to discuss some of the broader issues as they affected schooling and education nationally. As might be expected, staffing was a major concern for schools throughout the period of the war. By mid 1916 over 20,000 male elementary teachers, approximately half the pre-war numbers had joined up, and the number of male students in the teacher training colleges had also declined dramatically. This shortfall was partially overcome by the employment of women teachers in boys' departments. Approximately 17,500 women had replaced men on military service by 1916.¹⁹ Many women teachers sought to obtain leave of absence in order to serve in nursing units or in the women's auxiliary services, prompting the Board of Education to issue statements calling on women teachers to serve their country in

¹⁸ Christopher Martin, *A Short History of English Schools 1750-1965* (Hove: 1979) p 87.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Sherington, *English Education, Social Change and War 1911-1920* (Manchester: 1981) p 49.

the schools rather than on the battlefields.²⁰ If the schools were able to make up for the shortage of numbers caused by male teachers enlisting in the first two years of the war, they found their situation unworkable after conscription was introduced. At this point the Army allowed teachers of a low medical category on Home Service to resume their teaching duties and also agreed that certain teachers and education officials might be reserved from service.

Another serious effect of the war on children's education came from the relaxation of the school attendance by-laws, from as early as August 1914, allowing children to leave school to go to work in industries suffering labour shortages because of the war. This problem was particularly acute in agricultural areas where farmers, unwilling to employ women or to increase adult wages, found children a cheap source of labour at harvest and sowing time. By 1916 15,753 children, mostly boys, had been exempted from school to become agricultural labourers. 546 of those children were aged between eleven and twelve.²¹ As the war went on the problem increased. More and more children were exempted from school to work on the land and in industry. Overall those leaving elementary school between the ages of 12 and 14 increased from 196,943 in 1915 to 240,556 by 1917.²²

Added to this problem was the significant shift in patterns of employment among school leavers. The high wages on offer in the wartime industries meant there was a rapid move away from peacetime occupations which offered a greater possibility of a lasting career. By October 1916 approximately 205,000 boys and girls were employed in the manufacture of munitions.²³ At Woolwich Arsenal alone there were 10,000 boys, of whom 3,000 were aged between 14 and 16, working shifts of up to 12 hours long.²⁴ This situation echoed the pre-war issue of 'blind-ally' employment that had first prompted the need for the proposed continuation schools. During the war educationalists were increasingly concerned about these children whom they felt were being sacrificed to the needs

²⁰ S.J. Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain* (London: 1967) p 339.

²¹ Sherington, *English Education, Social Change and War 1911-1920* p 49.

²² Ministry of Reconstruction, "Juvenile Employment During the War and After," (London, 1918), p 49.

²³ Sherington, *English Education, Social Change and War 1911-1920* p 50.

²⁴ *The Schoolmaster*, 18th March 1916, p 370.

of the war. These concerns lead to the setting up of the Departmental Committee on Juvenile Education in Relation to Employment after the War. The committee recommended that teachers should encourage children and their parents that staying in full-time education was a better option than joining the labour market just at the time when demobilised soldiers were returning.

The rest of this chapter explores how the war entered the curriculum of schools; what was taught and why. We see how teachers called for advice from the Board of Education on how to explain the war to their pupils following demands from the children themselves to learn more. It seems children, most of whom had a personal link to the war with fathers and brothers fighting abroad, were keen to know as much as they could about the ongoing conflict and that their increased interest was reflected in the standard of their work as assessed by school inspectors. The chapter will then look in more detail at schooling in the nation's capital to understand how the London County Council's Education Department tackled the practicalities of schooling London's children despite the disruptions caused by war. There was strong interest in London in the new theories of child development and education leading some educationalists to pay special attention to how the war was affecting children psychologically. Nationally there seems to have been a strong intention on the part of the Board of Education and individual schools that children should be encouraged to take part in the war effort. Their involvement was to be closely linked to lessons on citizenship, where children were to understand that when they were collecting materials or producing articles of clothing they were actually contributing to the future security of the nation. These lessons on citizenship were essential if the coming generation were to realise the importance of the work they were going to have to undertake to rebuild the nation after the war. Children were continually encouraged to see themselves as part of a wider family - an Empire for which they would have to work hard if it was to survive.

The majority of schools discussed in this chapter are state schools. This is because we are often dealing with government or LEA directions given to schools with regard to children's war work or their safety. It is by looking at such schools that we are best able to discern national policy with regard to

education during the war and best understand how schools fitted in with the war effort. However a small number of public and private schools are discussed with reference to how individual schools approached the issue of the war, and attention is drawn to the similarity of many of their attitudes with those of schools in the state sector.

War in the Curriculum

No body can escape from the war feeling, which is in the very air.... It would be absurd to endeavour to escape from this, and to try to immerse oneself in a calm philosophy, for it could not be done. The boys at school, above all, could not do it, nor even the girls, and the effect of the war feeling upon them is inevitable; it must, therefore, be reckoned with, for it will affect them not only now but, maybe, for the whole of their lives.²⁵

The Schoolmaster - October 1914

As soon as war broke out both teachers and schools were asking for guidance as to what should be taught about the war, recognising both the undeniable interest of their pupils as well as the unique opportunity the war represented for breathing new life into the existing curriculum. Over the following four years the war informed teaching on everything from history and geography to English and lessons on citizenship. The desire was to invoke the spirit of patriotism and give children a sense of national identity and their place at the heart of a great Empire under threat. To do this tales of past and present heroes were told alongside lessons on the geography of Europe and the economic and social history of the combatant nations. As for the children, there is evidence from inspection reports that their attention and interest in schoolwork improved. Teachers were able to connect their lessons to the events of the world outside to which so many of the children had a personal connection with fathers and brothers serving in the forces.

²⁵ *The Schoolmaster*, 3rd October 1914, p 485.

The aim was for children to be taught to understand that Britain's participation in the war was not only right but that it was part of the history of a great nation of which the children were an integral part. An article in *The Schoolmaster*, the weekly newspaper of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), urged teachers to recognise this:

The claims and the beauty of patriotism must be kept in mind, the glory of our country sharing gallantly and effectively in a just and needful war must be dwelt on, and nothing must be done or said which might weaken a child's sense that he is one of a great company of people, a member of a race which, in the present as in the past, has shown its fitness to gain, occupy, and hold a great international position for the benefit of the whole world as well as for ourselves.²⁶

Concerns over national efficiency had led to a wave of legislation to protect and promote the health and well being of children in order to safeguard the Empire – now it was time for the children to understand why. Unlike past lessons, on far away places involving people the children had little in common with, this war provided teachers with the opportunity of showing the children how ordinary Britons, their fathers and brothers, were displaying all the qualities of patriotism and self sacrifice that had made the British Empire great.

But the article went on to urge teachers to impress upon their pupils that war in itself is 'no gain, no permanent and biological necessity.' Should they fail to make this clear the teachers would be falling into the trap their German counterparts had in recent years and educating the nation's children to glorify war and strive for national expansion. It was the responsibility of teachers to 'try to make war on future war by our teaching as soon as this war is done.'²⁷

So this was no rampant jingoism; at the core these lessons were intended to be educational. Teachers were genuinely looking for ways to harness the children's new-found interest in world affairs to teach them something of their country's history and national character. The enthusiasm with which individual teachers and the Board of Education responded to the demands of the children for lessons

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

on the war can be seen as a result of the new thinking on child centred teaching methods that had been growing in the years before the war.

Children at state elementary schools in Britain just before and during the war studied a curriculum broadly outlined by the Board of Education. *The 1905 Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers and Others Concerned in the Work of the Public Elementary Schools* had chapters devoted to: English, Arithmetic, Observation Lessons and Nature Study, Geography, History, Drawing, Singing, Physical Training, Needlework and Housecraft (for girls) and Handicraft and Gardening (for boys). However these were, as the title of the publication explains, suggestions, and there was no prescribed syllabus or core texts to be studied in all schools. Indeed the *Suggestions* were keen to point out that:

The only uniformity of practice that the Board of Education desire to see in the teaching of Public Elementary Schools is that each teacher shall think for himself and work out for himself such methods of teaching as may use his powers to the best advantage and be best suited to the particular needs and conditions of the school.²⁸

The curriculum of state post-elementary schools varied depending on the type of institution. As we have seen junior technical and industrial schools were developing in the early years of the century focusing on a range of subjects, from manual and scientific to clerical subjects designed to prepare adolescents leaving school at 16. Grammar and grant-aided secondary schools concentrated on a more academic curriculum, in essence carried on from the subjects studied at elementary school level.

In light of the demands from teachers and schools for specific guidance on how to incorporate the war into the existing school curriculum the Board of Education issued a circular suggesting a course in history for the higher forms in schools to give a background to the war.

²⁸ Board of Education, *Handbook of Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers and Others Concerned with the Work of the Public Elementary Schools* p 6.

Modern European history was to include German history, concentrating on the country's unification, the liberation of Italy including the achievements of Garibaldi, the gradual disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of independent Christian States in Eastern Europe as well as Russian and Austrian history. The basic principles of the course were to give a general outline of the political history as well as to present the outstanding events, episodes and personalities of the period. The Board also stressed that use should be made of the children's foreign language skills, encouraging teachers to use French and German texts on the Napoleonic Wars as well as English ones. Just as we saw in the *Schoolmaster* article the Board of Education made it clear to teachers that the course should be as intellectually balanced as possible so as not to 'encourage national animosities.'²⁹

The Board recognised that children's new-found interest in foreign affairs could be utilised to structure and strengthen the history curriculum. Charting the history of Europe up until the end of the nineteenth century without encouraging 'national animosities' the Board presumably hoped that children would be guided to an understanding of the present conflict in which Britain's participation in the war was the natural and just outcome. If intellectually the aim was to present the history of the period as neutrally as possible, it was still recognised that important lessons could be learnt in terms of national identity with relevance to the present war.

On this point the circular urges teachers to bring out, 'more clearly than is generally done' certain aspects of English history, including the growth of the British Navy and its importance in terms of the defence of England at such times as the Spanish Armada and the wars with France. Special interest should be shown in the part the British Army had played in past continental wars. Finally the Board conclude with an appeal to teachers on the importance of history teaching in the present circumstance:

There is no surer course of courage than the study of past achievements and no better school of wisdom than the recognition of past mistakes.³⁰

²⁹ Board of Education, "Circular 869," (1914), p 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p 4.

The teaching of history was to become not only a lesson in the past strength of a great Empire but also as an example for the future. British military heroes from Nelson to General Gordon were held up for emulation by teachers keen to give their children, and boys in particular, examples of the characteristics considered great and essential in a time of war – courage, fortitude, sacrifice and honour among them. Ideal British characteristics were also extolled when attempts were made to explain the causes of war to children. The Board of Education would occasionally recommend particular commercially produced war-themed texts for use in schools including *Why Britain went to War - To the boys and girls of the British Empire*. Written by Sir James Yoxall, MP and secretary of the NUT, the text uses the playground analogy to explain Britain's position to children,

In all this war there is nothing for us to be ashamed of: we fight for honour. You know what honour is among schoolboys - I do not mean prize-winning, or getting one's name written in gold letters upon an honours board, but straight dealing, truth-speaking, and "playing the game". Well *we* are standing up for honour among nations while Germany is playing the sneak and the bully in the big European school. Germany must be taught to "play cricket", to play fair, to honour a "scrap of paper", not to be false or cruel, and not to threaten and brag. A boy who behaved as Germany has done would be "sent to Coventry" by all the school.³¹

Albert A Cock's *A Syllabus in War Geography and History* published in 1916 takes a more sophisticated view on the causes of war in the final chapter of his book entitled 'Ethical Questions'. The chapter contains suggestions for teachers about how to explain the necessity of the war to children, explaining:

Economic and ethical problems are always closely intertwined, and the intelligent pupil will probably be stirred to raise the question of the morality of the attack upon Belgium, and perhaps the morality of "crushing Germany".³²

³¹Sir James Yoxall, *Why Britain Went to War - to the Boys and Girls of the British Empire* (London: 1914) p 15.

³² Albert A Cock, *A Syllabus in War Geography and History - for Use in Senior Classes in Elementary and Secondary Schools* (London: 1916) p 31.

To explain these questions to children Cock believed it important to approach the matter in other ways than solely insisting on the sacredness of treaty obligations. He says:

Let us think of the problem in terms of personality. We may legitimately conceive of a nation as having, in its corporate life, a personality of its own. As such, it is entitled to the respect and to the independence which attach to the status of being a *person*. This is a right inalienable by any treaty. It can never cease to be a right. At all times and in all places, personhood is sacred and inviolable: to respect it is one formulation of the Kantian categorical imperative.³³

Perhaps this difference in tone can be explained by the fact that Cock is writing two years later, when much of the initial enthusiasm for the war has begun to be replaced by a grim acceptance of the likelihood of a protracted struggle. Instead of a simplistic appeal to children's sense of right and wrong Cock recognises that some pupils are likely to be questioning the validity of their earlier belief in the justification for war. What he does is to urge the children to think about the problem from a philosophical perspective and to understand that the issues transcend the bounds of the existing crisis.

Despite this more sophisticated approach there were still many in 1916 who saw the opportunity the war provided for inculcating more particular lessons in patriotism and self-sacrifice to children. Richard Wilson, in his *The First Year of the Great War* published in 1916, also explained Britain's position in terms of teaching Germany to 'play fair' but then went on to discuss the personal lessons children might learn from the war:

I hope to show you some of the bright-eyed heroism of the noble sons of Britain, among whom some of your own friends, brothers, cousins were doubtless numbered. If you who read this book can lay claim to one who gave up his life in the war, then you have a splendid pattern before you for the rest of your life; and you now know something of the true meaning of those noble words. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'³⁴

³³ Ibid. p 32.

³⁴ Richard Wilson, *The First Year of the Great War - Being the Story of the First Phase of the Great World Struggle for Honour, Justice and Truth. Told for Boys and Girls of the British Empire* (London: 1916) pp 8-9.

This lesson of personal sacrifice for common good was so important that many felt the learning of it should not be left to chance. A debate on the teaching of patriotism in schools was held in the House of Lords in November 1915 where speakers stressed the importance of impressing upon children a true sense of patriotism and the duties of citizenship. During the debate Lord Sydenham called on teachers to use the events of the war to teach children moral lessons connected with the history and ideals of the nation, which would serve as a monument to those who had sacrificed their lives for their country. Many must have felt that the current debate raging over the need for conscription proved that not enough was being done in schools to teach young people the duties and responsibilities of citizenship. What was the point of teaching children that they were part of a great people who had created a great empire, if they left school unwilling to fight to defend that empire?

Admiral the Lord Beresford, in a Foreword to H. W. Household's history of the Navy for children echoed this sentiment explaining that teachers had an important role to play in 'making the character of our future citizens' and that:

There can be no finer training for a child than the inculcation of a lofty and ennobling spirit of patriotism, and in no way can the patriotism of the British child be so successfully aroused as by the stirring story of our splendid fighting seamen.³⁵

The benefit of using the stories of great soldiers and sailors of the past was that they could be adapted to appeal to children of all ages. Unlike much of the history and geography teaching which was aimed at older children, perhaps 10 and over, exciting tales of adventure and battle could be told to younger children, thus inspiring them to greatness at an early age. Indeed many children would already be familiar with the language of such tales from their fictional literature, which will be considered in a later chapter, so it was no wonder that patriots recognised the opportunity of adapting the lives of military leaders into exciting tales for younger children.

³⁵ H W Household, *Our Sea Power - Its Story and Meaning* (London: 1918) foreword.

Several books for children devoted to the responsibilities of citizenship also appeared during the war suggesting that some publishers at least agreed with Lord Sydenham that more needed to be done to train children to understand their position in the British Empire. One, entitled *Children of the Empire*, explained the position to children like this:

You are a member of a family, and that family is part of a nation. All the people who live in our land are united by their history, language, religion, customs and institutions. For this reason, they come to love their country, and loving it, they wish to work for it, to defend its liberties and to protect its honour.

This love and service of your country is patriotism. Patriotism is a sense of our responsibility for our country; each citizen of a country has to take his share in the work. Every child should be a patriot.³⁶

The book goes on to explain the development and structure of the English Parliamentary and legal systems as well as the forms of governance throughout the Empire before ending with a chapter outlining the citizens' 'Duty to Empire'. Here children are advised to think what they might do for the Empire in their future lives and urged to think of their future careers not only in terms of what it will give to them, but also how they will help benefit the Empire. It explains:

At no time in the recent history of Britain will there have been such a chance for both boys and girls as there will be after the war. It will be left to those now growing up to remake Britain... None must suppose that patriotism is needed only in time of war, and by soldiers. The greatness of a country depends on the greatness of spirit with which every kind of duty is undertaken by its citizens. The home-maker is as essential as the defender of homes.³⁷

Conscription had proved to many imperialists and conservatives that the duties of citizenship were not fully appreciated by the British people. Not all men had understood that it was their responsibility to fight to defend their country and they had had to be compelled to do it. If this was to be avoided in the future, and if Britain was to sustain her position as a leading military and industrial power, then her future leaders and workers had to be taught to understand the nature of citizenship. It was not enough to leave it to the few; if Britain was to rebuild then

³⁶ C. Gasquoine Hartley and Arthur D Lewis, *Children of the Empire - a Young Citizens Reader* (London: 1916) p 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p 94.

children must understand that there was serious work to be done. This book and others emphasised the need for everyone to take their place as citizens of the Empire.

Although we cannot know exactly which books and what methods of teaching were being used in which schools we can gather from Board of Education and School Inspectors' reports that the war was a regular subject for study, particularly in the higher grades in elementary schools and in secondary schools. Despite the undoubted interest of both pupils and teachers in the war, School Inspectors occasionally questioned the quality of war-themed classes. One, inspecting a school in a northern district in 1914, remarked in his report to the Board of Education that he felt the teaching about the war was being overdone:

In the Upper Departments, perhaps history teaching suffered most. The teachers rushed into schemes following the course of the war; and their lessons were mere reproductions of newspaper headings which the children knew before they came to school.³⁸

Another, inspecting schools in the South East, wrote that he considered too much time had been sacrificed to "a nebulous War History" and over-ambitious schemes of teaching. He recommended instead that teachers take a broader outline, charting the history of the combatant nations through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, making regular reference to the present war.³⁹

Perhaps the surprise development came in English lessons where Inspectors commented on the great improvement they saw in children's English Composition which they attributed to the interest the children had in their subject. They saw an improvement in general knowledge as children wrote compositions on war topics including the War Loan and the War Taxes but they were struck most by children's letter writing. 'Letter writing is now a real thing: composition is improved by virtue of the greater wealth of experience to write about' wrote one Inspector of schools in the North. Another felt that:

³⁸ Board of Education, "Board of Education Annual Report 1914-1915," (London, 1915), pp 11-12.

³⁹ Ibid.

Real letters to real persons are being written. In a town school the letters to the men at the front were so interesting that I enquired and found that 95 per cent of the children had relatives in the service.⁴⁰

In the final chapter of this thesis we shall examine letters written by children to their fathers, and those sent in return. Reading them it becomes clear that while their class teacher may have envisaged these letters as composition exercises, they were much more than that to the children. Perhaps for the first time in their lives these children were using their lessons in composition to construct genuine letters to people they loved. Into them they could pour all their news about home and school and in return expect a personal letter that might tell them something of their father or brother's experience in the war they were so interested to learn about. Perhaps it was not that the children had a 'greater wealth of experience to write about' but simply that for the first time they had someone they wanted to write to. Unlike previous exercises in composition which may have seemed contrived and mechanical, these letters were an expression of the children's need to communicate with their absent relatives. As such these were hardly lessons at all but personal attempts to bridge the gulf the war had created between them, their fathers, brothers, and even unknown soldiers.

It seemed to these Inspectors that because of the war the children were 'more alert than they ever were before'. As with the composition of letters perhaps this was because the children had a stake in what they were learning about. For the first time it mattered to them personally how the map of Europe had changed over the years and why nations had particular alliances with each other. The coastline of Turkey and the mountains of Italy were suddenly fascinating to children who might have heard the day before that that was the region to which their father had been sent. The history of the British Navy and the exploits of Lord Nelson took on a whole new significance now that their brother was serving aboard a warship. No wonder children were paying more attention to their work and showing a keener interest in what their teachers were saying, for the first time the events of the world outside their home and street were touching their lives and prompting them to ask questions of the world around them.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p 13.

Increasingly as the war continued, the duties of citizenship and the role of children in rebuilding the country after the war entered the curriculum with the teaching of geography and history. The Board of Education and individual teachers aimed to maintain a rigorous standard of intellectual accuracy and to avoid the tendency to subvert lessons in history and geography to serve the British position. Some children had responded by throwing themselves into their work as they found their lessons more relevant than ever before and this produced improvements in the standard and diversity of their work. The underlying message to children was that the British position was not only the right one, but in fact the only one a nation with such a history of greatness could take. Children learnt their place within a noble Empire and in the context of a history filled with great deeds and great sacrifices. It was fervently hoped that these children would learn their lessons and be fit to maintain these traditions when the war was over and they took their places as full citizens of the British Empire.

London: A brighter future?

There is no doubt that the resumption of the normal work of the schools at this crisis, and the silent influence exercised by the teachers through children and parents upon homes in every part of London, materially contributed to preserving the mental and moral balance of the capital of the Empire at this juncture, and the Council has placed on record its sense of the value of the teachers' services.⁴¹

London County Council - Annual Report for Education 1915-1919

London's schools were closed for the Summer holidays when war broke out in August 1914, but fears about the uncertainty of what effect the war might have on the capital prompted the London County Council (LCC) to ask all their teachers to return to London and reopen the schools. The idea that school teachers would have a 'silent influence' on the moral and mental balance of children and families across the capital was part of the Council's vision for an education service that encompassed more than just the teaching of facts to young children. Education, in the eyes of the LCC, was a force for good in society and,

⁴¹ London County Council, "Annual Report of the Council - Education, 1915-1919," (1920), p 4.

if run effectively, held the promise of positive change. The LCC had a history of embracing new educational theories and methods and trained its teachers to the highest standards. Thus the children educated under this enlightened system would be raised up from their humble beginnings by the acquisition of knowledge, and the ennobling efforts of their teachers. Before the war the Council's philosophy was to best educate London's children to be useful citizens of the capital of the British Empire. That philosophy acquired a new sense of urgency during the war as the Council recognised the essential role of education in moulding a new generation, capable and keen to rebuild a better Britain.

London was also the first local authority in the Country to appoint an educational psychologist. In 1913 Dr Cyril Burt was appointed to a part-time post and encouraged to design his own remit. As part of his work Burt carried out psychological surveys of children in LCC schools, investigating everything from individual children's intellectual capacity to patterns of delinquency. But Burt was not alone in being interested in children's psychological development. During the war other educators in London combined their child-centred approach to education with a pre-war interest in child psychology and attempted to understand and minimise the ill effects of the war on their pupils. There was concern over both how to help children cope with the frequent air-raids that happened during the school day as well as a more general interest in children's attitudes to the war. This level of consideration for children's feelings suggests that both the LCC and London's teachers recognised the enormous impact the war was having on the lives of London's children. More than this though they understood the significance this impact might have on children's later lives and attempted, whenever possible, to counter the negative with something positive.

When war broke out in 1914 the LCC had just completed ten years as a Local Education Authority. Under the Education Acts of 1902 and 1903, the old elected School Boards had been abolished and complete control of London's schools had been given to the Council. The first few years of the Council's work had been spent consolidating the various branches of education, both maintained and non-provided schools under the one authority. The Council were also increasing the number of secondary school places available to both Council

scholars and the general population, and the scholarship scheme itself was being extended to allow more of the capital's more able children to progress up the scholarship ladder to university. In the elementary schools efforts were being made by the Council to reduce class sizes. In a scheme agreed by the Council and the Board of Education, known as the 40/48 scheme, progress was being made in reducing senior classes to no more than forty children and infant classes to no more than forty-eight.

As the capital's education authority the members of the LCC's Education Department were keenly aware of their role in setting an example to other authorities around the country. London was not just the capital city of the nation it was also the capital city of the British Empire. In successive volumes of *The London Education Service*, the authority's official manual, it emphasised the importance and implications of this position:

London is the home of the world's markets; the centre of international finance; the capital city of a world-wide Empire; the meeting place of nearly every race of people. It is not only, therefore, the needs of the 'locality' which are insistent on their claim on the London Education Authority. The policy of London, including the organisation of its education service, must be largely influenced by Imperial circumstances and the general advance of humanity. For it is on these that their own existence largely depends.⁴²

If the children of London could not be educated to a standard befitting their place as future citizens of the capital of this great Empire then what hope was there for the rest of the Country? Officials in London had long been at the forefront of the education debate and it was under the old School Boards that London had pioneered post-elementary education through its trade schools and higher grade elementary schools. Social reformers like the Fabian Sidney Webb organised the expansion of technical education within the capital and as we have seen progressive educationalists like Montessori found a ready audience for their ideas amongst London's administrators and teachers.

The LCC's priority was to increase the supply of trained teachers for the capital. The expansion of secondary education and the abolition of the old pupil teacher

⁴² Stuart Maclure, *A History of Education in London, 1870-1990* (London: 1990) p 83.

system, (whereby older pupils were essentially apprenticed in teaching), meant that demand was now far outstripping supply. When it took over, the LCC had inherited one major teacher training centre, the London Day Training College, opened in 1902 and attached to the University of London. Entry to the college required matriculation and was intended for degree students. To supplement this the higher education committee quickly began using its new powers to set up others colleges to train elementary school teachers. The number of training places in London rose from just 330 in 1902 to 950 in 1915. With an additional 550 places for London teachers at Church colleges outside the capital London was now able to operate at a subsistence level of trained teachers.⁴³

But the LCC wanted more than just qualified teachers. They wanted teachers that were up to date on the latest theories of child development and education and so began a regular service of lectures and courses aimed at raising the standard of elementary teaching across the city. Classical scholar Gilbert Murray, the author and poet Sir Henry Newbolt, and Sir Arthur Keith anatomist and anthropologist, were amongst those invited to speak at these events and it was estimated that over 7,000 teachers took part in the evening courses between 1908-09. A year later in 1910 the authority also set up an education lending library for London's teachers, so that all its teachers could be kept 'in touch with the latest developments of educational theory' and enabled to pursue their knowledge of other subjects.⁴⁴

At the outbreak of war then there was optimism in London about the future of education. Members of the Education Department lead by its Education Officer, Robert Blair, supported calls for the raising of the school leaving age, and for the increase of secondary provision through both technical schools and the scholarship scheme. Interest was also being paid to teaching methods and the curriculum through the influence of educational psychologists and reformers speaking regularly in the capital.

⁴³ Ibid. p 93.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p 86.

Once war broke out London's schools faced a major shortage of teaching staff as men enlisted in the Forces. The problem was most acute in boys' departments and women teachers from girls' and infant departments were asked to volunteer to take their places. At the same time married women teachers and others who had retired from service were called upon to resume teaching for the period of the war. Shortages were a continual problem however, and eventually the fixed staffing number of larger boys and girls departments had to be reduced. The Council also sought to remedy the problem of finding enough teachers for the under fives by training a small number of unqualified women on intensive courses to teach temporarily. This was a step back for the Council as they had spent the first few years in power successfully attempting to certify all teachers in the city, particularly those in the voluntary sector, many of whom had never attended a training college.⁴⁵

As the shortages got worse the Council recognised that even Head Teachers were being forced to teach classes continuously. It was therefore decided to suspend the usual school examinations and to reduce clerical work to a minimum to try to alleviate some of the pressure on the depleted staff.

The LCC's Education Officer, Robert Blair, considered however that London's children still learnt important lessons despite the disruption and teacher shortages:

The deepest lessons that were learnt in the schools during the war cannot be gauged by external evidence. The appeal of heroism, the touch of sympathy, may seem to have but a transient influence on the heart of youth, but they have probably sunk deeper than would appear and may bear abundant fruit in after life.⁴⁶

As we shall see later in this chapter, teachers often appealed to children's sense of duty and extolled the lessons in self-sacrifice and honour they were learning. Apart from this it was felt that the war gave teachers an opportunity to break through the normal routine of school lessons and challenged everybody to re-examine old thoughts and assumptions. Shortages of staff, materials and books

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ London County Council, "Annual Report of the Council - Education, 1915-1919," p 5.

were overcome as imaginatively as possible, instead of visiting museums and galleries - most of which had closed - teachers took children to performances of Shakespeare at the Old Vic. It was accepted that losing teachers must be detrimental but it was believed that other things partly counter-balanced the loss,

...by the stimulus of stirring scenes, by the story of thrilling deeds, by the desire for personal service, and by the ready response made by the children to the call to "do their bit" for their country both at school and at home.⁴⁷

Because of this, Blair believed, educational standards in London's schools did not suffer. Here Blair was not alone; the LCC's Chief Examiner for Junior County Scholarships examined the work of some 10,000 children who competed for scholarships in the last year of the war, and actually felt standards were improving. The examiner had expected the number of students getting high marks to have fallen but in fact the numbers rose. They rose so much that he dismissed any possibility of it being the result of a change of standard in questions or marking and concluded that children and teachers were working harder despite the obvious difficulties they had to overcome.⁴⁸

Children in London were also encouraged to contribute to the war effort through the War Savings campaign. In London arrangements were made between the War Savings Committee and the Council for teachers to organise the distribution of War Savings Certificates to the children in their schools. Almost all the schools took part and in over 100 elementary schools children collected over £2000. Although the LCC were unsure of exact figures they estimated that the elementary and secondary schools of London raised over £500,000.⁴⁹

As well as issues of staffing and curriculum the war also affected the practicalities of schooling London's children. In total 13 of the capitals schools were completely taken over by the War Office, meaning that their children had to be accommodated by neighbouring schools. In some instances overcrowding meant that children only attended school on a half-time basis. The most serious

⁴⁷ Ibid., p 6.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p 5.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p 9.

threat to the day-to-day management of the schools however came from air raids. Relatively little disruption or damage was done to school buildings by the night time visits of German Zeppelins. It was the daytime aeroplane raids that caused problems. This problem was one that schools and the Council were forced to deal with throughout the war but the most terrible incident occurred on the morning of the 13th June 1917 when a bomb fell on a school in Poplar, killing 18 children and injuring many others. Blair wrote:

From that time forward it was realised that London had come within the fighting zone, and that those who were responsible for the children's education were also responsible for doing their utmost to safeguard the children's lives.⁵⁰

The Education Department issued sets of guidelines to safeguard children's safety during air-raids that were regularly updated as council inspectors toured the schools inspecting damage. The most difficult decision facing the Council was whether to advise schools to send their children home at the first sound of an air raid or whether to keep them at school. The decision was taken that children should remain in the school buildings until after the danger had passed although the deaths of so many children in Poplar prompted fresh calls for guidance and a re-examination of the Council's decision.

In July of 1917, the Department wrote to the Head Teachers of London schools in response to their anxieties about the school's responsibilities, explaining that the only choice lay between keeping the children on the premises or sending them out into the streets. Blair accepted that neither choice was completely free from risk, but that the schools were generally a safer place for the children to be. There were roughly 1,000 school buildings in the capital and the Council felt that the risk of one being hit was fairly low. Any risk had to be weighed against the alternative of sending London's 650,000 children out into the streets where they would be at just as much at risk, if not more, from bombs and shrapnel. Calls for advice on what to do with the children within the schools continued however and on the 25th August 1917, the LCC issued a new set of rules to Head Teachers. It was decided that as soon as an air-raid warning was given the top floor of two,

⁵⁰ Ibid., p 7.

three and four storey buildings should be evacuated and that the displaced classes should be spread around the school so that not too many children were concentrated in any one spot.

It was warned that children shouldn't shelter on staircases, but that they might use cloakrooms and teachers' rooms provided that they sit with their backs to the windows. Children in one-storey buildings were, if possible, to be moved to adjacent two storey buildings if time permitted. The Council was aware how frightening air raids could be for children and wrote,

While it is recognised that it may not be possible to carry on work of a normal character during an actual raid, it is most desirable that the attention of the children, particularly young children, should as far as possible be drawn from the raid itself. This has been accomplished successfully in many cases by letting the children sing or by telling them stories.⁵¹

The need to keep the children calm was important both in terms of safety and for morale. Here was another way that teachers could exercise their 'silent influence' over the children to show them both how to behave and to allay their fears. Air raid drills and fire drills were to be practised regularly and teachers were advised to warn children of the dangers of picking up parts of shells and cartridge cases that might be found after an air raid. We have seen how these mementoes of the night's excitement were highly prized by children who continued to collect them despite the danger warnings. Perhaps most importantly however, the Council urged schools to be a force for morale in the community saying that the schools had already done much to

....allay the anxiety of parents and particularly to induce them to leave their children in the school buildings entirely under the control of the teachers until all danger has passed. It is felt that the confidence of the parents in the teachers is so great that any danger of panic due to excitement may by such appeals be reduced to the smallest proportions.⁵²

Parents' confidence in the teachers and their faith in the safety of leaving their children in school was not complete however and school keepers were instructed

⁵¹ London County Council, "Air Raids," (1917), p 2.

⁵² Ibid., p 3.

to lock all outside gates and refuse admission to all unauthorised persons as soon as a raid was sounded. Schools were also told that they would have the support of the police should parents crowding at the school gates become a problem. The catastrophe in Poplar had shaken parents and the schools alike and shortly afterwards the Council suggested the school send out the following letter to the parents of children in their care:

My Dear Mothers,

The County Council has again decided that, in spite of the sad trouble in ----, the children are, on the whole, safest in school, and that we MUST keep them until the danger is past, whatever the time may be. May I beg of you, for your sakes, your children's sakes, and for our sakes NOT to come up for them?

1. Even if the schools had warning and we all let them out, three quarters of a million children all over London would be toddling home in the streets, many a long way, lots of them with no mothers with them and some of them with no mothers at home when they got there.

Ten times more children would be killed and hurt, and many would see awful sights which might haunt them for life.

2. If the mothers were also crowding round the schools and in the streets, they would also be injured, and mothers' lives are very, very precious to their children, to their homes and to our country.

3. If some mothers came up and not others, we should never have time to pick out the right children, all the others would cry, and there would still be the double danger to mothers and children in the streets.

4. Even if you do come up, we CANNOT let them out, so keep indoors for the children's sakes.

5. Our school has a concrete roof. A bomb could scarcely come through to us, but a bomb on the roof would hurt lots of you outside, so please don't come near us.

6. Your children are nearly as precious to us as to you. We have to care for and we will take every care of them and keep them happy. They won't even know what is going on if we can help it. Isn't that much better?

I am, etc.⁵³

This letter addressing itself solely to mothers articulates many of the preoccupations the authorities had with regard to families during the war. It recognises that an increasing number of married women had taken up employment to supplement their separation allowance, or simply to take advantage of the relatively high wages on offer in the factories, resulting in a

⁵³ London County Council, "Air Raids in School Time," (1917).

perceived breakdown of authority in the home. Officials were worried that with men away fighting and women out at work children were more likely to become delinquent. The letter also reflects the increasing importance placed on the status of motherhood during wartime, when huge losses on the battlefield produced an emphasis on the importance of bearing and raising the future generation. Just as it had during the 'national efficiency' debates of the pre-war years, motherhood became a national concern, prompting calls for increased efforts to reduce maternal mortality and promote better services for mothers and infants.⁵⁴

Some improvements in family health *were* seen during the war. Because of the increased wages earned by parents, and the separation allowance received by mothers, children in the less prosperous districts of London were better fed and clothed than they had been before the war. The number of children deemed to be 'necessitous' by the Council had fallen from 75,000 in the early days of the war, to just over 8,000 at its close. School medical inspections showed that the number of children found to be poorly nourished during 1918 was less than half that of the number in 1913.⁵⁵ But the medical inspections also drew attention to some new medical problems for London's children:

During 1916 and 1917 some increase in nervous manifestations among children was observed as a sequel to air-raids, but this condition was purely temporary and no permanent ill effect has been observed.⁵⁶

Since this was only writing in 1919 it seems early to be contending that 'no permanent ill effect' had occurred. As we saw in the previous chapter children reacted in a variety of ways to the air-raids; some children were excited by the drama and novelty of the experience while others were terrified of the sound and even more horrified when the planes or Zeppelins were brought down, knowing that men had been killed. Dr C.W.Kimmins, Chief Inspector of Schools for the LCC was particularly interested in the children's response to the air-raids. In 1915 he set 945 children between the ages of eight and thirteen, spread across five different schools, to write essays on their impressions of the London air-

⁵⁴ Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop Journal* 5 (1978).

⁵⁵ London County Council, "Annual Report of the Council - Education, 1915-1919," p 11.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

raids. In a lecture to the Child Study Society at the Royal Sanitary Institute, Dr Kimmins analysed the results explaining that:

At eight years of age, the noise of the firing bulked very largely in the essays. No personal feelings were expressed and there was no evidence of fear. Even at that age the girls looked after the younger children. At nine the boys thoroughly enjoyed the raid, spending as much time as possible in the streets; occasionally among the girls great fear was expressed. At ten the boy was very talkative, and for the first time there was distinct evidence of fear, though not nearly so marked as in the case of the girls.⁵⁷

Kimmins noted that throughout there was evidence of the mothering attitude of girls towards the more helpless and that boys appeared to get more confident, becoming obsessed with finding souvenirs of the raids at around twelve. One striking point noted by Kimmins was the evidence of the very small part played by the father in the family. He noted that in 95 per cent of the essays no references at all were made to fathers (in some case no doubt because the fathers were away fighting), but that even when they were mentioned the references were far from flattering, with men described as terrified and abandoning their families to seek solace in the pub.

Kimmins believed that the essays illustrated the dangers of suppressed emotions amongst the children, with girls of twelve the most at risk as they clearly felt frightened but would not show it. What is interesting is that although he is aware of the dangers of suppressed emotion, Kimmins appears to take the children's essays at face value. Nowhere does he suggest the possibility that some of the children may have been concealing their fears on paper. Almost all the boys, according to Kimmins, felt no fear at all during the air-raids, something that doesn't quite tally with the memories of those looked at in Chapter 2. While Kimmins' interpretation of these essays (which unfortunately have not survived) is a fascinating insight into a contemporary attempt to understand children's attitudes, we mustn't forget that these children, surrounded by their peers and writing for a complete stranger, might not always have admitted what they really felt.

⁵⁷ *The Schoolmaster*, 25th December 1915, p 906.

On another occasion, at the West Ham and District Educational Conference, Dr Kimmins delivered an address on “The Attitude of London Children Towards the War”. Based on further essays, and his conversations with children across London, Kimmins noted that the girls were ‘more mature and thoughtful than the boys: but the general tone throughout was intensely loyal, calm and courageous.’ He went on to outline the practical things the children had been doing for the war effort then explained:

As regards thrift, the girls frequently mentioned instances of their own activity in this direction; the boys were fond of giving good advice, including such items as “save a penny a week and win the war!” but, so far as the essays showed, they were content with merely advising. Both sexes were strong on cutting down expenditure on sweets and cinemas; the boys also mentioned going without comics and similar literature; the girls never. Minor economies included fireworks (boys), light (girls), and on the part of one “typical boy”, soap! ⁵⁸

Kimmins was also interested in the children's domestic life and how they coped with the war at home noting:

The girls obviously took much more kindly to practical helpfulness in the home than the boys, particularly in the matter of “minding baby”. Many of the boys seemed to regard as their main duty at home, refraining from worrying, and, as one put it, keeping “merry and bright”⁵⁹

Dr Kimmins concluded that in terms of children's general attitude to the war, little girls of ten and boys of eleven were the most bellicose and bloodthirsty. Elder girls of thirteen or so were by far the most thoughtful, ‘and got down to principles as the basis of the statements they made.’⁶⁰

What is interesting here is how the children's writing appears to match the intentions of the schools with regard to the war. The children's attitudes are described as being ‘intensely loyal, calm and courageous’ very much in keeping with the intentions of their teachers. We shall see shortly how the schools encouraged children to save and charged them with being helpful at home and from Dr Kimmins' findings it appears that this message got through.

⁵⁸ *The Schoolmaster*, 30th December 1916, p 800

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

In taking responsibility for the children during air-raids the Education Department was hoping to set an example to parents of 'business as usual'. They wanted to prevent panic and disruption and as far as possible carry on the normal practice of schooling. The war upset much of the department's work, from the building and repair of its school buildings to the training of its future staff. But it also focused public interest on the subject of education, and on the health and welfare of children, as people looked to create a better future after the war. Blair pointed to the 1918 Education Act as the culmination of this increased interest and recognition of the importance of education during the war. He observed that the vital relation of education to national destiny was indicated by the fact that the Bill was being discussed by Parliament at the very moment of the great German offensive of 1918, and that it received its Royal Assent just as Haig was beginning his triumphant attack on the 8th of August 1918. Blair concluded his report on the war years saying:

It may be taken as a good omen that the new campaign against ignorance should have been launched upon the day that inaugurated the crowning attack upon tyranny. For complete freedom cannot be established until ignorance has been dethroned, and the foundations of peace will not be finally secure until they are based upon widespread knowledge. The training of enlightened citizens is the greatest problem for the next few decades, and national education is the master key to national reconstruction.⁶¹

It didn't take a World War to convince the LCC that education was the means by which Britain could secure a better future. The enthusiasm with which the education department expanded its facilities and improved the quality of its teacher training in the pre-war years indicates that they already understood the importance of educating future generations. The war made the Council more aware than ever of the pressing need for educational reform, and offered them the promise of an education act that went a long way towards meeting some of their most urgent concerns. The war also gave the Council and its teachers a chance to observe their pupils under the enormous strain of war. Because of their established interest in educational psychology, individual teachers and investigators gained a new respect for the children, as they noted how brave and

⁶¹ London County Council, "Annual Report of the Council - Education, 1915-1919," pp 11-12.

self-controlled they could be. London's children not only performed better academically at school, but they also appeared to take the war in their stride, responding positively to encouragement from their teachers.

Schools go to War

With the whole country encouraged to support the war effort through drives to raise money, conserve food and serve in auxiliary services, the government and the Board of Education recognised the unique opportunity they had to transmit their message into British homes through school children. If organised appropriately by the schools, children could be made to work for the war effort and through their involvement influence their parents. Not only would the children's own activities contribute towards the war effort, but the example of best practice demonstrated by the school, would find its way into the nation's homes. The schools became an agency for the dissemination of all sorts of pieces of advice to the public during the war, from how to cook economically, to how to convert back gardens into allotments.

In 1916 the Board of Education were asked by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries to issue a circular to public elementary schools about the food supply, suggesting ways in which children and schools could help increase national food production. They recognised the difficult circumstances under which schools were operating but felt confident that,

every Elementary School which is in a position to do so will be ready to assist at the present time in any work which can contribute directly or indirectly to the national welfare.⁶²

The circular then listed the ways in which schools were already helping in terms of food production, mentioning gardening, the keeping of animals and, for girls the making of jam and the preserving of fruits and vegetables. In mentioning gardening the circular says:

⁶² Board of Education, "Circular 944," (1916), p 1.

In October 1915 there were 3,129 school gardens in England in which 56,037 children of Elementary School age were receiving instruction in practical gardening. Efforts will no doubt be made, by intensive cultivation and a well arranged system of secondary cropping, to use every yard of land in these gardens to the best advantage throughout the year.⁶³

The Board suggested that to do this schools should attempt to acquire more land, making use of derelict or unused plots and also proposed that gardening classes could take over the cultivation of the gardens belonging to men in the Forces or those otherwise engaged in war work. Going even further it proposed that schools become centres for seed testing and use their influence to facilitate the co-operation of local farmers in the lending of expensive equipment. This suggested a new role for the school as not only a purveyor of advice, but also as a central organising authority for war work at a local level. Whether any school succeeded in running such a scheme is unclear, although there is no reason why enterprising teachers, keen to contribute more than just their teaching abilities, would not have been able to organise something of this sort.

The Board had already issued a pamphlet to teachers of domestic science, explaining the need for increased economy in the preparation of food, and charging them with spreading this message into homes through their pupils. Now they supplemented this with a call for more attention to be paid to the cooking of vegetables rather than meat and added that,

More time might also be given to those branches of domestic work which in large households come within the province of the still-room maid but which are equally within reach of the clever cottage house-wife.⁶⁴

Here they suggest the girls should be trained in jam-making, the bottling and drying of fruit, and pickle and chutney making. The teaching of domestic subjects to girls gained more urgency during the war as the number of women entering domestic service declined in favour of jobs in munitions factories with better pay and conditions. But the thought expressed here that girls might also

⁶³ Ibid., p 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p 3.

make use of these skills in their own homes, rather than whilst in service, does suggest that the Board recognised as essential the future role of these girls as wives and mothers. The huge loss of life on the battlefield and the enormous social dislocation on the home front often lead to strong reactionary attitudes that urged women back into the home to take care of their husbands and children. Despite the new opportunities for women to work outside the home opening up during the war, the Board of Education remained content with steering girls towards work in traditional fields.

Where teachers were experienced animal keepers the Board urged them to pass on their knowledge to the pupils and to keep animals at school. Chickens could be kept for both eggs and meat, and it was also suggested that children might learn how to manage an incubator and to foster-mother chicks. Rabbits were also proposed as suitable animals for schools to keep, providing they had the space,

Most country boys know a good deal about the feeding and management of rabbits as pets, and there would as a rule be no difficulty in establishing a 'school rabbitry', where room can be found for the accommodation. It will probably be necessary in most villages to find a market for the rabbits in neighbouring towns, since local prejudice usually prevents the use of tame rabbits for food in places where wild rabbits are plentiful.⁶⁵

Even very young children could help, the circular suggested, entreating teachers to remind children about the importance of harvesting wild plants and fruit from fields and hedgerows.

Despite all this good work that children could do, the Board of Education was at pains to remind teachers of the importance of discipline when it came to the children's work. At the end of the circular the Board printed two warnings saying that:

a) Teachers will need to impress strongly on the children the importance of getting through the outdoor work of the school in reasonable time. If children are allowed to loiter and "make a job last out" in order to escape

⁶⁵ Ibid., p 4.

indoor lessons, they will quickly acquire bad habits of indolence and more harm than good will result.

b) All practical work should be marked by scrupulous order, neatness and cleanliness. Tools and utensils of all kinds should be cleaned every time they are used before putting them away in their proper places.⁶⁶

Instilling a sense of order and discipline in their pupils was seen as just as important a task for the teacher as imparting knowledge. Education and the work of the schools was seen as a reforming influence on working class children, brought up, it was believed, with poor discipline and few morals. By coming into contact with the superior manners and behaviour of their teachers in the schools, it was felt these children could be reformed, and that they in turn could influence their parents at home. Discipline was key if the children were to develop into good, diligent workers. Learning their place in society while at school, through strict discipline and few opportunities for independent action, the schools intended working class children to become hardworking, obedient employees.

Food production was not the only way the Board of Education felt children could help with the war effort. In August 1917 they passed on an appeal from the Ministry of Munitions and the Food Controller, asking for the help of schools in the collection of horse chestnuts that had been found to be a good substitute for grain in some processes. They wrote to the schools:

The experiments prove that for every ton of horse chestnuts which are harvested, half a ton of grain can be saved for human consumption. The horse chestnut therefore, though itself totally unfit for food, can be utilised indirectly to increase the national food supply. It is therefore urgently necessary that this year's crop of horse chestnuts should be harvested. In present circumstances it is felt that school children could give most valuable assistance in collecting the chestnuts, and by so doing make a definite contribution to national efficiency.⁶⁷

Children provided a ready supply of free labour to undertake tasks that required no skill but a reasonable amount of time. We have seen how children were very keen to take part in the war effort and it is likely that many jumped at the chance to undertake work for the Ministry of Munitions.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p 6.

⁶⁷ Board of Education, "Circular 1009," (1917).

Individual schools, both those under council control and independent schools, were as keen as the Board of Education to involve children in the war effort and the children themselves seem to have responded enthusiastically. Girls' departments made clothing, blankets and bandages both in and out of school time, the money for supplies often being met by the teachers themselves. South Hampstead High School was a private girls' secondary school run by the Girls' Public Day School Company in North London. Here the girls collected food, tobacco, clothing, books and magazines to be dispatched every fortnight to prisoners of war. The school was also a member of the Girls' Secondary School Patriotic Union, founded in September 1914 under the patronage of HRH Princess Mary. As part of the Patriotic Union South Hampstead members pledged themselves to produce one article of clothing a term for the duration of the war. As well as this the children raised money and sacrificed their prize fund for a hospital in Antwerp being run by the school's former medical examiner Dr Florence Stoney.

As a girls' school South Hampstead did not have old boys to honour, but as well as supporting their old girls, many of whom were serving as doctors and relief workers abroad, the school still wanted a roll of honour. The November 1914 issue of the school magazine describes how the school placed a Roll of Honour for King and Country in the school hall 'on which are inscribed from time to time the names of near relatives of members of the school who are on active service, and of those who are nursing abroad under the Red Cross Society.'⁶⁸

South Hampstead was an academic school with many of its old girls going on to University and professional careers. They were proud of their former pupils serving the war effort at home and abroad but the fact that they included male relatives on the Roll of Honour shows how much more the Roll represented than just school pride. The middle class families that patronised South Hampstead would have seen many of their sons enlist as soon as war was declared so that the girls at school would have had a personal stake in the war from the start. To continue teaching and encouraging the girls to support the war without

⁶⁸ South Hampstead High School, "School Magazine," November 1914.

recognising the personal link many must have had to it, would have been a wasted opportunity. By honouring the bravery of the girls' brothers and fathers, the Roll of Honour acted as both a comfort and an encouragement to the girls at school to continue with their war work, despite their personal anxieties.

At Cobourg Road Girls' School, run by the LCC, the children's support of the 68th Battery RPA was so great, with parcels and letters being sent to its soldiers monthly, that the men of the Battery decided to recognise the girls' support with a commemorative shield. The school's handmade War Record, produced to coincide with the presentation ceremony outlines the girl's efforts and describes the relationship they built up with the men of the Battery. The children regularly wrote to the soldiers and were 'rapturous over the arrival of the soldier's letters.' In addition several of the soldiers visited the school whilst on leave and were always given an excited welcome by the children.⁶⁹ This link between school classes and particular soldiers was not uncommon and in the final chapter of this thesis some of the letters of these unusual correspondents will be discussed to try and understand what the bond meant to each party.

Boys' departments were equally active making splints and crutches with materials and instruction supplied by the local depots. The children's efforts were always praised by the schools who were keen to take advantage of the children's willingness to sacrifice their free time and pocket money, to press home to them a message of self denial and hard work. In a letter to the December 1915 issue of the school magazine the Head master of Wood Close LCC School wrote:

You, boys, have done, and are doing, your share, and you ought to rejoice in the feeling that you have done your duty. "*Duty*" and "*sacrifice*" are two of the best words in the English language, and the more we can carry out their true meaning, the more shall we be really satisfied with ourselves. Keep on trying and you will be really surprised at the feeling of happiness gradually springing up within you in spite of the difficulties thereof.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Cobourg Road School, "Our School War Record."

⁷⁰ Wood Close School, "School Magazine," December 1915.

We have seen how public school boys were being encouraged to do their duty and sacrifice themselves to the national cause. Here we see state schools extolling the same virtues to their working class pupils. The war was a perfect opportunity for schools to use as an example to their pupils of the higher ideals of discipline and sacrifice. Children could be encouraged to think of themselves as future useful citizens, to work hard and behave so that they might one day prove good workers. This was not a new message and before the war children were told of the threats to the stability of the British Empire as an attempt to encourage them to see themselves as its future defenders. Now the real threat of defeat could be held up as an example of what happens if a country and its people failed to do their duty.

State-run schools were hugely proud of their old boys and, just as they were to the public school boys in chapter 2, the exploits and memory of these former pupils were invoked as an example to the younger boys. At Brecknock School, also run by the LCC the school occasionally closed for half a day to honour old boys who had been awarded with military honours, and the headmaster recorded all the letters he received from old boys in uniform in the school's log book.⁷¹ Schools were also often visited by old boys home on leave. Robert Blair, the LCC's Education Officer, makes a special mention of this tie between schools and their old boys in his report on London's schools during the war. He even cites one example of a school that started a fund to provide for the education of one old boy's children after he had been killed in France.⁷²

So far, all the schools mentioned, be they independent schools or schools run by Local Authorities, have supported Britain's participation in the war. This reflects the widespread popular support for the war in the country as a whole, but in fact support for the war effort was by no means universal. There was strong opposition on both religious and philosophical grounds from a minority and this was reflected in the attitudes of some schools. Here we will consider two schools that had reason to oppose the war. Both are independent schools run in accordance with particular philosophies and religious beliefs. The really

⁷¹ Brecknock School, "Log Book."

⁷² London County Council, "Annual Report of the Council - Education, 1915-1919," p 8.

interesting thing about them is that although in general they opposed the war, it still became a part of the life of the school.

The first is King Alfred School, a progressive school, founded in North London in 1898 by a group of parents seeking a different kind of education for their children. Its philosophy should perhaps more specifically be described as 'rational' and the aims of the King Alfred School Society (KASS) which founded the school, were 'the furtherance, in every possible way, of true educational methods'. The local residents and parents who made up KASS were inspired by the Garden City Movement and, like it, they sought to combat the ills of Victorian urban industrialism through the application of proven scientific methods. KASS included academics, lawyers, artists and journalists all interested in the educational theories of the day including those of Froebel, Pestalozzi and Herbart. The school curriculum was to be totally based on the latest scientific studies of child development and was to be different from earlier progressive schools like Abbotsholme and Bedales (both boarding schools). The society intended to set up a series of coeducational day schools in urban areas where the school would communicate both with the local community and the educational community through public lectures about their reformist ideas.⁷³

King Alfred's stressed the importance of learning for learning's sake, and there was little or no emphasis on examinations and prizes. In fact what most concerned the founders was the Victorian preoccupation with examinations and results. Only a few years after the abandonment of the 'payment by results' system children in London were still examined regularly and for the less well off this was indeed the only way to progress through the education system. The founders of King Alfred School believed that examinations fostered a competitive spirit which worked against the natural co-operation of teacher and pupil, and school and home. The narrow curriculum, which resulted from an over emphasis on examinations, hindered the all-round development of the child's powers of reasoning and observation.

⁷³ Ron Brookes, *King Alfred School and the Progressive Movement, 1898-1998* (Cardiff: 1998) p 3.

Between 1901 and 1914 the school had grown from 31 pupils to 85 but Headmaster John Russell had been forced to abandon the rigid rejection of all examinations in order to attract more parents to the school. He initiated some preparation for Standard exams with older children to enable them to progress on to university. This was a disappointment to him and he later blamed the outbreak of war in 1914 on the intense competitive spirit between nations, fostered within their education systems. He condemned the way this competition was disguised by 'an increased flood of cheap emotion, of patriotic insincerities, of organised passion, and of reckless injustice.'⁷⁴

Russell said that although he himself, if he were younger, would have volunteered to fight straight away, he believed that if schools were tolerant, loving places, then children would learn to have goodwill for each other, as nations must if they are to avoid war.⁷⁵ Despite this philosophy, copies of the King Alfred School magazine produced during the war show that the school and its children were quick to get involved in the war effort. In the autumn 1914 issue an editorial explains that the children's desire to do something to help was harnessed by a Mrs Cox who suggested that the children might make sweets in the science labs to send to the Front - the children deciding to send them to old pupils of the school serving in the Forces. The children were also engaged in sewing, knitting and splint making as well as holding tea parties for wounded soldiers recuperating in the area. Most of the content from the school magazines of this period is made up of the children's artwork and it is here that we can see how quickly children were picking up on the imagery of war. The first issue after war broke out for example, was filled with pictures of battles and military equipment, drawn by both boys and girls.⁷⁶

What is interesting about considering the work of children at a school like King Alfred is that, unlike at most state schools, the philosophy of the school was completely geared to encouraging the children to develop their own interests. Here, where the position of the Headmaster was, as we have seen, on the whole against the war, it was the children who propelled the war into the curriculum.

⁷⁴ Ibid. p 64.

⁷⁵ John Russell, "School Antidotes" (1915).

⁷⁶ King Alfred School, "School Magazine," Autumn 1914.

Their interest prompted the school's involvement with war work and in their magazine they expressed their preoccupation with current events through their artwork. Perhaps the children had fathers and brothers serving in the Forces and so were unable to forget the war when they came to school. Or perhaps, having listened to the conversation of their parents, they had become familiar with the concerns and language of the home front. Either way, when they got to school and found that the war was getting little attention they asked questions, drew pictures and no doubt discussed it themselves until their teachers were compelled to respond.

The fact that their teachers did respond is also important. Here, at a school that was trying to promote rationalism and informed debate many teachers, as well as Russell, probably felt uncomfortable about the war. But knowing the importance of listening to the children and gearing the curriculum to suit their needs, they responded to the children's interests with understanding. The children were not discouraged from following the war, or told that it was wrong, instead they were helped to make the contribution they were so keen to make and encouraged to draw and exhibit their work on the war. The teachers at King Alfred recognised that they could not control what the children were interested in, and indeed an important part of the school's philosophy was to encourage the children's capacity for independent thought. Thus, despite the fact that it went against the moral philosophy of the Head, and perhaps many of the teachers as well, the war became a part of the daily life of the school.

Another school that had reason to oppose the war was Leighton Park School in Reading. Founded in 1890 by members of the Society of Friends, Leighton Park was designed to provide secondary education along public school lines for the sons of members of the Society and others. In 1914 the school, under the Headship of Charles Evans had 62 pupils, most of whom boarded at the school. The 1914-15 guide to the school published for prospective parents, and written by Evans, declared that,

the school should stand for all that is best in Quakerism; and to those outside the Society, an outstanding characteristic of Friends has been their firm testimony against war. Generation after generation of Quakers

has maintained this in the past; it is my hope and full belief that this trust of our forefathers will be handed on by us to future generations, until war shall be as discredited as the slave trade and slave keeping have now become.⁷⁷

However Evans and others at the school recognised that this war represented a far greater challenge to those beliefs than any that had gone before. In a letter to the December 1914 issue of the school magazine, *The Leightonian*, Evans expressed his admiration for the boys of the school who had made opportunities to help with the war effort in the school holidays or who had begun ambulance training during the term. But, he wrote:

at this time sympathy is called out more especially to O.L.s [Old Leightonians] who have arrived at an age to make their own decisions. The call to military service has come overpoweringly to many who little dreamed of such a thing. There are, I believe, O.L.s wearing khaki today to whom war is abhorrent. There are others whose chief regret is that disability puts field service out of the question. Many another finds himself unable, for conscience sake to join in war at all, and has to turn to other ways of helping his country and humanity. I rejoice that outlets have been found for the zeal of some of these in work in Belgium and France.⁷⁸

Opinion was divided amongst the boys in the school itself, and in the Autumn term of 1914 the Debating Society carried a motion in favour of interning all German nationals, but in the same term it strongly defeated a motion proposing conscription. The war continued to be a regular subject of debates and in 1916 the Society reversed its earlier position against conscription. Nevertheless Evans refused to allow any form of military training at Leighton Park; instead the boys were trained in first aid and ambulance work. There was also a visit made by some staff members and prefects of the school to a German prisoner of war camp on Newbury Racecourse, where they took books and food, and stayed for an afternoon chatting with the prisoners. That this trip was organised and conducted within school time shows how very keen the school was to promote tolerance and understanding amongst their pupils. As we saw in the previous chapter, innocent Germans who had been living in Britain for years were experiencing

⁷⁷ Leighton Park School, *The School Year 1914-15* (1914) p 23.

⁷⁸ Leighton Park School, "The Leightonian," December 1914.

serious persecution and harassment at this time, and children were often amongst their attackers.

Because many of the families who sent their sons to Leighton Park were committed pacifists, there were occasions where families became divided over the issue of the war. The issue of conscription forced many to confront their pacifist principles, and some young men felt unable to claim exemption from the self-sacrifice being demanded of their peers. Throughout the war the school recognised the efforts of former pupils, both those who had enlisted and those who served as non-combatants. But perhaps differently from elsewhere the school also took pride in its old boys who were imprisoned as conscientious objectors. The letters of boys serving in the Forces regularly appeared alongside those of boys in prison in *The Leightonian*, and the school's attitude was that those obeying the call to duty - whatever they felt that duty might be - were doing work of national importance.

Both King Alfred School and Leighton Park differ from our earlier schools as they were opposed to the idea of war on moral and religious grounds. What is notable however is that despite this position, the war still entered the daily life of the school. Perhaps because of the pressure of mainstream society or through the demands of the children themselves, both schools took part in war work on the home front and supported their former pupils who became caught up in the fighting.

In all the schools considered teachers attempted to subvert the negative impact of the war to give their pupils positive examples of particular skills or moral characteristics. By encouraging the children to contribute to the war effort, the Board of Education and individual schools felt they were teaching their pupils valuable lessons in self-sacrifice, duty and citizenship. In all their endeavours the children were encouraged to work hard and set an example to their families at home. With the threat of defeat hanging over them, children could be encouraged to understand the importance of self-discipline and the need to support the war. For their part the children responded with enthusiasm, raising thousands of pounds, collecting and conserving food and raw materials and

corresponding with troops abroad. When the schools were slow to act, the children themselves forced the war into the classroom, demanding lessons on the war and the chance to make a contribution. On both sides there was an understanding that the war required the special attention of everyone on the home front and that children had an important role to play both now and in the future.

Conclusion

Throughout the war teachers and children responded enthusiastically to the challenges of war. Both sought to incorporate it into the curriculum, perhaps a recognition on the part of teachers that in this new age of child-centred learning they would be failing their pupils if they ignored a subject so closely linked to so many families. The war inspired new lessons in history and geography but it was perhaps as a vehicle for lessons on citizenship that the war proved to be most useful. By extolling the virtues of past and present military heroes, as well as the ordinary soldiers who served under them, schools attempted to instil in their pupils the importance of duty and sacrifice. Children learnt about the extent of the British Empire, its role and its responsibilities and by highlighting the threat to its security children were encouraged to want to work and fight for its survival in the future.

Across the country individual schools worked hard to overcome the difficulties of teacher shortages and absent pupils to maintain a high standard of education throughout the war. They found ways for their pupils to take an active role in the home front war effort, both as a means of materially contributing to the successful prosecution of the war, but also as a way of further bringing home to the children the duties of citizenship. Children collected, made and saved anything and everything for the war effort, while maintaining bonds and striking up new friendships with soldiers serving abroad.

In many ways the war seems to have energised teachers, children and schools. It appears that in working hard to overcome the difficulties imposed by war, they

not only overcame them, but in many instances superseded them. Teachers and educationalists at all level from the Board of Education down to individual classrooms never lost their pre-war enthusiasm for educational reform. Instead they continued to press for change throughout the war, highlighting the importance of their work, educating the citizens of the future to take up the work of reconstruction and reform after the war was over.

Chapter 4 - Children in Uniform

Introduction

Perhaps the most visible way in which British children contributed towards the war effort during 1914-18 was through their involvement in organised uniformed youth groups. Boys and girls usually between the ages of about 12 and 18, were routinely employed by hospitals, local authorities and central government, while others contributed by collecting, making and preparing everything from clothing to splints and bandages for the British troops. Their efforts were directed by the organisers of Britain's youth groups who saw the war as a great opportunity to bring home to their members the need for the self-discipline, obedience and self-sacrifice that was behind so much of their teaching. The children were to be of service to their country in its 'hour of need', they had been trained for it and more importantly they had been instilled with the desire to want to do it. And they did want to do it. Members of the Boys' Brigade, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides all threw themselves into the war effort enthusiastically - they relished the opportunity to become involved, to feel they were 'doing their bit'. What is interesting is that the children did not always interpret their role in quite the same way as their leadership intended, in a manner that suggests the children wanted even more responsibility than they were being given. For female youth groups the war had a transforming effect, they proved their worth leading to greater public acceptance and an acknowledgement that girls and women, if allowed the right training could contribute to the defence of the nation.

To understand how and why Britain's youth groups responded so enthusiastically to the war we must understand the climate in which they were created. While reforms were being made in the field of education during the pre-war years, to improve teaching methods and increase access to secondary schooling, concerns were being raised that children's moral training was being neglected. It was not enough to simply impart knowledge to young people; they needed to be trained to be useful citizens of a global empire. Britain was under threat from increased industrial and military competition particularly from Germany, and the Boer War had raised serious questions about the country's capacity to defend its Empire. In

the late nineteenth century social investigators like Booth and Rowntree had identified levels of poverty that prompted fears of permanent racial degeneration. Many imperialists felt that the country was going soft through neglect. Britain was becoming complacent. So just as it was important for the nation to take steps to remedy its physical failings, so too was it important for it to address the moral direction in which it was headed. If Britain were to remain a strong imperial power then the rising generation must be prepared to take up their role as imperial leaders.

It is within this context of anxiety about the nation's health, wealth and imperial well being that we see the emergence of a number of uniformed youth groups during the late Victorian and early Edwardian periods. Initially these groups were targeted at working class boys. Boys it was felt, lacked discipline. They lacked moral fortitude and their attempts to behave as 'men' were often misguided, leading them towards loutish behaviour and crime. They needed to be taught to respect society, to recognise the need to sacrifice their own self-interests for the common interests of the British Empire. They needed to be taught 'manliness' as defined within the public school ethos of self-discipline, obedience and fair play. Girls on the other hand, needed to be trained as mothers. The rapidly declining birth rate, and the challenges posed by the expanding women's movement, prompted imperialists to fear that women were endangering the empire by refusing to carry out their essential role as mothers to a new generation. So as girls attempted to join groups like the Scouts, attracted by the exciting freedoms suggested in its literature, they were diverted into sister organisations that instead reined in their enthusiasm, and set them on a path to becoming good mothers and companions to men.

Influenced by social Darwinism many youth group leaders saw the condition of human existence as a ceaseless battle for survival and considered young people to be the ammunition of the future. For them the First World War represented the epitome of that struggle for survival. By considering how they directed young people's involvement in the war effort therefore, we can begin to understand what values and attitudes they felt it important children learn to equip them to carry on that struggle in the future. Here discussion of male and female youth

groups has been separated, partly because their leaders kept them so separate. The intention was to teach boys to be men and girls to be women, each with their own particular role. However it will be noted that many of the concerns of their leaders are the same. It was feared that both boys and girls were in danger of moral degeneracy and both were taught, before the war and during it, the importance of self-sacrifice, discipline and obedience amongst other things. The fundamental point for both was that they should be trained to be useful citizens, keen to give service to their country and their empire.

The Problem with Boys

The identification of youth, and particularly male urban youth, as a significant social problem to be tackled by experts of 'Boy Nature' emerges at the end of the nineteenth century, at the same time as the recognition of the existence of adolescence as a separate stage of life. Until the late nineteenth century any discontinuity between childhood and adulthood was largely reserved for the upper and middle classes, whose children enjoyed an extended period of youth at preparatory and public schools, and finally at university. This period of what some historians have termed 'self-conscious boyhood' was celebrated in boys' magazines like the *Boys' Own Paper* as well as being frequently eulogised by those (men) lucky enough to have experienced it.¹ For working class youths on the other hand the end of childhood came with the transition from school to work. This occurred at around thirteen or fourteen for the sons of skilled workers, who often spent some years at a secondary school, but ended at eleven or twelve for the sons of the unskilled who received no formal education after elementary school.

The expansion, and inherent problems, associated with 'boy labour' in all the major cities began to trouble middle-class philanthropists who saw the plight of large numbers of boys employed in dead-end jobs, with no training or prospects for future employment, as a contributing factor to the perceived rise in juvenile

¹ John Springhall, Brian Fraser, and Michael Hoare, *Sure and Steadfast - a History of the Boys' Brigade 1883 to 1983* (London: 1983) p 26.

delinquency. In fact Charles Booth's pioneering turn of the century study of life and work in London identified 'boy labour' as a special characteristic of the city's economy. These boys, outside the controlling influence of school, responsible employer or, increasingly, religious influence were deemed to represent a serious threat to the moral and social future of the nation. They were falling through the gaps of decent society. For a few years after they left school they had work. After contributing to the household economy they might still have money in their pockets and were experiencing the greater degree of freedom that that bought them. When they were fired from their jobs (to be replaced by another school leaver who could be employed at a lower rate of pay) they were liable to spend an extended period of time without employment. During this time, with no structure to their day, and no direction in their activities, it was felt they could be tempted into bad behaviour and crime. And what good were these boys to the Empire? None, if they were allowed to hang around on street corners, smoking and becoming involved in petty theft. What they needed was direction and structure in their lives.

If the future of the Empire lay in the hands of these youths it became increasingly clear to imperialists that more care must be taken to ensure that young people realised and accepted this responsibility. Lord Meath and the National Service League (NSL) launched campaigns to promote national service and the Empire Day movement, while the Empire was portrayed in juvenile literature as a source of inspiration and adventure to young people in Britain. Young men and women of the middle classes were encouraged to become military leaders, missionaries and teachers in the colonies, while working class youths were encouraged to emigrate as domestic servants and soldiers. But, this was not enough. If the nation's youth represented the Empire's future they could also represent its demise, and imperialists were not prepared to leave that future to chance.²

It would appear then that youth movements developed out of efforts to reinforce social conformity amongst these feared working class lads who, it was felt,

² For further discussion on fears for the future of the empire and formation of Scouts and Guides see Tammy M. Proctor, "On My Honour - Guides and Scouts in Interwar Britain," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 92, no. 2 (2002).

lacked the necessary social and moral training to fit them as useful citizens of the British Empire. What these working class boys lacked, according to the founders of such youth groups, was the training they themselves had received in the country's public and private schools. Central to this training was the concept of 'muscular Christianity'. First brought to prominence by the famous early Victorian Headmaster of Rugby School, Dr Thomas Arnold, the concept had, by the turn of the century, become synonymous with the public school ethos epitomised by Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857). Muscular Christianity or 'Christian manliness' placed great emphasis on athleticism and sportsmanship and upheld the physical and moral value of 'masculine' team games over 'effeminate' scholarship. This was combined with a fundamental belief in the inherent superiority of the British race that saw Britain's pre-eminence in the world as the natural outcome of progress.³ Late Victorian public-school attitudes equated manliness with good physical and moral health and can be seen in the growing interest in personal health education, diet and abstinence from alcohol and cigarettes. Manliness was best reflected in vigorous physical pursuits while intellectualism and any expression of emotion was considered soft.⁴ For the organisers of the various youth movements and their supporters the public school ethos represented character, patriotism, discipline and *esprit de corps*, all of which were missing in the working class boys they sought to reach.

The Boys Brigade

The Boys' Brigade was founded in Glasgow in 1883 by Sunday School teacher and local businessman, William Smith, and was the period's first uniformed youth movement aimed at attracting the sort of boys it was believed most needed reforming. Smith was born in 1854 near Thurso in the north of Scotland into a family with strong military connections. When his father died in 1868 Smith was sent to Glasgow to work for his uncle's wholesale textile business. In

³ J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public Schools* (Cambridge: 1982).

⁴ Allen Warren, "Popular Manliness: Baden-Powell, Scouting and the Development of Manly Character," in *Manliness and Morality - Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940*, ed. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: 1987), p 199-200.

Glasgow Smith was influenced by Moody and Sankey's Evangelical movement and, in 1874, abandoned the Church of Scotland, in which he had been brought up, to join the College Free Church in prosperous Hillhead. In the same year, at the age of twenty, Smith joined the 1st Lanarkshire Rifles Volunteer Regiment where he quickly rose through the ranks.⁵

Little is known of Smith's character as he left almost no autobiographical material and even his biographers have struggled to define his character. According to Springhall Smith was 'naturally modest, unselfish and self-effacing, he was at the same time hard-working, masterful, somewhat austere and rather a martinet.'⁶ An active Christian, Smith was involved with the North Woodside Mission in Glasgow, and was secretary of the Sunday School Teachers' Society. In 1880 he had set up a Young Men's Club (modelled on the YMCA) to promote social activities at the Mission where he worked alongside other committed Christian philanthropists like Revd George Reith. His commitment to fostering Christianity amongst the young then was already firmly established; what he lacked was a way of controlling the behaviour of his Sunday School pupils. In 1883 Smith decided to try using his training in the Volunteers to set up a Brigade programme for his class. It was a success with fifty-nine boys signing up immediately. Smith quickly saw the advantage of a scheme of Christian training for boys that bridged the gap between the age of about 13 when boys tended to drift away from Sunday school as they began work, and 17 when they were old enough to join the YMCA. It was during this period that it was felt that many working class boys began to run wild, becoming 'hooligans or street loafers'.

The stated object of the Boys' Brigade, then and now, was 'The advancement of Christ's Kingdom among Boys, and the promotion of habits of reverence, discipline, self-respect, and all that tends towards Christian manliness.' It was a non-denominational movement based around Christian teaching and military drill, which quickly spawned Anglican, Catholic and even Jewish branches

⁵ Springhall, Fraser, and Hoare, *Sure and Steadfast - a History of the Boys' Brigade 1883 to 1983*.

⁶ John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society - British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (London: 1977) p 23.

across the country. By 1900 there were 906 companies nationally catering for over 41,000 boys.⁷ That Christian teaching and military drill could be fused so successfully and come to sit quite comfortably in the minds of many late Victorian parents owes much to the increasingly favourable public image of the military at this time, and the reputations of leading Christian soldiers like Sir Henry Havelock, the evangelical Christian general who had died during the Indian mutiny, and General Gordon, the hero of Khartoum.⁸

Springhall, Fraser and Hoare note the growing connection between religion and the military in late Victorian Britain in their study of the Boys' Brigade. They believe that the growth of what they term 'Christian militarism' was evident in Britain since the Crimea and the Indian Mutiny of the mid-Victorian era, and point to the religious literature that used stories of evangelical generals to create the image of Christian soldiers as heroes. In addition they cite the years of peace and relative stability as contributing factors to the softening of the military image to one of colour and pageantry. This, combined with the adventure stories written for children and featuring both real and imagined military heroes, created an atmosphere in which military drill, titles and leadership added an air of respectability to what Smith was trying to do in the minds of many Glaswegian parents.⁹

This greater acceptance by the public of military values could also be seen as a response to perceived threats to male dominance. John Tosh has suggested that during this late Victorian era, the partial militarization of what he terms 'hegemonic masculinity' in Britain, served to reinforce the indispensability of manly attributes, at a time when women's demands for greater political, educational and social involvement, appeared to 'pose a challenge to traditional patriarchal assumptions.'¹⁰ The increased visibility of women and women's issues was explicitly linked in the minds of imperialists with the falling birth rate. Some women were seen to be deliberately turning their backs on their role

⁷ Springhall, Fraser, and Hoare, *Sure and Steadfast - a History of the Boys' Brigade 1883 to 1983* p 258.

⁸ Ibid. p 25.

⁹ Ibid. p 26.

¹⁰ John Tosh, "Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender," in *Masculinities in Politics and War - Gendering Modern History*, ed. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh (Manchester: 2004), p 55.

as mothers, and demanding new roles within male society. For those wanting to stem the tide of female emancipation, the strong identification of the soldier as an ideal form of masculinity was one way to emphasise social difference along gender lines. Indeed one argument often employed by anti-suffragists in the early Edwardian period was that women, who could take no part in the defence of their country, should have no right to determine policy that instructed men to fight. Men earned their right to vote through the basic fact that they could be called upon to sacrifice themselves for their country if need be.

But for Smith at least, military training was simply a means to an end. It was the religious teaching that was of primary concern and, to this end, the concept of Christian manliness was of real use to him. Speaking at a public meeting in Liverpool in 1891 Smith declared:

There is undoubtedly among boys an impression that to be a Christian means to be a "molly-coddle" and in order to disabuse their minds of this idea we sought to construct our organisation on a model which would appeal to all their sentiments of manliness and honour¹¹

Like the leaders of other uniformed youth movements Smith was able to see that by giving youths activities and a structure that appealed to them he would be able to deliver his aims in a way that was more likely to be well received. The desire that boys be taught to be 'manly' was not necessarily at odds at all with what the boys themselves wanted to be, it's just that Victorian social reformers had very specific ideas about what the right kind of 'manliness' entailed. Smith understood this,

All a boys' aspirations are towards *manliness*, however mistaken his ideas may sometimes be as to what that manliness means. Our boys are full of brave earnest desire to be brave true *men*; and if we want to make them brave, true *Christian* men, we must direct this desire into the right channels... We must show them the *manliness* of Christianity.¹²

¹¹ Quoted in John Springhall, "Building Character in the British Boy: The Attempt to Extend Christian Manliness to Working-Class Adolescents, 1880-1914.," in *Manliness and Morality - Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940*, ed. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: 1987), p 55.

¹² The Boys' Brigade, "The Boys' Brigade Gazette," February (1891): p 168-9.

Using military training to instil Christian values did not sit comfortably with everyone however, and the Boys' Brigade attracted some fierce criticism from some Nonconformist Churchmen. One such man was the Revd John Brown Paton, retired Principal of the Nottingham Congregational Institute, who brought the idea of a non-militarist Boys' Life Brigade before the National Sunday School Union in 1899, persuading them to adopt it as a national organisation with himself as the first President. The Boys' Life Brigade operated for 27 years after which it merged with the Boys' Brigade. Throughout it sought to give the boys the same training in obedience and discipline that the Boys' Brigade achieved through military training using life saving drill, gym and first aid training. By 1914 there were over 15,000 boys and 400 companies in the Life Brigade, mostly connected with the English Free Churches.¹³

The Boy Scouts

In General Sir Robert Baden-Powell, hero of the siege of Mafeking during the South African War, it would appear that Edwardian society had the perfect candidate for the leader of another military youth group. However, when Baden-Powell formed the Boy Scouts in 1908 he, at least publicly, had very different intentions for the direction of his new movement. Baden-Powell was born in 1857 into a well-connected, professional, middle-class family. He had an intensely devoted relationship with his mother who encouraged competitiveness amongst her children and was ambitious for their careers. Biographers have suggested that of foremost influence on Baden-Powell's attitudes in later life were his experiences at both his public school, Charterhouse, and as an officer in the British Army. At school he was not an academic achiever but joined numerous societies and clubs and developed a love of the outdoor life. In the Army Baden-Powell was suspicious of formal, orthodox, military training believing that it did little to help train really good soldiers.¹⁴

¹³ Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society - British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* p 45.

¹⁴ Ibid. and Michael Rosenthal, *The Character Factory - Baden Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* (London: 1986).

Baden-Powell was an imperial patriot and believed, as did many others, that the physical deterioration of the British race, as highlighted by the 1904 Report of the Physical Deterioration Committee and exacerbated by the falling birth rate, and the waning interest in the fortunes of the Empire, were a sign of national decadence, and posed a real threat to the future interests of the nation. According to Springhall, Baden-Powell was further spurred into action by his fears that the Liberal Government's welfare policies were weakening the public's motivation for self-help claiming

Free feeding and old age pensions, strike pay, cheap beer and indiscriminate charity do not make for the hardening of the nation or the building up of a self-reliant, energetic manhood.¹⁵

Impatient with partisan politics, Baden-Powell was attracted to the then fashionable concept of national efficiency.

National efficiency won the attention of people of widely differing political allegiances, and was seen as a way to reverse the trend of moral and social degeneracy that was threatening the security of the empire. The concept appealed to those with social Darwinian beliefs who felt that a strong British race was necessary for the maintenance of empire, as well as to Fabian social imperialists like Beatrice and Sidney Webb, who sought to secure their social reforms by persuading Liberal Imperialists that the interests of a great empire were best secured by raising a strong imperial race.¹⁶

In drawing up his system for Scout training Baden-Powell was heavily influenced by the American youth leader Ernest Thompson Seton whose movement of Woodcraft Indians began in 1902. Seton's scheme centred around building up boys' character through learning techniques of woodcraft and the observation of nature and fitted in well with Baden-Powell's own emphasis on the importance of tracking skills in army training. Baden-Powell's dislike for more formal methods of military training was to have a strong influence over his vision for the Boy Scout organisation. In drawing up his system of training, he

¹⁵ Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society - British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* p 57.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p 59.

eschewed the idea that military drill, or in fact drill of any kind, could produce the kind of boy the Empire needed. Instead Baden-Powell believed it was character training that was required for boys who had not had the benefit of a public school education, and therefore knew nothing of the spirit of citizenship that would produce a future generation ready to take on the responsibilities of imperial leadership. Baden-Powell was very specific about what he saw as the connection between his scheme of Boy Scout training and the ideals of the public school system. He wrote:

This then is one of the main reasons for the Boy Scout training, namely to take the place of the public school life which is only open to the comparatively few whose parents can afford it, and to give the mass of our rising generation responsibility, helpfulness to others, loyalty and patriotism which go to make "character" and in which they have no kind of education in their schools whatever they may have in the way of *instruction*.¹⁷

As we have already seen the hidden curriculum of the public schools aimed to produced boys loyal above all else to their school and the ideals it espoused. It produced men willing and eager to serve and even die for their country, and to preserve the status quo when it came to the structure and workings of Victorian and Edwardian society. This then is what Baden-Powell wanted for working class boys too. John Springhall and Michael Rosenthal see in this attempt at social control the sinister face of Scouting and other organised youth movements, where what amounts to the indoctrination of children was dressed up as entertainment. 'Wrapping his deeply conservative social ideals in an appealing and exciting movement', Rosenthal explains,

he [Baden-Powell] achieved the formidable goal of creating an institution that could be embraced not only by those whom the social system was designed to support, but also by those largely excluded from its advantages.¹⁸

Organised Boy Scout activities appealed to some urban working class boys, who had little opportunity for the excitement of camping trips and outdoor adventure in their normal lives. They were encouraged to embrace a movement that

¹⁷ Quoted in Rosenthal, *The Character Factory - Baden Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* p 91.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p 104.

recognised individual achievement as well as promoting team spirit, and accept the importance of 'character training' by proving themselves responsible, useful, young men. By training these working class youths to be obedient, hardworking and self-sacrificing, Baden-Powell was seeking social cohesion, where everybody understood and accepted his place in the social order, and worked hard in the interests of the nation.

Others have disagreed with this social control theory of youth movements, pointing to their popularity and ability to attract young people from diverse regional, religious, and class backgrounds, as evidence that their aims could not have been so narrow.¹⁹ Although I am more convinced by Springhall and Rosenthal's arguments, what the debate really highlights is the way historians have concentrated almost solely on the youth groups' prescriptive strategies, rather than the practical realities of the organisations' efforts or the experiences of the young people themselves.

Source material relating to children's experiences or the individual and local practices of youth organisations are scarce. Reconstructing a history purely based on participants' experience therefore would be difficult because of the large number and variety of schemes operated for Britain's youth, and the devolved nature of leadership at local level. Existing histories have identified youth culture in part through their focus on the aims and intentions of youth group founders, and the advice given out from headquarters. This has often produced a history that assumes that adult concerns automatically translated into children's experiences, and can imply an agenda that does not always reflect what the children themselves perceived their involvement to be about. This chapter, by contrast, explores both adult direction of Britain's youth movements in the years before and during the First World War, and also, as far as possible, what that wartime experience meant to the children themselves. It uses the accounts of individual youth group branches to understand the ways in which

¹⁹ See Allen Warren, "Sir Robert Baden-Powell, the Scout Movement and Citizen Training in Great Britain, 1900-1920," *English Historical Review* 101 (1986)., Martin Deadman, "Baden-Powell, Militarism, and the 'Invisible Contributors' to the Boy Scout Scheme, 1904-1920," *Twentieth Century British History* Vol 4, no. 3 (1993). and Proctor, "On My Honour - Guides and Scouts in Interwar Britain."

children interpreted the instructions they were given, sometimes following them and sometimes rejecting them, in their attempts to support the war effort.

Little Soldiers?

The question of militarism, which is central to the discussion of the involvement of British youth movements in the war effort, has dogged these movements since their creation and continues to preoccupy historians today. Were groups like the Boy Scouts and the Boys' Brigade paramilitary organisations masquerading as peace loving troops, teaching nothing but moral fortitude and Christian manliness? Or, were they in fact covert attempts, lead by Imperialists and National Service League supporters, to produce young men ready to serve as soldiers in the Regular Army or Reserves? The evidence is conflicting but when you look at the histories of individual local groups, at what the children actually did, it becomes clear that whatever the official position of the leadership was, the experience of individual troops could be quite different. During the First World War particularly, we see children involved in a huge range of activities designed to back up the war effort, some of them closely allied to the military. This allows us to understand how difficult it was in practice for local grass roots groups to distinguish between what activities were helping win the war in a non-military capacity, and what would be considered too militaristic for their leadership.

The fact that the Scouts, Boys' Brigade and Church Lads' Brigade were led by soldiers, wore uniform, learnt discipline and obedience, and in some cases drilled with weapons, yet have always defined themselves as staunchly non-militaristic, is what has always confused attitudes in this debate about the role of militarism in youth groups. The problem is made more difficult because of the loose interpretation of the word militarism. How do we define it as a concept? Do youth groups have to actively seek to encourage their members to want to serve in the armed forces to be considered militaristic? Or is it enough to positively model soldiering through the teaching of drill and outdoor survival skills? Can a child wear a uniform, carry a weapon and hold a military rank without being encouraged to absorb military values? The leaders of the major Victorian and

Edwardian uniformed youth movements certainly thought they could, but many commentators at the time and since have disagreed. By looking at the writings of youth group leaders and comparing them to the experience of children at grass roots level, this chapter will attempt to untangle this debate.

Although the Boys' Brigade carried all the trappings of a military group, uniform, military ranks and drill with rifles, their emphasis on the religious motivation for their existence was always their main defence against charges of militarism. It was claimed by the Brigade that the drill and ranks were merely a way to interest the boys and to teach them self-discipline. To militarists however the Boys' Brigade's methods fitted in well with their ideas to encourage service to Empire and military training. From 1900 onwards there were an increasing number of organisations and individuals campaigning to strengthen the Imperial ideal in Britain. Among them was Lord Meath, later the Boy Scout Commissioner for Ireland, who founded the Empire Day Movement and the Boys' Empire League, which sought to propagate the Imperial message through schools. Others like Lord Milner and Lord Roberts of the National Service League (NSL) toured the country warning of Britain's fate if the nation failed to prepare itself for the military threat posed from abroad, and advocated conscription as the only answer.

These fears for the security of the Empire were partially recognised by the Liberal government, and in 1907 the Secretary of State for War, R.B. Haldane's Territorial Forces Bill was passed. The Bill reorganised Britain's Volunteer forces and brought all Officers Training Corps and Cadet Corps work under the control of the War Office. A portion of the Bill that proposed compulsory military training for boys at elementary school was rejected, following strong opposition from Ramsay MacDonald and the Labour and radical Liberal MPs. Haldane did however, seek to bring all uniformed youth movements under War Office control, to act as feeder organisations for the new Territorial force.²⁰ This possibility of coming under War Office control was put to the youth groups as an attractive choice, as failure to become a part of the scheme carried the penalty of a withdrawal of all previous financial and military assistance from the War

²⁰ Alan Penn, *Targeting Schools - Drill, Militarism and Imperialism* (London: 1999).

Office. The Boys' Brigade however, consistently refused the offer between 1909 and 1911, although, as we shall see, they were later to relent.

The Boy Scouts, still only in their infancy at this time, also rejected the government's proposal. In all public statements and documents Baden-Powell and the Scout organisation always maintained their non-militarist standpoint. Distinguishing between war scouts and peace scouts, Baden-Powell always stressed that his Scouts were peace scouts, partly because he was aware of the negative connotations any military style organisation would have in the minds of the prospective parents of just those sorts of boys he hoped to attract to Scouting. From the beginning Scouting's biggest critics were trade union leaders, working class parents and Labour Party leaders, who distrusted attempts to organise youths into uniformed movements or introduce military drill into schools. At the Seventeenth Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party in Edinburgh in 1909 Keir Hardie moved a resolution calling for an end to the building tensions between Britain and Germany, the eventual abolition of war, and declared the Conference's 'unabated opposition to all attempts to foster military customs in our schools or to impose compulsory military service upon the people.'²¹ Labour leaders attacked the Scouts regularly in the press, so Baden-Powell was well aware that he needed to do what he could to minimise the appearance of militarism so as not to further alienate working class parents.

Despite this, from its earliest writings, the Scout movement saw preparedness for war and the Scouts' role in any war as central to the very point of its training. Along with training the boys in the importance of following orders and maintaining discipline, Scouts were also told of their responsibilities in case of war or invasion by the enemy. From its inception as an organisation Scouting stressed the importance of service, service to country and service to Empire. The children were to be trained to be useful, and, within the context of pre-war fears over imperial rivalry and the threat from Germany, that meant they were to be useful in a time of conflict. Baden-Powell's claim then that he was training peace scouts seems hard to reconcile with the fact that he was preparing them for war.

²¹ Ibid. p 147.

Michael Rosenthal, a biographer of Baden-Powell and historian of the Scout movement, also sees this problem:

the notion of the Scout as a serviceable citizen trained to follow orders in wartime is at the heart of Scouting. Whether this makes him a war Scout or a peace Scout, or whether a willingness to defend one's country is the best way to express detestation of war is beside the point; what matters is simply that Scouting holds out before us a model of human excellence in which absolute loyalty, an unbudgeable devotion to duty, and the readiness to fight, and if necessary die for one's country, are the highest values.²²

The distinction between peace scouts and war scouts also seems to have caused some confusion for the Scouts themselves as Michael Blanch has noted. In 1909, the Birmingham Scout Association declined the Territorial Force's invitation to take part in a large military parade that was to be held before the Secretary of State for War, R.B. Haldane, explaining to the *Birmingham Daily Mail* that as they were 'peace scouts' they could not participate. This letter produced a flurry of angry correspondence from Scoutmasters and Scouts who all believed they had a role to play in the military machine with one Scoutmaster protesting that how could they 'be loyal to God and the King' like this?²³ A letter from a Boy Scout suggests that some at least of the Scouts themselves considered the movement to be militarist:

the Birmingham Scouts Council says that the boys are being trained in a peace scouting movement, and not as war scouts. If this is so, it was never understood by the boys themselves, or at least those whom I have spoken to. We always understood that we were being trained to be of use to our country in the time of need²⁴

Other local scout troops were also confused about what counted as militaristic activity. From their earliest days in 1908 Scouts in Chiswick had organised their own rifle training taking lessons from the father of one of the boys and some members even went on to compete in national shooting competitions. However one former Scout from the troop recalls that they felt there was nothing

²² Rosenthal, *The Character Factory - Baden Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* p 162.

²³ Michael Blanch, "Imperialism, Nationalism and Organised Youth," in *Working Class Culture - Studies in History and Theory*, ed. John Clarke, Chas Critcher, and Richard Johnson (London: 1979), p 112.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

inherently militaristic about what they were doing; perfecting their shooting skills was simply a way to instil discipline and build character. What is interesting is that the writer recalls that the practice was discontinued after the end of the First World War. Presumably this was because shooting was too closely associated with the military war and perhaps parents and even the boys themselves had lost their enthusiasm for it as a form of character training.²⁵

Even more strikingly Scouts in Derby before the First World War were awarded proficiency badges for infantry training and some troops had been known to give demonstrations of rifle and bayonet drill. So skilled were these boys in military drill that once the war itself broke out some of the troops were to be found marching round the district leading trainee soldiers in their first experience of route marching.²⁶ What is clear from these examples is that troops at a local level interpreted their training instructions in different ways. While Baden-Powell might have advised troops not to take part in military drill or train with weapons, boys and their Scoutmasters at a local level did not always follow these directions. If the boys themselves were particularly interested and had access to some local training, as those in Chiswick had, they took advantage of it because they saw no conflict between that and the rest of their Scout training. Likewise if a local Scout leader, with military experience, passed that on to his troop it was because he believed he was carrying out the aims of Scouting by preparing his boys to be useful citizens of the Empire.

Despite continually denying any connection with militarism, the Boy Scout Association was repeatedly challenged by some of its own members over the issue, and on several occasions in the early years breakaway groups formed when the executive failed to take their concerns seriously. The first of these disputes arose in 1909 when the Scout Commissioner for London the liberal aristocrat Sir Francis Vane, complained that National Service League leaders had populated the Scout Council. Vane felt that executive control of the youth movement had been given to soldiers and conscriptionists, whose aims were in stark contrast to Ernest Thompson Seton's woodcraft philosophy. After a tense

²⁵ Alwyn Dawson, *The Story of the 1st Chiswick - Early Years 1908-1939* (1978) p 15.

²⁶ John R. Hughes, *Thirty Years and More* (Derby: 1996) p 15.

couple of months in the winter of 1909, when it looked possible that the entire London membership might withdraw from the movement, Vane was forced to resign, later taking charge of the more peacefully inclined, but short-lived, British Boy Scouts.²⁷ Interestingly, John Springhall points out that when the NSL eventually disbanded in 1921 it handed its assets of £12,000 to the Boy Scout Association as being the body which most 'successfully teaches the ideals of citizenship of which Lord Roberts' scheme was a part'.²⁸

A second split occurred when, in 1915 several leading members of Scouting in the Cambridge area broke away to establish an organisation to oppose the military stance the Scouts were taking in the war. The naturalist Ernest Westlake joined them as leader, and in 1916 they set up the first group of the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry. Westlake and his son Aubrey closely modelled their movement on Seton's Woodcraft Indians but were also heavily influenced by the American social Darwinist G. Stanley Hall's theory of 'recapitulation'. This theory sought to apply Darwinian biological ideas to the educational psychology of adolescence, believing that every developing adolescent 'recapitulated' the cultural history of the human race in the stages of their own physical and mental development. Incorporating this into their movement a system of training was developed to allow children to live through the earlier stages of mankind in order that they might appreciate and understand the present stage of evolution.²⁹

Another London Scout leader John Hargrave, Commissioner for Camping and Woodcraft at Scout Headquarters, started the Kibbo Kift Kindred in 1920. Hargrave was unhappy with the strong association the Scout movement had had with the war effort, and sought to form his own movement on more socialist pacifist lines. The Kibbo Kift did not survive for long as a youth movement however, as its leader became immersed in the Social Credit movement and then the Greenshirts, a militant section of the League of the Unemployed.³⁰ The 1925 Woodcraft Folk have been more successful and still survive today. Begun by

²⁷ John Springhall, "The Boy Scouts, Class and Militarism in Relation to British Youth Movements 1883-1935," *International Review of Social History* 16, no. 2 (1971): p 138.

²⁸ Lord Milner quoted in The Irish Scout Association, "The Irish Scout Gazette," February (1921).

²⁹ Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society - British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* p 111.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p 114.

members of the Co-operative movement this organisation has been the closest thing to a socialist Boy Scout/Girl Guide group and was certainly popular in the decades after the war when anything associated with militarism came to be distrusted by parents. However it never had anything approaching the membership of the Boy Scouts, who also sought to distance themselves from their more imperialist, militarist, standpoint of the pre-war years, by emphasising the importance of internationalism and class harmony.³¹

Clearly the question of militarism confused attitudes amongst those interested in youth movement then just as they do now. Despite repeated assertions from the leaders of the Boy Scouts and the Boys' Brigade, and the continual refusal to accept War Office support, both groups suffered from breakaway movements concerned that militarism was creeping in to the schemes. But we cannot be convinced that this perceived strain of militarism came solely from the military leaders of such groups, in fact it appears that often it was at local level that some of the most overtly military activities were originating. Local boys led by individual Scoutmasters were taking it upon themselves to practise shooting, bayonet drill and marching, despite instructions from headquarters that they were not to do so. This suggests that despite the strong and charismatic leadership of both Baden-Powell and Smith the huge scale of the movements they spawned meant that uniformity of practice at local level could never be achieved. By the outbreak of war in 1914 there were just over 60,000 boys in the Boys' Brigade and over 153,000 Scouts.³² Both groups were deliberately attempting to mould the character of their members to produce useful, patriotic boys, prepared to take on the responsibilities of citizenship. It is unsurprising therefore that in the immediate pre-war years, when so much press and political attention was being paid to preparedness for war, that young boys should want to learn the skills to make themselves useful soldier-citizens.

³¹ Ibid. pp 117-8.

³² Springhall, Fraser, and Hoare, *Sure and Steadfast - a History of the Boys' Brigade 1883 to 1983* p 258. and Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society - British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* p 134.

The War

Whether militaristic or not, at the outbreak of war British youth groups threw themselves into the war effort. The Boys' Brigade immediately offered its help to the government, but felt the need to defend itself against accusations of joining in military activities in the October 1914 edition of the *Boys' Brigade Gazette*. Describing their offer of service as not only a duty but also a privilege the *Gazette* goes on to say:

Our offer was unconditional; to have excluded from our offer purely military duties would have been unnecessary, because the age limit of our Boys makes it impossible for them to be employed directly either as Territorials or in the Regular Army... To have excluded everything that could be called in a sense "military duties", would have made our offer valueless.³³

The *Gazette* also stressed that the Brigade was determined to maintain its principles of non-militancy and to retain the full liberty to work independently of government, as in normal times. As we shall see during the course of the war this independence was challenged and eventually, in part, relinquished by the Boys' Brigade.

At the start of the war the boys of the Boys' Brigade were urged by their leaders through the *Boys' Brigade Gazette* to help their mothers at home, do extra tasks without being asked and not to complain about any shortages of food. As the war progressed however their services were increasingly needed outside the home as messengers and orderlies, in ambulance troops, and to signal the 'all clear' after air raid warnings. Throughout, the message from the Boys' Brigade headquarters was to 'be steady'. In a 1914 pamphlet entitled '*A Word About the War to the Boys of the Boys' Brigade*' the Executive brought home the gravity of the situation to its young members saying:

Shouting and waving little flags may be fun but it isn't business. Men are dying under the flag. This war is a big, terrible business, and we all have to see it through. Boys, be steady.³⁴

³³ The Boys' Brigade, "The Boys' Brigade Gazette," October (1914): p 20.

³⁴ Quoted in Springhall, Fraser, and Hoare, *Sure and Steadfast - a History of the Boys' Brigade 1883 to 1983* p 107.

The Boy Scout Association also used its monthly magazines (*The Headquarters Gazette* for Scoutmasters and *The Scout* for boys) to pass on instructions as to the sort of work that Scouts might become involved with now that war had been declared. Scout duties, which they were already largely trained for, would be designed so as to release men for the more arduous tasks of war. Their scope, it was claimed, would be non-military, and would come more in line with police work that could be directed by the Chief Constable of each County. Specifically Baden-Powell, in the very first month of the war suggested that the work of the Boy Scouts would include:

- a) Guarding and patrolling bridges, culverts, telegraph lines, etc., against damage by spies.
- b) Collecting information as to supplies, transport etc., available.
- c) Handing out notices to inhabitants, and other duties connected with billeting, commandeering, warning etc.
- d) Carrying out organised relief measures amongst inhabitants.
- e) Carrying out communications by means of despatch riders, signallers, wireless.
- f) Helping families of men employed in defence duties, or sick or wounded etc.
- g) Establishing first-aid, dressing or nursing stations, refuges, dispensaries, soup kitchens etc., in their clubrooms.
- h) Acting as guides, orderlies, etc.³⁵

The speed with which local Scout organisers were able to put into practice Baden-Powell's suggestions can be gauged by this letter sent in to *The Scout*. The boy, a Scout from Hampstead, North London, was on holiday in Sandgate, Kent when war broke out but responded to the notices posted around town asking Boy Scouts to report to the local headquarters of the Red Cross Society. Having taken his uniform with him on holiday the boy was included in the activities of the local troops:

First of all I delivered some official documents, and then went and bought some cloth and flannelette for pyjamas, shirts etc. I then assisted in shifting about a hundred chairs from the Memorial Hall to the Bevan Convalescent Home. After this we rigged up beds in these two buildings and the Devonshire Nursing Home. So we have now got three hospitals.

³⁵ The Boy Scout Association, "Headquarters Gazette," August (1914): p 233.

A spy was collared by two boys of the 3rd Hythe (Shorncliffe) Troop yesterday, and another was caught in Sandgate today - a patrol leader and I gave the report to the Post Office.³⁶

Baden-Powell also suggested that Scouts and Sea Scouts could assist the Coastguards in watching the nation's estuaries and ports. Their organisation by counties under their Commissioners, and even their distribution in small units under Scoutmasters all over the country was seen to be a great strength, making mobilisation easy, and putting the Scouts in a strong position with their existing knowledge of the local area and conditions. Even when Scouts had no knowledge of an area they could be put to good use. Some troops were away from home at their annual camp when war was declared but many were asked to help immediately in the place they were staying. The 4th Streatham Sea Scout troop were at camp in Leatherhead over the August Bank Holiday and one member has recalled:

Immediately high adventure came to the lads for they were each given a whistle by the local police sergeant and told to guard the railway line at the end of the field... However all was well and the Territorial Army arrived after 3 nights and the "4th" boys were commended by the officer for their courageous act in helping to defend their country.³⁷

To Baden-Powell it was inconceivable that the government would not jump at the chance of using such a well-trained and reliable force. Because of the implications of their war work Baden-Powell felt confident that:

they will be excused from school attendance by the Education Committees and from work by their employers.³⁸

They were not, and throughout the war Boy Scouts undertook their work in the evenings and at weekends. The only exception to this was in York where Scouts were in such demand by local officials and public bodies that the local Education Committee agreed to the setting up of a Scout's Temporary Day School where Scouts would be available for duties for one week at a time attending school at all other times.

³⁶ The Boy Scout Association, "The Scout," August (1914).

³⁷ Streatham Sea Scout Association, *Golden Jubilee of the 4th Streatham Sea Scout Group. 1913-1963.* (London: 1963) p 1.

³⁸ The Boy Scout Association, "Headquarters Gazette," August (1914) p 233.

Baden-Powell wanted his Scouts to understand what he saw as the positive lessons that could be learnt from war. He believed that:

The Damoclesian sword of war ever hanging over a country has its value in keeping up the manliness of a people, in developing self-sacrificing heroism in its soldiers, in uniting classes, creeds, and parties, and in showing the pettiness of party politics in its true proportion.³⁹

For Baden-Powell then, a nation could be incited to work together for the common weal, sacrifice their individual, or class concerns, if sufficiently afraid for the future of the nation. More importantly, in terms of Scouting's ideology, it proved the worth of their motto to 'Be Prepared'. The present conflict proved to the pre-war doubters of Germany's threat that the country must guard itself 'not merely for what may be probable, but for what may even be possible.'⁴⁰ As well as being prepared to be of practical use the war was the ideal opportunity for Scouts to practise self-sacrifice, just as the soldiers abroad were being asked to do. An editorial in the *Headquarters Gazette* ran

I like to tell my boys that in some small way they can in spirit, if not actually in person, lay down and protect a wounded soldier. They can voluntarily suffer hardship like good soldiers by some simple acts of self-denial. They can give up their beds and sleep on the floor when beds are required for hospitals. They can at least dispense with sheets and sleep in blankets. ... The certain result of happiness for the boys themselves is not an inducement to be held out to them, but will follow in due course.⁴¹

And so 'character training' was to be achieved by teaching the boys to find happiness through self-sacrifice and self-denial. The example of soldiers, prepared to give up their lives in the service of their country, was held up as the epitome of successful character training, and young boys were urged to live up to the sacrifice the older generation were making for them.

Already, by September 1914 Scout Commissioners and Scoutmasters had mobilised their boys, offering their services, free of charge, to various government departments and regional bodies. Baden-Powell congratulated them

³⁹ Ibid. September: p 262.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid. December: p 80.

on this effort claiming that their hard work meant that the Scouts had, in fact, mobilised more rapidly than the Defence Forces, assuming the preliminary guarding of the coasts, telegraphs, and railways until the others were ready to take over the duties. For Baden-Powell this was a great achievement. Despite the fact that the Defence Forces presumably had far greater numbers to organise as well as a broader range of concerns, Baden-Powell took pleasure in comparing his own force favourably to the nation's adult force. He wrote:

This is a great feather in our cap and has once more drawn the grateful appreciation of the authorities; it has given us another definite step in progress in the form of the official recognition of the Scouts as a National non-combatant force.⁴²

Fears that the enemy were planning to contaminate the water supply appear to have been rife with many histories of local Scout troops reporting that their members were posted to guard reservoirs and waterworks. For one patrol the monotony of the work was broken one evening in the first month of the war. In Glasgow, Scouts Alex Beckett and Arthur Blair were guarding the Milngavie waterworks when Alex spotted a man climbing over the perimeter wall,

The man had not gone far when Scout Beckett stopped him and asked him to show his permit. This he was not able to do nor would he give information about himself. The Scout asked the man to write down his name and noticed the German script of the letter B. Scout Blair arrived on the scene and water-works staff were alerted.⁴³

The local paper later reported that the man was a German schoolmaster on holiday in Scotland and that he had been transferred to the custody of the Army at Maryhill Barracks. After that follows an unsubstantiated report that he was shot later trying to escape from military custody in Edinburgh.

In recognition of the prompt and significant initial contribution by Boy Scouts across the country the Scout uniform was formally recognised by the Government as the uniform of a public service, non-military body on the 10th August 1914. With the announcement of this in the Scout press came the very

⁴² Ibid. September: p 262.

⁴³ Alec J. Spalding, *The 24th, 1908-1988 - a History of the 24th Glasgow (Bearsden) Scout Group* (1988) p 11.

stern admonition from Scout Headquarters that no Scout or Scout officer in uniform must on any account carry arms. However again local groups interpreted these instructions differently. The 1st Chiswick Scout troop had been at camp in Westgate near Margate when war was declared. As the camp was very close to St Mildred's Seaplane Station, the troop had immediately offered their services there and had been accepted. Unlike other groups whose work away from home ended when the summer camp broke up, boys from Chiswick, who were no longer at school, were asked to stay on at the Seaplane Station (for which they were paid a shilling a day). Part of the boys' work involved patrolling the camp in the evenings and at weekends; what is unusual is that they did this initially wearing full infantry fighting equipment - rifle, bayonet and 150 rounds of ammunition. Because they found carrying everything too heavy, all non-essential equipment was later omitted although the boys continued to patrol with 10 rounds of ammunition. One of the Scouts involved, Jack Hewson, reported later that he knew of the attitude of the Boy Scout Association towards its members carrying arms but that he considered his role to be an exceptional case 'and under similar circumstances would do the same again'.⁴⁴

What is unclear is whether these Scouts patrolled with arms at the request of the seaplane garrison or whether it was a decision they took themselves. The garrison was staffed with about 50 Royal Naval Air Service personnel and 25 men from the Royal West Kent Regiment and it seems likely that it was from one of these forces that they received their arms. It is clear however that they knew that what they were doing went against the principles of their movement but they were willing to carry arms anyway. Bearing arms, to these Scouts, in the same way as the soldiers doing the same job seemed like the right thing to do. They believed that they were performing a military duty for their country in a time of war, something they had been trained to do, and then asked to do by the military authorities where they were stationed.

The Secretary of State for War Lord Kitchener saw, like Baden-Powell, the benefit of the war for Scouting, feeling that it provided both the ideal opportunity for Scoutmasters to show boys the real meaning and value of all their training,

⁴⁴ Dawson, *The Story of the 1st Chiswick - Early Years 1908-1939* p 18.

and for giving boys the chance to see it for themselves. Kitchener's thoughts were relayed to the Scouts in the September 1914 edition of the *Gazette*. They were told of his belief that there was a need for the manhood of the nation to come forward at this critical time, and of what he believed could be the value of the assistance of boys who were wholehearted in their work and could be trusted to carry it out to the very best of their ability. The Scouts, Kitchener declared, 'were a great asset to the nation.'⁴⁵ Such high praise, from so magnificent a war hero as Lord Kitchener himself, must have been very eagerly received by the boys engaged in Scout work, and the ready use made of them by government departments, hospitals and the like, encouraged them to behave as was expected of them and help the nation in its time of need. Frank Hinton, a Sea Scout from Portishead remembers that he and his fellow Scouts were put to work collecting everything from scrap iron to old rubber as well as gathering herbs for medicinal purposes. He recalls that the Scout Association rewarded war work with a War Service Badge and that

we all worked hard to get one of these coveted little discs showing that the wearer had put in 80 or 100 hours war service.⁴⁶

The sadness for Baden-Powell was that Scouting had not begun twenty years earlier, for if it had he believed that there would have been an even greater response than there was to the country's call for defenders. There would have been a body of men already trained in discipline, initiative, self-reliance, resourcefulness and most importantly self sacrifice, ready to jump at the chance to fight.⁴⁷ In the light of this sentiment I find it hard to believe that the philosophy behind Scouting was not, at its heart, a military one. To claim that you are not training future soldiers but to still be sure that you would produce them seems an odd certainty. But perhaps Baden-Powell could separate in his mind the instilling of patriotic sentiment and the desire to serve your country, from the likely outcome of such teaching - enlistment in the Territorials or Regular Army. Indeed as we have seen some Scouts did not even wait until they had left the movement before they became involved in serving in a military capacity. At local level at least there is evidence that the boys considered

⁴⁵ The Boy Scout Association, "Headquarters Gazette," September (1914) p 263.

⁴⁶ John F Rickard, *Scouting around Portishead* (2000) p 30.

⁴⁷ The Boy Scout Association, "Headquarters Gazette," September (1914) p 263.

themselves a military force and would gladly have carried arms on a permanent basis had they been allowed.

So keen was Baden-Powell to have the Scouts prove useful during the war that he even offered to send a battalion of cyclists for service abroad as messengers, but the offer was declined by the Commander of the British Forces in France, Sir John French, on the grounds that the bad weather was likely to make conditions impossible for bicycles. Baden-Powell was prophesying as early as October 1914 that his Scouts would probably be called upon in the future to play a more vital role. While at present the army only wanted larger men of nineteen and over, Baden-Powell explained writing to his Scouts, it was likely that the time would come when the standard would be lowered to include younger men of smaller size. Already, he said, in Germany young fellows of sixteen were being pressed into the ranks, and that Britain soon might follow, at least for Home Service. To that end he said:

I want all Scouts to Be Prepared for this, and to have our "Bantam Battalion" ready, so that the moment the door is opened we can step in with a corps already trained for service.⁴⁸

Baden-Powell invited every Scout, between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, to send in his name to his Scoutmaster as willing to serve if called upon; those boys should then be grouped into patrols, trained in rifle shooting, judging distance, signalling, pioneering, entrenching, and drilling in accordance with infantry training methods. This scheme became known as the Scout Defence Corps in 1915 which Baden-Powell claimed represented neither a shift in the movement's methods nor the beginning of a process that would turn the whole movement into a cadet corps run along military lines. He had, he said, taken the advice of a number of gentlemen who were, like himself, averse to military training as education for boys, and they all agreed saying that:

in the present national emergency, when the country is staking its very existence against the imposition of militarism over Europe, there is no

⁴⁸ Ibid. October: p 290.

harm in helping the older boys to prepare themselves for the defence of their homes, if need be.⁴⁹

Baden-Powell's aim in setting up the Scout Defence Corps was to protect Britain from the threat of a German invasion, something he continued to urge both the country and his Boy Scouts to 'Be Prepared' for. It was believed that in the event of an invasion, the Scouts, if properly prepared at once, could be of great national value, by acting to both allay the panic of civilians and to aid the machinery of the relief effort. The boys, therefore:

should be taught to be prepared for the worst; to think out every situation that is likely, or possible, to occur, and be impressed with the fact that their duty is to observe discipline and keep a smile on, even in the worst of circumstances, in order to reassure the more frightened.⁵⁰

Scouts should be detailed to all the leading authorities and, in case of invasion, cyclist patrols should sleep at their headquarters so as to rally all Scouts in case of emergency. Before an invasion Scouts could distribute warnings to inhabitants and organise their evacuation from certain areas, along with their wagons and livestock. After an invasion they could be organised into search and rescue parties as well as fire brigades to aid in the relief work.

It is hard to read these suggestions for the preparation and training of children to take such a substantial role in the organisation of the nation in the event of an invasion without feeling that those who advocated such preparations were putting those in their charge under unnecessary risks. Baden-Powell, and the many other retired soldiers who made up the administration of the Scout Association, appear to have longed for some action in which their troops could take part. They urged their Scouts on and on in their training, suggesting more and more central positions for them within the Home Front war effort, ultimately positions which risked their lives. What if the Seaplane station in Margate had been attacked by German warships, or the German schoolmaster the boys in Glasgow apprehended had been violent? The whole point in involving these boys in the work that they did was because both the Scouting authorities and the

⁴⁹ Ibid. November: p 321.

⁵⁰ Ibid. October: p 290.

military authorities believed that the threat from the enemy was real. Baden-Powell wanted to train young boys to be of service to their country in the future, but what he actually provided was children to serve their country in the present. The fact that Britain wasn't invaded should not obscure the fact that the Boy Scouts were expected by their leader to play a critical role if it was - and no doubt they would have been keen to do so themselves, regardless of the danger.

Perhaps mindful of fears on the part of parents that their children were being proposed for such dangerous roles Baden-Powell even went so far as to issue a statement on 'What Scouts Could Be Shot For' claiming that their duties:

if essentially non-combatant and designed to help their fellow-countrymen rather than to fight the enemy, do not render Scouts liable to capture or summary punishment at the hands of the enemy. Their uniform would be a protection to them like that of police.⁵¹

By December 1914 1,400 Scouts had been retained by the Admiralty for duty as coastguards, following their call up as Navy Reservists. Some 100,000 more were estimated to be officially employed in government departments and hospitals.⁵² In addition, returns from February 1915 announced that already 3,300 Scouts had joined the Scout Defence Corps, prepared to defend their country if called upon to do so.⁵³ From 1916 there were renewed calls from the War Office for the country's uniformed youth movements to become affiliated with the County Territorial Association as part of the nation's Cadet organisation. The unanticipated length of the war meant that there was increasing support for this as the patriotic option amongst some in the youth groups' leadership. Others took a more pragmatic approach believing that recognition was one way to secure existing membership and encourage recruitment amongst boys who might otherwise just join their local cadet corps.

⁵¹ Ibid. p 291.

⁵² Ibid. December: p 347.

⁵³ By the end of the war 25,000 Scouts had served on coast guard duty and 80,000 had earned their War Service badges. More than 100,000 Scouts, former Scouts and Scoutmasters became soldiers in the conflict, 10,000 of whom died in combat. The Boy Scout Association, "11th Annual Report," (London, 1919), pp15-17..

The cadet scheme, with its rigid reliance on mechanical drill did not give enough prominence to Baden-Powell's idea of character and he claimed boys trained by it ended up as worse recruits into the army than those with no training at all:

In my own mind the boys of the country have a very definite place in the war - in the war that comes after this war - namely, in the struggle for industrial and commercial success which is going to raise our country out of the havoc brought about by the existing crisis, and which will consolidate for us tomorrow the results of victories won by our men in the field today, and will compensate for our losses.⁵⁴

That war would probably continue for the next ten or twenty years and would be won, Baden-Powell felt sure, by the country whose citizens were equipped for the work ahead. To that end he felt that the nation should be concentrating on training the rising generation in individual character, technical efficiency and physical health. With this foundation he felt they would make the most efficient citizens and equally, if need be, the most effective soldiers. But to dress young men up,

in khaki and to teach them to play at soldiers under the allurements of the existing war fever, is, to my mind, to trifle with a very serious situation and with a very big national opportunity.⁵⁵

The Boys' Brigade on the other hand were tempted by the idea of recognition as cadet corps and in March 1917 the Executive polled all companies for their opinions. Of the Companies that replied (29 per cent did not), it was noted that over 74 per cent were in favour of any Company being permitted to apply for recognition, subject to a guarantee being given by the Territorial Force Association concerned that there would be no interference with the religious and social work of the Brigade, and that only those nominated by the Brigade would be accepted as Officers. Of those who were not in favour most were entirely against, but some advocated delay in taking any definite step until after the war.⁵⁶ Consequently the Executive decided that while these numbers did not warrant a recommendation that the Brigade as a whole should become cadets, support was so widespread that permission should be given to individual

⁵⁴ The Boy Scout Association, "Headquarters Gazette," May (1916): p 115.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ The Boys' Brigade, "Boys' Brigade Gazette," June (1917): p 114.

Companies to apply for recognition without damaging their position in the Brigade.

Springhall, Fraser and Hoare, in their history of the Boys' Brigade argue that the Boys' Brigade was worried about losing potential recruits to the secular cadet corps. The total number of boys in the Boys' Brigade fell from about 60,000 in 1914 to 43,000 in 1919, which suggests that this decision had little impact in attracting boys to the movement. By allowing the individual companies to accept recognition the Boys' Brigade created an association with the State's military muscle that was to prove unpopular in the post war years as many parents' reaction to the war turned to revulsion.⁵⁷

Martin Deadman has described the Scouts' role in wartime as 'peripheral' and likened their work to that of women, designed to free men for the fighting.⁵⁸ While that may have been the position of the Boy Scout and Boys' Brigade leadership, in reality the children's work became much more than that. Children were relied upon by government offices, hospitals and the Post Office, as well as local military authorities and the police, who all recognised the potential for utilising such a large number of usually unpaid volunteers. When you consider the thousands of children who were organised by their troop leaders to guard bridges, deliver messages, sound the 'all clear' etc and who read the words of their leaders, extolling them to 'Be Prepared' or 'Be Steady', it seems unlikely that they themselves would have seen their role as peripheral. Indeed as we have seen some children embraced the chance for an active military role, believing that it in no way went against the principles of their movement. In fact the organisations themselves also went to great lengths to make sure that the children's work was recognised, whether it be through recognition as a non-combatant force, a cadet corps, or through the award of a War Service Badge.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Springhall, Fraser, and Hoare, *Sure and Steadfast - a History of the Boys' Brigade 1883 to 1983* p 116.

⁵⁸ Deadman, "Baden-Powell, Militarism, and the 'Invisible Contributors' to the Boy Scout Scheme, 1904-1920," p 218.

⁵⁹ By April 1918 the Boys' Brigade had issued 2,650 badges for boys who gave over 100 hours unpaid and voluntary service, outside of school or work hours.

Throughout the war young boys were trusted with important work by government departments, hospitals and the police and this was purely because they had been trained for such work. Groups like the Scouts, the Boys' Brigade, the Church Lads' Brigade and others instilled in their members the importance of discipline, obedience, patriotism and self-sacrifice and so successful were they that their members could be employed in such work. They were too young to serve in an overtly military capacity, though no doubt some of them, as well as their leaders, would have been more than willing to do so, but they none the less played an important part in the organised work of the Home Front.

The Girl Guides

When a band of self styled 'Girl Scouts' gatecrashed the 1909 Boy Scout Rally at Crystal Palace, Baden-Powell initially showed little interest in their enthusiasm. When it emerged however, that several thousand girls had in fact registered themselves with Headquarters as 'Boy Scouts' it became clear that some provision would have to be made for them. For Baden-Powell it was not desirable that the movement become a mixed one. He foresaw both the disgust of his boy members at having their movement hijacked by their sisters as well as the disapproval of polite society at having girls take part in such manly activities in the company of hordes of boys.

The answer then, was a separate organization to be run alongside the Scouts by his sister Agnes, with the same ideals of character training for the new generation but with differing methods. In 1909 therefore, Baden-Powell published a pamphlet entitled '*Girl Guides: A Suggestion for Character Training for Girls*' and in 1912, with his sister Agnes another one entitled '*The Handbook for Girl Guides or How Girls Can Help Build the Empire*'. In these pamphlets the Baden-Powells outlined what they saw as the problems and solutions for the female youth of the country. As with male youth the problems lay in a decline in moral standards, and an increase in juvenile crime. The problem of getting good servants and the need for girls to be trained to become useful but not become hard and unwomanly, were both issues it was felt could be

addressed by the system of training proposed for the Girl Guides. Most of all, girls, as future mothers of the sons of the Empire, needed strong moral and patriotic training in order for them to be a positive influence on men.

As with the Boy Scouts it was not certain at first whether the training would become a movement in itself and in the 1909 pamphlets it is suggested that Guide training could be taken up by other female youth organisations, or perhaps as a cadet branch or feeder to the Territorial Organisation of Voluntary Aid. The suggestion was that every girl of whatever social class might be given practical instruction in Hospital Nursing, Cooking, Home Nursing and Ambulance Works as well as moral instruction in Religion, Chivalry, Patriotism and Courage. It was stressed that this was best achieved through means that really appeal to girls, but that care should be taken not to encourage her to become a 'rough tomboy'.

The threat of invasion and the need to populate the Colonies with good British stock are prioritised in the specific aims of the Girl Guide training. The 1909 pamphlet states that Guides would be trained:

1. To make themselves of practical use in case of invasion by being able to find the wounded after a battle; to render first aid; to transport them to hospital; to improvise ambulances, hospitals etc; to make hospital clothes; to cook; to nurse, etc.
2. To prepare themselves for Colonial life in case their destiny should lead them to such; including camp life, farming, gardening, housekeeping, cooking, and so on.
3. To make themselves generally more useful to others and to themselves by learning useful occupations and handiwork, and yet retaining their womanliness.⁶⁰

The system proposed to cater for girls between the ages 12 and 16, but their organisation was going to have to be significantly different from that of boys. Whereas boys were urged to get up their own troops and then find a suitable adult willing to serve as Scoutmaster it was felt that this level of freedom and initiative was not appropriate for girls. Instead they were to wait for a local ladies' committee to initiate the groups, thus making it clear that the girls' activities were to be supervised and structured appropriately from the first. If

⁶⁰ Robert Baden-Powell, *Girl Guides: A Suggestion for Character Training for Girls* (London: 1909) p 7.

girls were to become guides and comrades to the nation's men it was imperative they retain their womanly refinements and reserve. Having bands of unsupervised girls climbing trees and camping out was hardly likely to persuade the nation's adults that Baden-Powell's scheme was designed to train women to be practical and womanly.

Another reason that the character training for girls needed more leadership from the top down, as it were, had to do with class. For Baden-Powell there was what he termed 'a bit of a gulf between the delicate lady of the castle and the fighting slattern of the slums' and he clearly had no intention of bridging it.⁶¹ While men, of whatever class were equalised and unified through sports and work and war they never, according to Baden-Powell 'attain the angelic height nor the degraded depth that women do'⁶² Thus while the training laid down for Boy Scouts could be almost universally applied, training for girls must be altered appropriately to suit their feminine nature which varied according to status. According to the 1909 pamphlet the training had to be administered with a greater degree of discrimination, for,

you do not want to make tomboys of refined girls, yet you want to attract and thus to raise the slum girl from the gutter. Its main object is to give them *all* the ability to be better mothers and guides to the next generation.⁶³

Thus in the years before the war the initial enthusiasm of girls for Scouting was reined in, as guidance from Headquarters advised Guides not to parade in public or try to ape the activities of the boys (which was what had interested them in the movement in the first place). It was also suggested that they camp indoors to begin with as it was felt the outdoor life might be harmful to their delicate health. There is evidence to suggest that these new directions were a great disappointment to the groups of girls who had already been inspired to form their own troops and had based their activities around the instructions in *Scouting For Boys*. Rose Kerr, an early recruit to Guiding who has also written a history of the movement, has suggested that 'many felt that the scheme now proposed for

⁶¹ Ibid. p 9.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

them, with its substitution of nursing and domestic duties for the more boyish activities, was rather a watered-down edition of Scouting.⁶⁴

Indeed the memories of other early Guides suggest that it was just those 'boyish' activities that they most enjoyed. In those pre-war days when the adult press and juvenile literature were filled with stories about the threat of invasion and the likelihood of war Girl Scout troops appeared to be ignoring Baden-Powell's advice and preparing themselves for battle. Miss Raschen who was captain of the 1st Birkenhead troop remembers the early days of the movement:

We wore Lincoln green dresses with red ties and red tam-o-shanters in winter, and white straw hats with green bands round them for summer. Lieutenants, leaders, and corporals wore white chevrons on the arm, like the N.C.O.s in the army. We always wore a white haversack filled to overflowing with first-aid requisites, and carried a cloth-covered water bottle slung on the shoulder. And last but not least, we never moved without our poles! Then of course we had our band (perish the thought!) complete with drums and bugles - oh yes the town knew when the Guides went out in those days!⁶⁵

Groups at grass roots level it seems took little notice of the entreaties to 'ladylike' behaviour, they adopted uniforms and even had military ranks, something the boy scouts themselves did not have. Another early Girl Guide from Devon remembers feeling similarly excited by the idea of action:

We had nobody to help us, but we felt immensely patriotic and - whisper it low - distinctly martial in spirit. This may have been due partly to the thrill of evolving a uniform, and the courage it took to walk along the street in it when we had evolved it!⁶⁶

Courage was definitely needed to march down the street in uniform as public sympathy for the Guides was initially extremely low. Baden-Powell was right, polite society, and even impolite society, didn't want to see women parading in the streets, carrying rucksacks and wooden poles, attempting to train themselves to be useful in time of crisis. Miss Stockdale who commanded a troop of girls in Liverpool recalls having all sorts of things thrown at them when they marched

⁶⁴ Rose Kerr and Alex Liddell, *The Story of the Girl Guides 1908-1938* (London: 1976) p30.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p 34.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p 38.

down the street in 1909. Then again, it is hardly likely that that would have upset her girls as they were a tough lot:

When the girls got at loggerheads with each other we made them put on boxing gloves and settle their differences in cold blood. This really was very effective and stopped tale bearing.⁶⁷

Similarly unladylike activities were sometimes actively concealed from Scouting and Guiding headquarters. The girls at Lingholt boarding school in Hindhead for example formed two rival troops, the Night-Hawks and the Wild Cats, and waged a constant war against each other, determining to steal as much of the other troops equipment as possible:

This thrilling life lasted for over a year, during which we gained many badges. But alas, Boy Scout headquarters finally discovered that we were girls, and demanded the return of our badges! (We had obtained them by the device of giving our initials only, not our Christian names, when applying)

Then came the day of change. The Games Mistress was appointed captain; the beloved Night-Hawks had to become the Heather patrol, and the Wild Cats descended to being Bracken.⁶⁸

This change of troops' names from animals to flowers seems to have upset many Girl Scout troops who had initially named themselves, as the boys did, after animals. Miss G.N. Commander of the 1st Birmingham company remembers:

We very reluctantly changed from being Scouts to Guides ... It seemed rather a come down to be flowers instead of animals, and the ideal of womanliness had no appeal for us at that age.⁶⁹

The constant emphasis throughout early Guide literature on the idea of womanliness closely associated with that of motherhood, Tammy Proctor has suggested, was a response to the struggle for women's suffrage. The Guide Association had to walk a thin line between the conservative forces of domestic or maternal respectability and feminist forces seeking new opportunities for girls to participate in society. Anti-suffragists feared that emancipated women would neglect their home and family and so it was important, if the Guides were to gain

⁶⁷ Ibid. p 36.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p 112.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p 38.

public support, that their movement be associated with the nurturing, home loving modern woman. Proctor goes further:

Girl Guides had to be womanly in order to answer adult anxieties about new freedoms for females. Guides were taught to be sympathetic and trained in home skills, and also they were taught to desire the company of men. Leaders thought that girls should become wives, not independent women. Some wanted to train girls to become "companions" for men, but not equals; they wanted to save girls from depravity and moral disintegration, so that as women they, in turn, could save men.⁷⁰

What the accounts of local Guide groups suggest however is that the girls themselves had little interest in being trained as 'companions' for men. That is not why they set themselves up as Girl Scouts and they initially resisted the new training suggested for them. They had become interested, as the boys who became Scouts had, in the outdoor life. They saw opportunities for adventure in learning signalling, tracking and camping skills. They wanted uniforms, a band, the chance for action, and when left to themselves, that is what they did. Clearly some of their early troop leaders, probably little more than girls themselves, also wanted these things for their girls. They organised the marches and bands and even promoted boxing for girls as a way to settle disputes. It seems likely that it was only as the Guide Association's central organising authority grew that it was able to insist on having groups lead by approved leaders, following the guidelines laid out in *The Handbook for Girl Guides*. Even then in the early years local groups adapted the rules to suit their membership and their interests and many girls continued to enjoy the more 'boyish' elements allowed in the training.

Guiding in wartime

With the outbreak of war however, the Guide movement adapted itself quickly to the new demands on the civilian population, and the old concerns with respectability and motherhood training were superseded by the new concerns for better-trained women to serve in auxiliary capacities. Partially responsible for

⁷⁰ Proctor, "On My Honour - Guides and Scouts in Interwar Britain," p 25.

this new direction was the input the Guides began to receive from Baden-Powell's young wife in 1914. Olave Soames was just twenty-three when she married the fifty-five year old Chief Scout in 1912 and in 1914 she began to take an active interest in the Guide movement. Olave was made Chief Commissioner in October 1914 and in that year began a series of letters to the *Girl Guide Gazette* - a magazine for both girls and their leaders. The Association was keen to explain to its girls how the Guide teachings on self-sacrifice and serving others could be practised in the face of war. Olave's letter to the Guides that opened the August 1914 edition of the *Girl Guide Gazette* explained that while men were being asked to sacrifice their lives, so women must try hard to make sacrifices and help others. She advised that girls should concentrate on cheering those who were obliged to part, visiting their homes and offering to care for their children or help look after the housework. Most importantly one of their chief duties was to maintain discipline as no work could be achieved without order, discipline and obedience. She writes:

Prompt obedience to orders is what every soldier has to learn, and it is instant, cheerful obedience which helps to make everything go smoothly.⁷¹

While rejoicing that older Guides trained in first aid would have the opportunity to become VADs (Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses), Olave Baden-Powell stressed that younger Guides should continue their first aid and ambulance training as well as offering their services to local army camps to help cook and clean, distribute books and magazines and knit and make clothes.

As the war progressed the girls' attentions were also drawn to the plight of their brother Scouts. Many, it was pointed out, were doing the country a valuable service by keeping watch over bridges, telegraph lines and reservoirs as well as the huge task of keeping watch over the coastline in the place of the Coast Guards who had been called up into the Navy. The girls, it was advised, could do no greater service than knitting warm clothes for these brave boys who were sure to be spending many cold nights out in the open.

⁷¹ Girl Guide Association, "Girl Guide Gazette," August (1914).

Across the country girls were sewing and knitting for soldiers, volunteering in hospitals, making bandages and splints, acting as messengers and helping with postal deliveries, in fact, offering themselves to any local body that could use their help. In Edinburgh a Guide in the 7th company remembers:

We went every Saturday morning in 1917 to run messages between the depot in Lauriston Place and the Red Cross Stall in the Princes Street Arcade where home-made marmalade was sold for the war effort. We visited the junk shops to collect empty jam jars which we wheeled about in an empty pram. Not very glamorous, but we felt we were helping to win the war - nothing else would have persuaded us to wheel an old pram filled with dirty jam jars.⁷²

Additionally Robert Baden-Powell wrote to the *Girl Guide Gazette* suggesting that the Guides transform their clubrooms into temporary hostels that could be used as shelters or makeshift hospitals in case of bombing raids or invasion by the enemy. In a letter to the magazine in October 1915 Baden-Powell wrote of the great work being done by women in France and urged the Guides to 'Be Prepared' for their chance to do great deeds for their country. He wrote: 'The Zeppelins - bless them! - will be a great help to you in this way,' and entreated the girls to be prepared for casualties anywhere women and children are gathered.⁷³ His letter went on:

You know what I mean. Have you got your hostels ready for taking in those injured or rendered homeless by bombardment? Have you your stretchers and bandages ready? Have you learnt to bind up wounds and put out fires? Have you learnt to keep your head and to be plucky in a panic? Have you determined to think nothing of your own safety and to sacrifice it if needs be in order to save others, as these other heroines have done?⁷⁴

Girls who did this were to be considered 'real Guides' and it seems likely that such an entreaty would have left many Guide troops desperate for some casualties to whisk off to their makeshift hospital beds to demonstrate their bandage tying prowess on - if they endangered their own lives in the course of the rescue, so much the better.

⁷² Joan Warrack and Peggy Greening, *Girl Guides - the Edinburgh Story* (Edinburgh: 1977) p 119.

⁷³ Girl Guide Association, "Girl Guide Gazette," October (1915).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

While Baden-Powell and the Guide Association recognised the new and varied opportunities the war provided for girls to gain some practical experience of what the training was aiming to instil in them, it was still important that they kept their sense of place and decency. Appeals were made to ensure that uniform regulations were strictly adhered to and that no added decoration should creep in, and on one occasion Baden-Powell wrote to the *Gazette* deploring the conduct of a group of Guides who had dressed in band uniforms and given a public concert. It was always pointed out that the men at the Front did not appreciate women behaving 'in a hysterical way', donning uniforms and adopting a pseudo militaristic demeanour. In May 1915, in another of his monthly letters to the *Gazette*, Baden-Powell wrote of his pleasure on hearing that Girl Guides in some centres, when asked to parade with public recruiting processions, had declined, not feeling it was the right place for them. He extolled their virtues saying how glad they were to do useful work 'behind the scenes', in offices and factories and in the homes of soldiers' wives and children. Emphatically he said:

Men are not going to be persuaded to enlist because a lot of children go about the streets waving flags; but it is entirely another matter when they see everybody, including even the girls of the nation, seriously at work doing their bit towards the defence of the Empire, and for the successful issue to the war.⁷⁵

The first Annual Report of the Girl Guides was for the year 1916, a year in which the association had received something of a revamp, with a new organisational structure for the counties and increasing input from Robert Baden-Powell himself. The report is clear about the significance of the war for the place of women in society and the way in which it was believed it helped encourage public acceptance of the Girl Guides as a movement:

The War has brought to women their opportunity. It has shown how they are needed in the work of the world; it has shown how they are capable if trained aright; it has shown how, through misdirection of education, they have been handicapped in the past.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Ibid. May.

⁷⁶ Girl Guide Association, "Annual Report," (London, 1916), p 3.

The education women needed to prepare them for their place in the world is described as being that of gaining efficiency through character, skill and health and particularly, for poorer women, in encouraging improvements in environment, handicrafts, homecrafts and hygiene. Guiding had been established to these ends, and through the war the practical implications of this training had been particularly brought home to both the girls and society at large. Without the war it was felt that it would have taken a long time to persuade suspicious parents, the public and educationalists that the movement was not just a factory for "Tom-boys". The war had broken down old traditions and prejudices and shown the value of service given by women if properly trained.

By 1916 some 50,000 girls had enrolled as Guides, and 2,450 Brownies had joined the junior branch (begun in 1915 to cater for girls between 8 and 11). During the course of the war so far, guides had turned their club rooms into hostels, acted as messengers in government departments, made garments and bandages and worked cooking and cleaning in hospitals. In addition they had raised £2000 for recreation huts for soldiers in France, through fund raising activities, not through soliciting donations, something both the Guide and Scout Associations considered begging, and not at all in the spirit of their teachings on self-reliance and initiative. Work of this kind meant that by 1916, 3,753 War Service Badges had been awarded to Guides for such duties.

In 1917 Olave Baden-Powell rewrote the Guide handbook, changing its name to *Training Girls as Guides*. Having never got along with her husband's sister, Olave was keen to remove Agnes from the leadership of the Guides and took over the position of Chief Guide herself in 1917. The new handbook didn't differ particularly in tone, it stressed the importance of learning mothering skills and the need for true womanliness to repair the damage caused by war and to return the country to a stable social footing. What was different was the emphasis placed on self-control and patriotism. The need now was for 'citizen mothers', girls trained to be efficient, yet womanly, nurturers of the coming generations.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Proctor, "On My Honour - Guides and Scouts in Interwar Britain," p 109.

The appeal was to the adventurous, responsible, girl who saw the importance of her future role and accepted it.⁷⁸ According to Tammy Proctor:

Looking fearfully to the threat from within - the new woman - and the threat from without - bolshevism - Olave Baden-Powell promoted the Guides as directing girls' energy in a positive, constructive direction.⁷⁹

But it wasn't only the feminist 'new woman' that Olave hoped Guiding would curb. Richard A. Voeltz has suggested that she also believed the teachings of Guiding could be used to help rein in that other female threat to the social order, the 'flapper'. Young wartime women, taking advantage of their new found freedoms and increased spending power were perceived to be behaving in more and more inappropriate ways, wearing make-up and expensive clothes, smoking cigarettes and eating out alone in public. These girls were particularly likely to fall victim to that other wartime affliction - 'khaki fever' - and find themselves unable to resist any young man in uniform. This was considered a serious threat to the health of the armed forces, through the spread of venereal disease, as well as to the moral fibre of the nation.⁸⁰ Shortly before a huge Girl Guide rally in Hyde Park in 1918 Olave Baden-Powell gave an interview to the *Daily Mirror* which they reported in an article entitled "Is the end of the flighty Flapper's day in sight?" In it she claimed the Guides

Enrol flappers - if I may call the young girls so - of every kind and aim at making them women of character. Every class joins, every type, and they turn out clear-headed, happy women of trained character.⁸¹

Voeltz explains that Lady Baden-Powell felt that the prime aim of the movement was to provide wholesome occupation for girls in their spare time and so divert their minds from more 'undesirable' things. Girls no longer had the same love of home that the older generation considered so important, instead she believed, 'the girls wanted to be out and about, they had the war fever on them.'⁸² What girls needed was a movement that was going to direct their energies away from the

⁷⁸ Olave Baden-Powell, *Training Girls as Guides* (London: 1917) p 22.

⁷⁹ Proctor, "On My Honour - Guides and Scouts in Interwar Britain," p 109.

⁸⁰ Richard A. Voeltz, "the Antidote to Khaki Fever"? - the Expansion of the British Girl Guides During the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, no. 4 (1992).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*: p 633.

⁸² *Ibid.*

streets and the soldiers and back into the home. By encouraging them to work for the war, but in primarily domestic tasks, girls could be persuaded to join and then have their enthusiasm channelled back into appropriate womanly and modest activities.

Guiding's role was to train future citizens and that role took on an even greater significance during wartime as the country began to recognise the important part the next generation was going to play in rebuilding the country after the war was over. Just as we saw with the education debate, those involved in Guide leadership began to stress the fact that the war would not necessarily end when the fighting was over. Britain would have to continue to fight, in trade and commerce, to maintain its position as leader of a great Empire. To that end it was felt that:

The Munitions which we have to get ready for this coming war are the men and women of the next generation, upon whom will fall the brunt of the struggle.⁸³

This was why Guide training was so important. It was believed that the inefficiencies of the pre-war years, characterised by high infant mortality due to preventable disease, could be eliminated by efficient, well trained mothers of the future, proficient in homecraft and hygiene.⁸⁴ Therefore Guiding:

offers to women of every standing a glorious and ready opportunity of doing that for their country of which perhaps they had never dreamed before that they were capable - a bigger and more permanent work even than the present war work because it affects the coming generation, and will help to maintain what we shall have won in the present War, and to compensate in some degree for our enormous sacrifices of blood and treasure.⁸⁵

While the war had shown Guides, and women in general, new and more exciting opportunities for work and activities outside the home, it was still presumed that most women would return to their pre-war lives, thus making Guiding's motherhood training all the more relevant. These girls were vital to Britain's

⁸³ Girl Guide Association, "Annual Report," p 14.

⁸⁴ Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop Journal* 5 (1978).

⁸⁵ Girl Guide Association, "Annual Report," p 15.

post-war reconstruction - they were needed to help rebuild Britain, but as mothers, not as workers. If they were to be confined to the domestic sphere at least, as Allen Warren has said, their preparation for that role 'had become more diverse and less inevitable'.⁸⁶ The Guide Association built on the success of the war years, and the interest in their movement that it generated and no doubt girls continued to be interested in the movement because of the element of personal freedom and independence that participation offered to them. From 50,000 members in 1916 the Guides had a membership of 120,000 in England by 1919 and during the 1920s their membership exceeded that of their brother Boy Scouts.⁸⁷

Undoubtedly the war helped the growth and development of Guiding as many girls must have joined because of the opportunities it afforded them for feeling that they were "doing their bit" for their country in its time of need. The Association saw that enthusiasm for the movement might die down after the war, but they felt that the new demands of reconstruction, with the promise of increased opportunities for well trained girls would help the Guides to continue growing. Most of all it was felt that the war had been a test, a test of the training offered by the scheme and of the work that could be achieved by well trained girls and women. They had passed that test and in some ways the war had validated their principles and the reasoning behind the programme. Britain's power and position in the world was under threat and it would take a concerted effort on the part of all citizens to hold off that threat in the future. The training of both boys and girls was seen to be central to that end, and as the war had shown, such training could produce young people both willing and able to jump to their country's call.

⁸⁶ Allen Warren, "'Mothers for the Empire'? - the Girl Guide Association in Britain, 1909-1939," in *Making Imperial Mentalities - Socialisation and British Imperialism*, ed. J.A. Mangan (Manchester: 1990), p 108.

⁸⁷ Proctor, "On My Honour - Guides and Scouts in Interwar Britain," p 72.

Chapter 5 - War as Entertainment

Introduction

Schools and youth groups tell us something about some of the institutional ways in which children learnt about and participated in the war. Schooling was compulsory, and though Scouts and Guides were not, children entered a world in those organisations already structured for them. Now we will consider some of the private ways in which children discovered and reinterpreted the war for themselves. Through toys, games, fiction and magazines, produced by adults but consumed by children, we can attempt to understand how adult preoccupations and desires to influence children's understanding of the war were appropriated by the children themselves to inform their play and shape their interpretation of events. Toy production and juvenile literature shows us both what images adults wanted children to have about the war and also what they felt children would enjoy. Motivated by commercial concerns toys makers and publishers were aware of what would sell and attempted to both shape the market and respond to children's desires. Editorials in the trade press make it clear that manufacturers knew that children's play and imaginations were being fired by the war and so sought to produce products that would appeal to their market. In turn these products fostered children's imagination, providing details and props to support their existing imaginative narratives.

We know from autobiography that children adopted the war as a recurring theme in their games because they were surrounded by it in everyday life. They learnt about it at school, many participated in the war effort through youth groups and most had a personal connection with fathers or brothers in the armed forces. What is harder to discover is how the war entered children's imagination, what place it had in their games and how important war play was in shaping their understanding of the real war, or their sense of themselves. Did playing at soldiers or nurses make children want to be soldiers and nurses? Did games give children an opportunity to confront fears about absent fathers and brothers? Did children use the war themed toys they were given in the way that was intended, or did they subvert their use for something else? All this is very difficult to know

because of the essentially private way in which children play. Children's games need not have any rules or structure, they can be invented on the spot and can change in purpose or meaning in an instant. Some autobiographers have recorded how they played and what they read, but many have not. From the evidence we do have, it appears the war entered children's games regardless of whether they had any commercially produced products available to prompt them. Children played games and read books as a way of expressing their own understanding of the war, giving them a chance to identify with their absent fathers and brothers.

The toy industry in Britain had benefited from the consumer boom of the 1870s and onwards. Technological advances and the reduction of transport costs created a highly competitive manufacturing environment which drove down prices. At the same time a fall in the cost of food brought on by the opening up of major agricultural resources in North America and parts of the Empire meant that, allowing for unemployment, average real wages rose by more than 75% between 1867 and 1900. Although this rate of growth decreased during the Edwardian period, wages were still much higher in 1914 than they had been in the late Victorian period. This meant that as families saw their household incomes rise there was more money left over to spend on what might previously have been considered luxuries for their children.¹

But there were still great variation in the types of toys that might be bought for different children. At the lower end of the social scale poorer parents might pick up penny toys for their children from the itinerant workers walking the streets of Britain. The number of such workers was increasing in Britain from 25,747 in 1851 to more than 69,000 by 1911, and particularly in London they represented a major source of supply for card tricks and paper novelties.² For more complicated manufactured toys however, street selling was on the decline. Replacing hawkers were specialised toy shops and department stores and even stationers, newsagents and post offices had all begun to stock children's gifts. In such shops parents might buy anything from the better quality dolls and toy soldiers not available on the streets, to mechanical toys, toy trains and the popular new construction toys.

¹ Kenneth D. Brown, *The British Toy Business - a History since 1700* (London: 1996) p 56.

² *Ibid.* p 62.

Despite this positive expansion in trade the toy industry was a cause for tension in the immediate pre-war years as it became part of the trade war with Germany that so terrified the Edwardians. The Germans had a far more established industry than Britain's and produced, on the whole, superior products. The value of German toy imports to Britain had risen from just £45,000 in 1855 to £800,000 by 1900. By the last full year of peace they had reached almost £1,200,000.³ There are problems with trying to compare this to British production as the low figures cited in the industry's 1907 Census of Production were called into question at the time and have been rejected since. Kenneth Brown, in his history of the British toy business has estimated that on the eve of war a figure of £1,000,000 would be plausible.⁴ This is considerably less than that of the German imports, but certainly healthy enough to survive and capitalise on the absence of the Germans from the market after hostilities were declared.

Children's Play

There is a limited literature on the history of children's toys and games in Britain and those there are show little interest in how these objects fit in to the myriad of cultural influences that shaped children's lives in any period in history. There was a plethora of military and war themed toys, aimed primarily at young boys, available in the British market in the years leading up to and during the First World War. Most histories of children's toys take the view that war toys in any market are simply a reflection of boys' innate interest in aggressive play and all things military. Leslie Daiken, in *Children's Toys Throughout the Ages*, argues for instance that, 'If the doll is the universal plaything for a girl, so is the toy soldier the natural toy for boys.' War games Daiken claims, are simply the expression of the 'herd instinct' in boys of a certain age and are 'merely a variation of the animal hunt.'⁵ Boys' response to war games and toy soldiers is instinctive, he believes, and they know what to do and how to play because their

³ Ibid. p 64.

⁴ Ibid. p 78.

⁵ Leslie Daiken, *Children's Toys Throughout the Ages* (1963) p 137.

response comes from their inherent or natural masculinity. The assumption is that men have always had to 'fight' and 'hunt' in order to survive, fighting therefore has gradually become their natural response to the world. As children, boys act out their natural impulses in play and so toy soldiers are the obvious choice of toy because they suggest the possibility of battle and conquest.

Antonia Fraser in her *History of Toys*, argues similarly that, 'it is inevitable that an age which has known wars should produce soldiers and war toys'⁶ For Fraser what is natural is the desire to imitate. Children want to copy their parents and so they absorb whatever the predominating theme of speech, dress or action happens to be. Significantly Fraser believes that the popularity of toy soldiers is 'obviously the natural development of an age when a child's admired father is dressed up as G.I.Joe. As long as men go to war and armies exist children will want to play with soldiers.'⁷ During the First World War, millions of British fathers were dressed up in our equivalent of G.I.Joe. If Fraser is correct this would mean that the huge quantity and variety of children's war themed toys on the market at that time could have been a response to the commercial demand of children to copy the dress and action of their fathers and brothers.

Graham Dawson's *Soldier Heroes* takes issue with this interpretation however, believing that children's private fantasies are shaped in more subtle ways. He agrees that children can be inspired by events in the world around them to want to act them out for themselves. Thus toys that mimic or depict current popular people or events are coveted by children who want them to enhance their re-enactments in play. In this way the wider social and cultural context can "inform" private fantasies and determine the imaginative resonance of particular forms of toy.'⁸ But, Dawson believes, children's imaginative investments with particular toys are not wholly dictated by the influences of society and toy makers. Boys' appropriation of wider themes of conflict and adventure 'depends upon an active choice and involves an element of active cultural production by boys themselves, in what can still usefully be called their own 'private'

⁶ Antonia Fraser, *A History of Toys* (London: 1966) p 231.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes - British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: 1994) p 239.

imaginings.’⁹ Toy makers might direct that a toy is used in a certain way and for a certain purpose but it is the children themselves who actually determine the place of that toy in their games. Similarly, as we shall see in this chapter, children don't necessarily need any commercially produced toys to play games either based on real events or invented entirely.

But why does it matter what children play with? To answer this question it is useful to have some understanding of the place of play in the psychic life of the child. Psychoanalysts practising during the war years and into the 1920s and 30s developed the use of play when working with children as it allows children to express feelings they are not necessarily able to articulate in words. Melanie Klein, pioneer of the ‘play technique’ argued that:

Play for the child is not ‘just play’. It is also work. It is not only a way of exploring and mastering the external world but also, through expressing and working through phantasies, a means of exploring and mastering anxieties. In his [sic] play the child dramatizes his phantasies, and in doing so elaborates and works through his conflicts.¹⁰

Through play, Klein argued children expressed psychic conflict brought on by anxieties experienced in their relationships with others. In their play these anxieties were given symbolic form which allowed the children to work through their conflict to the resolution which represented the fulfilment of their unconscious wish. This gave the child pleasure while protecting him/her from the anxiety that would accompany the fulfilment of that wish in real life.

For D.W. Winnicott, a contemporary of Klein's who also worked with children from the 1920s, this place of play is neither the child's inner psychic reality, nor is it part of the external world around them. Rather it is a between place where children can ‘gather objects or phenomenon from external reality and use these in the service of some sample derived from inner or personal reality.’¹¹ For Winnicott this potential space between the child's inner reality and the external reality of the world around them is where a person's capacity for cultural

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Quoted in Ibid. p 241.

¹¹ D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: 1971) p 51.

experience is located. He believes 'cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested in play.'¹²

In order for the analyst to correctly use the 'play technique' Klein insisted that the toys used with the children be 'neutral' in order that their form did not suggest a particular theme of play to the child that might interfere with the expression of their unconscious fantasy. She insisted that 'the human figures, varying only in colour and size, should not indicate any particular occupation'. Klein was thus attempting to take away the importance of any outside cultural influences on the themes of children's play and consequently on the make up of their psychic life.

Drawing on this technique but abandoning the emphasis on neutral toys, Dawson has attempted to understand the ways in which his own childhood passion for war toys unconsciously helped to shape his understanding of his own developing masculinity. Dawson explores the development of his childhood sense of self, through his imaginative investment in, and boyhood fantasies of, adventure and war. He suggests a complicated link between manufactured toys, children's imaginative use of them and their creative development of their sense of self that takes into account the wider social and cultural context of their lives. This has relevance for the millions of British children, and boys in particular, who grew up before and during the war, surrounded by war toys.

If a child's sense of self is in part developed through play, as British psychoanalysts were discovering in the inter-war decades, and can be specifically informed by particular types of toy, as Dawson's self analysis indicates, then the preponderance of war themed toys during the First World War helped to shape the identities of those children who grew up playing with them. The existence of so many gendered, military inspired, toys on the market in Britain during the war, may, if Dawson is right, have shaped millions of boys' understanding of their own masculinity. Perhaps girls' exclusion from these games, coupled with the nurse dolls and hospital games marketed at them, had an influence on girls' developing sense of their gendered identity. Boys became the men they were

¹² Ibid. p 100.

going to be, in part because of the military toys they played with as children. For them playing at soldiers perhaps sparked an identification with forms of masculinity that encompassed the resolution of conflict through aggression. They learnt to be men by playing at being the type of men who fought. Similarly girls grew up playing with toys that encouraged them to develop a sense of themselves as caring, nurturing women, future mothers, needed at time when seemingly all the men in the world were fighting. The war encouraged the manufacture of toys sharply divided along gendered lines. There were no female toy soldiers, and no male Red Cross nurses. Children may have played with the toys meant for their siblings of the opposite sex, but this was not what was intended by the toy makers, or probably even the parents who bought them.

Toy Soldiers

Kenneth Brown has linked the huge increase in production of model soldiers in Europe from the late nineteenth century to the rise of militarism in Europe before the First World War.¹³ During the early years of the nineteenth century the market in toy soldiers expanded significantly as the availability of new materials and production techniques lowered manufacturing costs. This coincided with an increase in awareness and popular public support for Europe's standing armies making the toys a popular choice for those that could afford them. At this time model soldiers were two-dimensional, flat metal cut-outs but by the second half of the century German manufacturers were producing solid metal three-dimensional soldiers. By 1889 the value of toy imports to Britain had reached £714,828, most of this trade coming from Germany.¹⁴

In the 1890s however the massive expansion of toy soldier production in Britain began. A technological breakthrough by the British manufacturer, William Britain, adapted the casting techniques used to make wax doll heads to make hollow metal figures. These figures could be sold at half the price of their European rivals because of the lower cost of materials and because they could be

¹³ Kenneth D. Brown, "Modelling for War? Toy Soldiers in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain," *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 2 (1990).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: p 238.

transported more cheaply due to the fact that railway carriage costs were directly related to the value of the freight. By 1900 Britains was producing over 100 different models and seven years later, when the enterprise was turned into a private company, it had a capital value of £18,000. By 1910 it is estimated that roughly 200,000 figures a week were being produced by Britains alone.¹⁵ The next few years saw the emergence of a number of other small companies, copying Britains' technique.

Britains remained the largest company however and the only one for which records survive. Brown estimates that other market players including Reka and Johillco must have been producing thousands rather than hundreds of figures leading him to conclude that by 1914 'a minimum of ten or eleven million toy soldiers were being produced annually in Britain'. These toys were intended mainly for the domestic market and were generally fairly cheap. Britains' standard box of either eight infantry or five cavalry figures sold for one shilling, but it was possible to buy smaller or inferior quality models for sixpence for seven infantry or four cavalry.¹⁶ In addition while most firms sold boxed figures they also produced models which were retailed singly, making them accessible to an even wider range of parents and children.

The craze for model soldiers also took hold amongst some adults. William Britain's son, Alfred, remembers that from as early as 1896 his father's firm was receiving regular orders for every new set from several 'gentlemen' buyers who appreciated their 'perfect modelling and correct colouring'. Robert Louis Stevenson, Jerome K. Jerome, G.K Chesterton, H.G. Wells, Charles Masterman, C.P. Trevelyan, and Winston Churchill were collectors (the last three all members of the Liberal Government which entered the war in 1914). Wells was so keen on the hobby that he even wrote a book on war-games to be played with the figures.

Little Wars was published in 1913 and set out a system of rules and suggested strategies for playing toy soldiers. 'Little Wars' Wells wrote

¹⁵ Ibid.: p 239.

¹⁶ Ibid.

is the game of kings - for players in an inferior social position. It can be played by boys of every age from twelve to one hundred and fifty - and even later if the limbs remain sufficiently supple, - by girls of the better sort, and by a few rare and gifted women.¹⁷

The book was popular and sales do not seem to have been hit by the advent of the 'Big' war the following year. Indeed the British Library's own copy is inscribed with the dedication 'To John from Auntie May, Xmas 1914'.

But Wells was at pains to make clear that he suggests 'Little Wars' as an alternative, rather than a preparation for the real thing. At the end of the book he issued an entreaty to the posturing nations of Europe to avoid war saying,

How much better is this amiable miniature than the Real Thing! Here is a homeopathic remedy for the imaginative strategist. Here is the premeditation, the thrill, the strain of accumulating victory or disaster - and no smashed nor sanguinary bodies, no shattered fine buildings nor devastated country sides, no petty cruelties, none of that awful universal boredom and embitterment, that tiresome delay or embarrassment of every gracious, bold, sweet, and charming thing, that we who are old enough to remember a real modern war know to be the reality of belligerence.¹⁸

The problem Wells believed is that,

I have never yet met in little battle any military gentleman, any captain, major, colonel, general, or eminent commander, who did not presently get into difficulties and confusions among even the elementary rules of the Battle. You have only to play at Little Wars three or four times to realise just what a blundering thing Great War must be. Great War is at present, I am convinced, not only the most expensive game in the universe, but it is a game out of all proportion. Not only are the masses of men and material and suffering and inconvenience too monstrously big for reason, but - the available heads we have for it, are too small.¹⁹

Despite this certainty however the book contains a puzzling contradiction. In contains an appendix for an adaptation of the rules of *Little Wars* to be used for Kriegspiel, war strategy games played by army officers in training. This was apparently in response to a demand for such an adaptation by military leaders

¹⁷ H.G. Wells, *Little Wars* (London: 1913) p 7.

¹⁸ Ibid. p 97.

¹⁹ Ibid. p 100.

who had written to Wells after the publication of much of his book in a magazine. But Wells saw no contradiction in deploring war and then offering help for the training of soldiers. He simply wrote,

If Great War is to be played at all, the better it is played the more humanely it will be done. I see no inconsistency in deploring the practice while perfecting the method.²⁰

That many parents should encourage their sons to play war games and master military strategy is not surprising, Brown believes, as toys have always been used as instruments of instruction and socialisation as well as amusement. Nicola Johnson, addressing imperial and nationalist influences on children's toys and ephemera during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, agrees. Parents gave boys toy soldiers, she believes, not to encourage a martial spirit or foster aggressively patriotic play, but rather to prepare them for adulthood as their sisters were through the gift of dolls and dolls' houses.²¹ Boys from relatively wealthy families were often destined for a career in the military, so just as their sisters had models of the future household they would be expected to run, so the boys had a miniature version of their future to play with on the nursery floor.

This was perhaps particularly likely for children from military families. Henry Harris was given a selection box of Britains' soldiers by his father, a professional soldier, on his return from France in 1916. From that point on Henry's interest was keen and when they later moved to Army quarters at Aldershot his weekly good-conduct reward was a box of Britains'. Harris' scrupulous father, 'was careful to keep a balance between the various arms and services, although I realise now that there was a bias towards his own cavalry regiment.'²²

By 1918 he had perhaps 400-500 figures which he would regularly parade on the floor to be inspected by the family's soldier servant. On a trip to Dublin towards the end of the war Harris met another boy and in their subsequent war games lost many of his most precious models. Harris' interest was no doubt strengthened by

²⁰ Ibid. p 101.

²¹ Nicola Johnson, "Penny Plain, Tuppence Coloured," in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, Vol 3: National Fictions*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: 1989), p 254.

²² Henry Harris, *Model Soldiers* (London: 1962) p 34.

his own father's status as a real soldier. Indeed the choice of the original gift of the soldiers by his father suggests a deliberate attempt to form a shared bond between father and son around the figures.

But family connections and a parental desire to see sons go into the military cannot alone explain the popularity of the soldiers. Indeed sales figures suggest they must have been bought by many parents never intending a military career for their sons. Richard Church, whose father was a postman, remembers the excitement of playing with the toys as a child. He owned a fort, with various regiments of soldiers and a field gun which fired rubber shells a quarter of an inch in length. As a child of 11 in 1904 Church played alone with his figures, near to his mother who was becoming seriously ill. He remembers that the game occupied him but that:

Behind this slaughter, however, and the momentary excitement it engendered, my mind was at work on its own more unique concerns, chief among them being my sense of foreboding as I watched my mother, furtively, from time to time.²³

Playing alone and despite the worries over his mother's health, Church was excited by his toy soldiers. He could fight a battle, playing the part of both army commanders, using his fort and solitary gun and become absorbed in play. He has noted how his soldiers had become more drab in appearance, dressed in the khaki of the recent Boer War, and that his one company of Coldstream Guards stood out in their bright uniforms. Church does not mention a particular interest in the military or the Boer War but yet he still owned and played with toy soldiers. This suggests that they were a common gift for boys, given perhaps because of their topical nature, but not necessarily indicative of particular parental approval or childhood interest in war.

Not all parents were so keen on the soldiers as toys however, and as well as nonconformists who had a tradition of hostility towards all things military (albeit a weakening one by this time) other parents were also raising concerns about their suitability. In 1888 the women's branch of the International Arbitration and

²³ Richard Church, *Over the Bridge - an Essay in Autobiography* (London: 1955) p 169.

Peace Society heard a speech by Oscar Wilde's wife that called for toy soldiers to be kept away from children for this very reason. And just months before the outbreak of war the National Peace Council put on a display of 'peace toys' at the Child Welfare Exhibition at Olympia in London. They argued that 'there are grave objections to presenting our boys with regiments of fighting men, batteries of guns and squadrons of Dreadnoughts'. Their display contained 'not miniature soldiers but miniature civilians, not guns but ploughs and the tools of industry.'²⁴

This lack of civilian figures was not lost on all model enthusiasts. H.G. Wells bemoaned the lack of alternatives, despite his very public love for war games.

Consequent upon this dearth, our little world suffers from an exaggerated curse of militarism, and even the grocer wears epaulettes. This might please Lord Roberts and Mr Leo Maxse, but it certainly does not please us. I wish, indeed, that we could buy boxes of tradesmen: a blue butcher, a white baker with a loaf of standard bread, a draper or so; boxes of servants, boxes of street traffic, smart sets, and so forth.... We have, of course, boy scouts. With such boxes of civilians we could have much more fun than with the running, marching, swashbuckling soldiery that pervades us. They drive us to reviews; and it is only emperors, kings and very silly small boys who can take an undying interest in uniforms and reviews.²⁵

But the fact was that in the years leading up to the First World War toy manufacturers were in no mood to produce civilian figures. The build up of tension in the Balkans before the outbreak of war saw Turkish, Greek, Montenegrin, Serbian, and Bulgarian armies produced for children's gratification. War sold, and toy manufacturers were well aware of this, a trade editorial remarking,

Nine out of every ten boys until they are twelve years of age at least want to be soldiers, and the desire is much greater if there is a war in progress in some part of the world. The Balkan War caused an increase in demand for play soldiers and the market was fairly swamped with orders for these.²⁶

²⁴ Fraser, *A History of Toys* p 231.

²⁵ H.G. Wells, *Floor Games* (London: 1911) p 22.

²⁶ *The Toy and Fancy Goods Trader* February (1914).

Most products were designed as sets of opposing armies and children were being encouraged to play games that pitted one side against the other, where someone won and someone lost. They were invited to play battles and wars where enemies fought each other to the bitter end, and where fighting was the whole point of the game. Whereas before they had had to rely on nineteenth century wars to inspire them, with the outbreak of war in Europe their armies could become miniature versions of the real ones, perhaps representing absent fathers and brothers seeing action abroad. For the toys to be convincing and for the industry to thrive it was important that children continue to make this imaginative link between their models and the real thing. To foster this Britain produced *The Great War Game for Young and Old* (1908), which contained photographs of their toys alongside ones of their real life counterparts. Similarly A.J Holladay's 1910 book *War Games for Boy Scouts Played with Model Soldiers* urged children to 'try and realise what Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener felt when in command of all those men in South Africa'.²⁷

In the twenty or so years immediately before the First World War then Britain saw its market for toy soldiers expand dramatically reaching production figures of between 10 and 11 million toys soldiers annually by 1914. Much of this growth was created by the new and innovative production techniques that saw British models supersede their German rivals in both quality and value for money. By marketing the soldiers in box sets of varying sizes and quality, and by retailing the figures individually, the toys could be enjoyed and afforded by a broader range of parents and children than ever before. This widespread popular interest was shared by adults as well as children and spawned books on how to play strategic games with the models as well as others on correct uniform and the histories of the various regiments. They were given as gifts by parents and bought by the children themselves sometimes because of a strong identification with military tradition but also simply because they were fun and would be enjoyed.

And what was the result? Had the young men who volunteered for war in 1914 been unconsciously prepared for conflict by a childhood spent in pitched battles

²⁷ A.J. Holladay, *War Games for Boy Scouts - Played with Model Soldiers*. (London: 1910) p 2.

arranged across the nursery floor during this golden age of the toy soldier? It is hard to believe that such toys, coupled with the imperial adventure literature and youth group movements all aimed at children, could fail to have some effect on young minds and their understanding of conflict and duty. And what of the children playing with the figures during the war itself? For them at least the games cannot have lasted long. By the end of the war and throughout the 1920s and 30s parents turned against the figures as their sense of shock and loss turned gradually to revulsion at the idea of all things military. No longer would adults give their children model soldiers and encourage them to stage battles. Instead companies like Britains turned to producing civilian figures, some of the most popular being farm characters and animals along with buildings and vehicles. But this was to come later - for first there was a war to be won and an enemy defeated.

War Games

In fact Britains only made eight new issues of model soldiers during the war and at one time feared they would be forced to close as materials grew scarce. At the outbreak of war however toy soldiers were joined by a swathe of new products with a distinctly anti-German theme. While the August 1914 issue of the trade paper *Games and Toys* was still running advertisements for the *Journal of the German Toy Trade*, priced at 6s 0d. per year, by September the mood had changed and the new issue was dubbed the 'British Empire Number'. British toy manufacturers, dominated for so long by their superior German rivals were quick to cash in on the opportunity for not only having a dig at their competitors but also for stealing their trade. As early as September 1914 a *Games and Toys* editorial was warning of a rise in the manufacturers' price of toys of between 10% and 50% but was also extolling the opportunities for British business to replace banned German imports with British products.

The same issue carried adverts for Faudels Patriotic Favours which included badges, buttons, flags and rosettes in the colours of the Union Jack.

Manufacturers were also swift to advertise their products as 'British Made by

British Labour with British Materials – indeed, British Throughout’. Anticipating the glut of Christmas trade the October issue carried an even greater number of hastily produced toys of the moment. For 1/- you could buy ‘The Dash to Berlin’ – ‘the new and breathless game for winter evenings’

All the excitement with none of the danger - that just describes this very latest British Table game which absolutely grips its players' interest from start to finish. You have the gallant Allies sometimes advancing, sometimes retreating holding their own, losing and winning, but gradually pressing onwards as in the great game of war itself.²⁸

Other board games included ‘Recruiting for Kitchener’s Army’ which retailed at 6d and consisted of a beautifully illustrated map of the British Isles over which players had to travel collecting recruits along the way. The player to reach Dover with the greatest number of recruits was declared the winner. There was also ‘Europe in Arms - an entirely new race game between the allied countries to reach Berlin, and the incredible sounding ‘Berlin’, an indoor golf game that came complete with putter and seven citadels.²⁹

Other heavily marketed items were toy guns and pistols and an October article urged manufacturers to fill the gap created by the absence of the German imports to produce top quality substitutes,

The war spirit is in the air, and wherever one turns will be found the troop of youngsters with paper hats and oddments of uniform, with biscuit box drums and wooden swords, parading the principle streets and drawing many a smile even from those who know too well the serious side of soldiering. These gutter urchins, for the majority of the street regiments are not much else, have a parallel amongst the children of the better classes, and these carry arms of a sort wherever they go, and quite a number are rigged out with air guns and pistols that fire a cap or discharge water.³⁰

The ‘war spirit’ was certainly in the air in Tansey, Derbyshire where J. Leonard Smith was growing up during the war. At the Herbert Strutt School a few miles away in Belper, Smith remembers a particular game inspired by the war and popular amongst the boys,

²⁸ *Games and Toys* October (1914).

²⁹ *Ibid.* November.

³⁰ *Ibid.* October.

In the school playground there stood a mountainous heap of rubble which - if my memory serves me aright - had been left behind by builders after demolishing an old building prior to erecting a new wing when war conditions allowed. We called this 'Hill Sixty', this being the name given in war dispatches to a strategically placed hill on 'the Front'. This hill had been fought over, taken and re-taken time and again by the German and Allied Forces, with enormous loss of life on both sides. So, being boys, we too must have our Hill Sixty, and many were the tussles to dislodge the enemy - members of an opposing house - from their supremacy on top of that heap of rubble.³¹

Smith's remark about 'being boys' suggests that he might agree with those who consider war play to be boys' natural choice of game. He remembers that he and his friends felt they too 'must have our Hill Sixty' indicating that incorporating real adult battles into their games was not uncommon amongst his schoolfellows. They were excited by what they knew surrounding this bitter conflict for a coveted bit of ground and felt that they too could fight as desperately for their own pile of rubble. An added dimension to the game came with the participation of a group of Belgian refugee children who had joined the school. Smith writes that there was an aura about these children that is difficult to explain to anyone not of those times,

Why they should almost have struck terror into the hearts of their opponents I still do not fully understand, but without doubt it was more than a psychological advantage to have them in one's own ranks when attacking Hill Sixty! Belgium at that time had been overrun by the Germans after a fierce resistance, and from their King downward the Belgian people were rightly regarded as heroes, and those refugee lads may well have felt that they had to maintain their country's reputation.³²

Whether these boys had toy guns, or improvised with sticks they found lying around, the author does not mention. But their understanding of events in the real war inspired the game with the children mimicking what they believed to be the behaviour of real soldiers. This was significant and profitable for toy manufacturers and in an article entitled 'Toys and What They Teach' the educational value of toy guns was being stressed for this very reason,

³¹ Rev. J. Leonard Smith, *A Tansley Boyhood* (Loughborough: 1996) p 45.

³² *Ibid.*

Toy rifles, air guns and similar model weapons are proving good selling lines throughout the country, and in conjunction with uniforms and helmets enable boys to make up in a very soldier like style... These guns, and other warlike toys all have the power to teach, and the drill of adults will for sure find itself duplicated by the youngsters.... The hint conveyed by these youngsters should not be lost on retailers, for the smallest of boys will want some part, if not the whole, of a military outfit, which, of course, would not be satisfactory without a weapon.³³

Models included the slight Warspite Pea Repeater as well as the more substantial Scout, Drake, Celt or Revenge, which used explosive caps for extra effect. There were double-barrelled guns like the Zulu or the Ajax, as well as repeating pea pistols capable of firing twenty shots in rapid succession. There was even the Little Dandy, a pea pistol and popgun in one. The guns were so realistic that under the Defence of the Realm Act, a permit was needed to sell them or risk a five-pound fine.³⁴

If children did not have toy guns to fire at each other they could buy any number of miniature guns to shoot at various representation of the enemy. These included a game with replica cannon to fire at model forts, trenches, and German infantry in which points were deducted if you hit the Red Cross tent.³⁵ There was also the 'stirring' war game 'At the Front' which,

contains soldiers which are to be taken out and fired at, for which deadly purpose there are pistols enough for considerable execution. Each soldier stands until he is shot and then falls like a man and takes no more part in the game. The uniforms are of the latest and most correct styles, representing armies of different countries.³⁶

Britains' toy soldier company produced perhaps one of the most horrible toys of the war, so gruesome in fact that it was discontinued almost immediately after its initial production when it must have been realised that the British public did not quite have the stomach for it. The 'Exploding Trench' was roughly a foot long and made of cardboard and wood. It had a target flag which when shot with one of Britains' 4.7 Naval guns, triggered a spring mechanism which hurled the toy

³³ *Games and Toys* September (1915).

³⁴ Nicholas Whittaker, *Toys Were Us - a History of Twentieth Century Toys and Toy-Making* (London: 2001) p 22.

³⁵ *Games and Toys* March (1915).

³⁶ Fraser, *A History of Toys* p 184.

soldiers inside into the air with an enormous bang. G.M. Haley a collector who owns one of these very rare items summed up the problem with the toy in a letter to the collectors' magazine the *Old Toy Soldier Newsletter*,

Thousands of young men from the British Isles and the Empire were going to their deaths at this time...What self-respecting parents would allow their younger children to play with an "exploding trench", no matter how innocently, when at the very same time as those nursery games, elder brothers were perhaps literally getting blown to pieces in the hell that was the war in France?³⁷

Cheaper toys included card tricks and paper novelties in which the Kaiser would be made to disappear or look ridiculous. The Armstrong Boxing Appliance Company made boxing dummies with a new range to represent the Kaiser, Kitchener and others, while Dean and Sons made dolls including a soldier, sailor, midshipman, John Bull, gunner and a boy scout. Nicholas Whittaker even reports a minor craze for Conscientious Objector dolls, but quotes a scandalised trade paper editor as writing,

One looks like a red-hot socialist, another is a whiskered villain, the third surely a resident of Colney Hatch. Let the doll-making trade be a cut above these characters. There are surely much more pleasant subjects.³⁸

The doll trade was another manufacturing group to take advantage of the absence of German imports to increase their productivity. Previously shipped from Germany, china doll heads were quickly added to the repertoire of British factories. So important was this change that the children's magazine *Little Folks* even ran an article on it called 'Christine – and all British' subtitled 'How they make dolls in England now' in their September 1917 edition. The story, which centred on the purchase of a new doll for the young Peggy, complete with exacting description of the process of manufacture, ends with the ecstatic Peggy leaving the shop carrying Christine exclaiming, 'I shall never want a *German* doll again'.³⁹

³⁷ Peter Johnson, *Toy Armies* (London: 1981) p 55.

³⁸ Whittaker, *Toys Were Us - a History of Twentieth Century Toys and Toy-Making* p 23.

³⁹ *Little Folks* September (1917).

Molly Keen's younger sister Ivy rejected a favourite toy when it was pointed out by her older brother that the lovely china doll she cradled was 'made in Germany'. Ivy, Keen writes,

promptly divested it of all its clothes and hung it upside down in the gooseberry bush! We all tried to persuade her to take it down but she was adamant in this and refused to do so.⁴⁰

There were also toy books with cut out soldiers and Messrs Gale and Polden Ltd published a series of toy books including, *The British Army Painting Book*, *Our Foot Soldiers*, *Our Guns and Men* and *Regimental Pets of the British Army*. The truly patriotic parent might also buy a Deans 'Patriotic Pinafore' so their child could dress in a replica military uniform.

The First World War had a positive impact on British toy manufacturing. At first forced, but then eager, British companies exploited the enforced absence of their German competitors from the British market to develop and sell their own versions of products that had long been dominated by the enemy. By promoting the purchase of their stock as a patriotic act, manufacturers and retailers exploited the pro-British sentiments of their customers to boost trade despite the rise in prices of between 10% and 50% in the immediate weeks after hostilities were declared. Companies quickly developed new lines in board and floor games based around the themes of war and by Christmas 1914 families could choose between a range of products that allowed them to recruit their way across Britain or fight their way across France.

Trade editorials encouraged manufacturers to look around them at the children pretending to be soldiers outside in the streets. These children, from the more affluent homes at least, needed equipping with uniforms and guns and companies that ignored this demand were sure to lose out. And if they did not want to be soldiers themselves then children could take the part of an army commander and fire miniature guns at fortifications and soldiers where their bloodless victims could fall like heroes doing their duty for their imagined country. To keep up morale and feed the market for cheaper paper novelties, products were developed

⁴⁰ M. Keen, *Childhood Memories 1903 - 1921*, Working Class Autobiographical Archive - Brunel University (London) p 26.

that promoted a negative image of the Germans that children were invited to mock and despise. At the same time dolls and uniforms allowed children to play as key British heroes and heroines of the war forging an identification with the soldiers, sailors and nurses that may have stayed with the children for the rest of their lives.

Children were presented with a version of the war through their toys just as they were at school and in their youth groups. Adults manufactured and purchased toys and games that featured the war as their primary inspiration to provide children with entertainment as well as lessons about the war. In turn children were able to purchase their own cheaper toys and games, indicating that at least some of the demand for the toys was indeed shaped by the children themselves. We also know that some children played games re-enacting the war that didn't necessarily require any manufactured toys. They could improvise with objects they found lying around or indeed play without any props at all. In these cases the war provided a narrative background around which the children created their own games without the help of any adult intervention.

Children's Books

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century juvenile literature continued to reflect the public school ethos of manliness, courage and patriotism. That tradition was consequently disseminated to grammar school boys and the working classes through the take up of its themes in the cheaper boys' magazines of the day. Tales of imperial adventure promoted a sense of British superiority and fostered a desire for adventure that some historians, including Walvin and Parker, believe helped pave the way for the enthusiastic response to war in Britain in 1914. Indeed George Orwell identified a sinister plot to infect working class lads with upper class values by the Amalgamated Press in 1940. Noting that Lord Northcliffe's operation also owned a large proportion of the country's right-wing newspapers Orwell wrote,

And boys' fiction above all, the blood-and-thunder stuff which nearly every boy devours at some time or other, is sodden in the worst illusions of 1910.⁴¹

Orwell was writing on the eve of the Second World War, but his argument applies equally well to our period. The problem for Orwell was not only that boys' juvenile magazines had always been full of the Imperial attitudes of the ruling elite, but that their message was likely to have a profound effect on young readers. He believed that people were heavily influenced in their attitudes by what they read and the films they saw. More particularly he felt that most adults were actually 'carrying through life an imaginative background which they acquired in childhood'.⁴² For working class boys and men who may have read nothing else in their life apart from juvenile magazines and newspapers, Orwell believed that this meant they were absorbing a set of attitudes at odds with their own experience in life and best interests. While readers may have been unaware of this, or felt that what was read in childhood left no lasting impression, Orwell felt sure that the newspaper owners were under no such illusions. Getting children hooked on juvenile fiction that was full of Imperial Adventure, or war stories, or examples of heroic deeds and self sacrifice, was an attempt to create adults willing and eager to fight for their country, and its leaders.

Boys' magazines were relatively cheap and enjoyed a wide circulation amongst the newly literate population. Those that had no access to the more expensive volumes of fiction received the message of masculine adventure and fair play through the numerous boys' magazines like *The Boys' Own Paper* and *The Captain*. Northcliffe's magazines had always addressed the concerns of its proprietor and in the years before the First World War its pages were filled with stories that highlighted the need for a stronger army to repel invaders. Frequent stories about German attempts to invade Britain appeared between 1906 and 1914 in the *Boys' Friend*, *Boys' Herald*, *Marvel*, *Magnet* and *Gem*. The attempts were always unsuccessful, scuppered on various occasions by Boy Scouts, school boys and regular fictional heroes like Sexton Blake. This preponderance of stories that cast Germany as Britain's most likely adversary has lead some to conclude that

⁴¹ George Orwell, *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (London: 1962) p 203.

⁴² *Ibid.* p 200.

If by 1914 the boys of Britain and the Empire were not raring to go and have a crack at the Kaiser it was certainly not the fault of Lord Northcliffe or his authors.⁴³

Juvenile fiction produced during the war continued and expanded upon the themes of imperial adventure to help inculcate in children an understanding and approval of the war based on the justification of Britain's participation and the superiority of her forces. Transposing the setting from an imperial colony to the Western Front, the stories were packed with adventure and intrigue for the hero from the start. Frederick Sadlier Brereton, a prolific writer of boys' wartime stories, and cousin of G.A.Henty, perhaps Britain's most famous nineteenth century boys' fiction writer, continued to publish himself as Captain despite his promotion to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig in *Women and Children First* maintain that younger readers generally believed the books to be authentic records of the writer's war experiences. In reality they were often based on Boer War experiences and bore little resemblance to the actuality of the fighting in France.⁴⁴ Presumably Brereton kept his rank as Captain when publishing to give his stories added authenticity. If his readers were to believe that the stories were based on his own experiences of the war, then being promoted out of the fighting line and into the general staff would have left him little opportunity for seeing any of the fighting for himself.

War stories, like their imperial predecessors, were formulaic. Our young hero was always amongst the first to volunteer, has numerous close scrapes along the way and often manages to transfer regularly between different branches of the army, navy and airforce allowing him a full range of opportunities for heroism. British soldiers are always, gallant, brave, strong and resilient, their German counterparts sneaky, underhand and cowardly. As in real life many of the lead characters are young boys who have lied about their age in order to enlist, desperate to get out to France before the war is over and they miss their chance.

⁴³ Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig, *Women and Children First - the Fiction of Two World Wars* (London: 1978) p 31.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p 72.

British participation in the war is supported in all stories and young readers are often told the moral reasons for the fighting by characters in the books. The tone of many of their explanations is didactic, suggesting the authors recognised the importance of their message to young readers and were keen to leave them in no doubt about the legitimacy of the fighting. In Brereton's *With French at the Front* (1915) for example, the position is laid out in a conversation between two soldiers,

She [Britain] could have stood aside, have hugged her tight little island and her numerous colonies and dependencies within her fleet, and sat down securely to watch this titanic conflict which Germany has commenced. But it [the treaty] bore Great Britain's signature. It carried the honour of millions of us, millions of simple, plain-dealing Britishers, with scrupulous minds and an idea of fairness and of what is proper far transcending ideas in the minds of Prussians. We had nothing to gain. We had all to lose - lives, ships, treasure - above all, that position in the world of protector of the weak which our sea power and our known peace-loving policy has gained for us.⁴⁵

If we compare this to the explanation for the war offered to school children in a pamphlet like Sir James Yoxall's 'Why Britain went to War', we see Britain's position being laid out as the honourable outcome of a bad situation.⁴⁶ The Germans have acted in a way that contravenes what Britain stands for; here the emphasis is on Britain keeping her word, whereas before it was in Britain standing up to a bully. In both cases it is stressed that there is nothing in it for Britain, that she is only responding out of duty and a love of peace. These are simple childlike rules of good behaviour that every child could understand, helping to foster support for Britain's role as an apparent protector of the weak.

The fighting described in the books predictably bore little or no resemblance to the real thing. Authors and the public alike had little opportunity for learning about trench conditions other than from the newspapers or from returning soldiers. Newspapers wanted to sustain morale at home and so did not dwell on the uncomfortable surroundings of the troops abroad. Returning

⁴⁵ Capt. F.S. Brereton, *With French at the Front - a Story of the Great War Down to the Battle of the Aisne* (1915) p 40.

⁴⁶ Sir James Yoxall, *Why Britain Went to War - to the Boys and Girls of the British Empire* (London: 1914).

troops were often reluctant to discuss their experiences with their family and friends, in part to spare them the horrors they were experiencing, but also perhaps to protect themselves from having to discuss at length things they would rather forget for their short time on leave. Equally, the reality of the grim stalemate on the Western Front provided little inspiration for exciting adventure fiction. For the books to sell, and for their message to be successful, it was no good having your hero sitting in a hole in the ground, up to his knees in mud, for weeks at a time.

Set on the battlefields of Vimy, Messines and Ypres, where some of the most horrifying battles of the war actually took place, Brereton's *Under Haig in Flanders* (1918) illustrates the artistic licence authors employed when writing. At one stage 'our hero' has, as usual, volunteered to undertake a dangerous raid into enemy territory,

A spree indeed! It was a desperate and most adventurous undertaking. Not that Roger or Bill or the Sergeant thought of it in that way. They ate their supper with gusto, sat chatting for a while and turned in to sleep like children. Then, an hour before dawn, a sentry wakened them, and, having drunk a steaming cup of cocoa apiece, for comforts are not by any means non-existent in the trenches, the three made ready for a journey across no-man's land into the country of the enemy.⁴⁷

We know from soldiers' testimony that in fact men often found waiting to take part in dangerous action one of the most difficult things to do. The anticipation and the fear prevented men from sleeping, or being able to eat and instead forced them to confront the dangers they were facing. In the five months of 1916 that the British fought on the Somme roughly 500,000 British troops were killed, and little ground was won. According to Brereton however, the battle went well with the men fighting bravely and skilfully. Perhaps feeling unable to claim total success he explains;

It was not the capture of ground we sought, nor the destruction of dug-outs and defences; it was to drive a blow home to the heart of the enemy, to destroy the soldiers of the Kaiser, to break the strength of

⁴⁷ Capt. F.S. Brereton, *Under Haig in Flanders - a Story of Vimy, Messines and Ypres* (Acquired by the British Museum 1918) p 57.

the German invader. That we went far to achieve that object there is no doubt.⁴⁸

The 'comforts' of Brereton's war at the front included:

Frizzling bacon, not to be beaten anywhere, bread that might have graced the table of a Ritz hotel, and jam that would be the envy of any housewife.⁴⁹

As well as inspiring readers with an exciting and positive image of life in the army children's authors were also keen to present the enemy as one worth fighting. If morale was to be sustained at home, government propagandists and pro-war journalists and writers knew that a sustained negative perception of all things German needed to be maintained amongst the British public.

Children's authors were always ready to exploit the negative attributes of their German characters and German troops were depicted as both un-sportsmanlike and cowardly. The Germans were derided as fighting men, and their tactics were regarded as underhand. In Brereton's *Under Haig in Flanders* (1918) sniping, a tactic employed by both armies, is discussed by a sergeant in the trenches who claims:

It's a craze with them Fritzes. They like killing people in a dirty sort o'way, they do.⁵⁰

Another common tactic was to portray German characters with cruel and nasty characteristics in contrast to the British who were always good and decent. When speaking of Germans held by the British, we are to understand from a character in Percy F. Westerman's *The Fritz Strafers* (1919) who has been captured by the Germans but is remembering German prisoners he saw on an English boat that:

In the matter of food and drink they fared equally as well as did their captors; if wounded they were given the best medical attention available, and their comfort was considered in almost every possible

⁴⁸ Ibid. p 163.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p 58.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p 63.

way. The ungrateful Hun, however, does not thank his captors for their little attentions. With the arrogance of his race he attributes his easy lot as a prisoner of war to the fear of the British as to what might happen to them when Germany is victorious. And on their part the British have got to learn fully - as they are beginning to do - that the only thing the German fears is the force of armed might.⁵¹

In addition to the negative attributes of the Germans as soldiers, the Britain of wartime fiction was overrun with German spies, many of them appearing as ordinary citizens who had been living there for years. The popularity of this theme can perhaps be understood by the fact that it gave authors the opportunity of suggesting to children a way in which they could help win the war. The fact that your next door neighbour could be a German spy, meant that children could take part in some amateur sleuthing of their own. The spies it appears were not hard to spot and they are usually suspected because of some small but obviously un-British trait like a grumpy nature or a cruel smile. In a story written by Angela Brazil, in which a German girl, who later turns out to be perfectly innocent, is relentlessly pursued by two over zealous classmates, we are told that she was first suspected because:

Her pink and white colouring, blue eyes and twin braids of flaxen hair were distinctly Teutonic; the cut of her dress, the shape of her shoes, the tiny satchel slung by a strap round her shoulder and under one arm - so unmistakably German in type - the enamelled locket baring the Prussian eagle on a blue ground, all showed a slightly appreciable difference from her companions, and stamped her emphatically with the seal of the "Vaterland".⁵²

Brazil was amongst a small number of authors writing about the war for girls, and it is interesting to note the differing representations of roles for women in boys' and girls' fiction. The girls' who appear occasionally in boys' fiction are delicate and sensitive and rarely get to take part in any of the action. Even when female characters are allowed to display enterprising characteristics, as for instance Gladys is in Brereton's *With French at the Front* (1915) it is not for long. Gladys Fairleigh is a young English woman, working as a governess in Germany when the war breaks out. She is being helped to leave the

⁵¹ P.F. Westerman, *The Fritzs Strafers - a Story of the Great War* (London: Acquired by the British Museum 1919) p 297.

⁵² Angela Brazil, *The School by the Sea* (Acquired by the British Museum 1914) p 13.

country by the book's two male heroes when they are all arrested. Overhearing that the two men are to be shot the following morning Gladys determines to rescue them by crawling through a ventilation shaft. Yet after this unusual burst of heroics we are told that Gladys reverts to type:

Indeed Gladys had been wonderfully plucky up to the moment when everything depended on her alone. Now that she was with the two gallant men who had protected her from Berlin, when, as it seemed, there was no longer need for personal exertion or for nerves to be braced, she sat down suddenly on the floor and buried her face in her hands. They saw her shudder and heard a stifled sob.⁵³

Female authors on the other hand, writing for girls, were quick to take advantage of the changing social climate in which women were taking up the opportunities of more and varied work outside the home and for the war effort. The heroines, albeit fewer in number than their male counterparts, work on the land, in the factories and as army and ambulance drivers. Brenda Girvin's eponymous heroine in *Munitions Mary* (1918) single-handedly foils a German spy-ring attempting to sabotage the newly employed female labour force in the munitions factory owned by the fierce Sir William. Sir William is so prejudiced against women working outside the home that he will apparently walk up several flights of stairs rather than get into a lift operated by a woman. Mary's colleagues initially blame the sabotage on Sir William himself, but the loyal Mary fights to prove his innocence and ultimately captures the Germans. Throughout however Girvin is at pains to let her readers know that Mary lost none of her 'womanliness' despite taking up men's work. It takes all of this to win round Sir William who eventually concedes,

This girl had shown intelligence and capability yet ... yet surely nobody could be more feminine than she was. Her tears on that awful night - only a very feminine woman would have given way to tears as she had. Her chutney making! His grandmother had made chutney. She had all the charms of his grandmother. He had been wrong to think that when a girl did a man's work she lost her womanliness.⁵⁴

⁵³ Brereton, *With French at the Front - a Story of the Great War Down to the Battle of the Aisne* p 48.

⁵⁴ Brenda Girvin, *Munition Mary* (1918) p 281.

Other characters are more impatient with the slowness of social change and in *A Transport Girl in France* (1919) by Bessie Marchant the heroine Gwen delivers a scathing attack on British attitudes. Gwen is working on a farm having volunteered early in the war. She has applied for a transfer however as she knows her superior driving skills could be used 'to free another man for the front'. When her request for a transfer is refused she laments to a friend,

My dear Daisy, the war may have changed us in a few things, but in downright bedrock essentials we are just where we were - just as stodgy and stick-in-the-mud as ever. No wonder the Germans used to beat us in trade. No wonder we find them so hard to beat at warfare.⁵⁵

Gwen eventually gets her transfer and by the end of the tale is in France driving for a General. But Gwen's character continues to push the boundaries of traditional fiction and our inevitable happy ending sees her literally lifting the man she loves out of a collapsing building.

Girls' fiction was not remarkably ground breaking although it does hint at the possibility of a greater role for women in the post war world. Girls were being exposed to a broader range of experiences open to women through their fiction, as they were through their involvement in the Girl Guides. Women writers always presented energetic, capable and competent heroines in their books, and while the girls may have been keen to retain their 'womanly charms' they did at least roll their sleeves up and get stuck in when given the chance. Interestingly none of the stories focus on a nurse heroine, one of the most high profile ways in which women were contributing to the war, and one of the most popular forms of toy doll marketed at girls. Perhaps this was because the authors felt that nursing was too domestic a role for their heroines. Life in a hospital, with its endless rounds of bed making and wound dressing, whilst undoubtedly noble, hardly provided the opportunity for heroines to foil spy rings or catch Germans. Perhaps this rejection of the role of nurse was also an unconscious attempt by the authors to counter the overtly domestic and feminine toys produced for girls by men. There were no toy female ambulance drivers or munitions workers or land girls, instead girls were only offered the nurturing, caring, motherly role of nurse. Women

⁵⁵ Bessie Marchant, *A Transport Girl in France* (Acquired by the British Museum 1919) p 81.

writers wanted a proactive role for their heroines, where they took part in the war as active participants, rather than responding to its horrors by caring for others wounded in action.

Picture books for younger children illustrated the various branches of the armed forces as well as the flags of the various allies. Several books taught the alphabet whilst explaining some of the basic elements of the war. *The Child's ABC of the War* (1914), begins,

A stands for Austria, where first was hurled.
The bomb that was destined to startle the world.
B is for Belgium, brave little state
So valiant for Honour so reckless of fate.
C's for our colonies, loyal and true
Bringing help to their mother from over the blue...⁵⁶

Our Soldiers - An ABC for Little Britons (1916) was a large picture book, each letter accompanied by a vivid colour illustration depicting the scene described, it ended,

W for the WOUNDED, tenderly borne Out of the fighting line bleeding
and torn.
X for the RED CROSS; noble their task - To help the poor wounded is all
that they ask.
Y for the YEOMEN, Stalwart and brown, Sons of the Colonies, True to
the Crown.
Z for the ZEPPELIN, floating on high, laden with bombs to drop from the
sky. Are you afraid of it? No, not I!⁵⁷

The same company also published the similar *The Royal Navy - An ABC for Little Britons* (1915) that had the following poem on its back cover,

Now I am seven I mean to go
On the Iron Duke with Jellicoe;
I'll do my best to fire the guns,
And sink the warships of the Huns.
When I'm grown up, perhaps I shall
Sail as a gold-laced admiral;
I'll wear a sword and cocked hat fine,
And never go to bed till nine.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Whitworth, *The Child's Abc of the War* (London: 1914).

⁵⁷ *Our Soldiers - an Abc for Little Britons*, (London: 1916).

⁵⁸ *The Royal Navy - an Abc for Little Britons*, (London: 1915).

There were other books of poetry aimed at children including the beautifully illustrated *What the Elephant Thinks of the Hun* (1918), and Nina MacDonald's *War-Time Nursery Rhymes*. Dedicated to D.O.R.A. the book contains a foreword which states that although British children had been spared the face to face confrontation with war, experienced by many Belgian and French children, they had nonetheless been exposed to the war because of their fathers' and brothers' experience. There can therefore,

be no possible objection to dealing, from the nursery rhyme point of view, with certain conditions brought about by the war. It is good that certain facts of the war should be impressed upon the mind of childhood, and there is no better means of impressing them than by the nursery rhyme. The facts dealt with in nursery rhyme remain with us from our childhood to our old age.⁵⁹

What the facts that should be 'impressed upon the mind of childhood' are the author does not say. But when we consider the content of some of the poems it becomes clear that the hope is the children will learn to hate the German enemy and fight for their destruction.

The book contains a total of 58 popular nursery rhymes adapted to the theme of war, dealing with every aspect of war from food shortages to military training. Perhaps one of the most gruesome is the horrible 'The House that Jack Built',

This is the house that Jack built.

This is the bomb
That fell on the house that Jack built.

This is the Hun
That dropped the bomb,
That fell on the house that Jack built.

This is the gun,
That killed the Hun,
That dropped the bomb,
That fell on the house that Jack built.

⁵⁹ Nina MacDonald, *War-Time Nursery Rhymes* (London: Acquired by the British Museum 1919) p 6.

This is the man in Navy-blue,
That fired the gun,
That killed the Hun,
That dropped the bomb,
That fell on the house that Jack built...⁶⁰

Storybooks for younger children included the charming *At War!* written and illustrated by Charlotte Schaller. The story published in 1917 is about Bobby a little French boy whose father has gone off to war. Bobby and his friends set up their toys and fight the war in their playroom and garden, while Bobby's younger sisters Zezette and Jacqueline start up a hospital to care for the wounded. As none of the boys want to play the part of the 'bosch' the children stick nails in the top of toy skittles to represent the spiked helmets of the enemy, then shoot them down with toy cannon.

The children also help with the war effort and after Zezette and Jacqueline have knitted gloves and hats for the brave soldiers in the trenches, Bobby slips into the parcels packets of tobacco, cigars, cigarettes, pipes and matches, which he buys with the pennies out of his money-box. The children are also shown writing to their father, which they do every day with great care,

Bobby tells of his fine army, always in fine trim; Zezette and Jacqueline of the wounded that they are caring for in the hospital. They put their best into their letters, for they know what pleasure it gave Papa who was fighting so bravely to protect them.⁶¹

The inside covers of the book are covered with slogans like 'Long live England', 'Long live the Triple-Entente', 'Long live our Cavalry' and 'Long live India'.

This book has a particular place in the heart of one man who was born just before the start of the war and who had a father fighting in France. James Thirsk who grew up in Beverley near Hull during the war remembers this book particularly in his autobiography,

I knew this book before I was able to read the text and Jean [elder sister] would have told me the story...How we came to have this book I do not

⁶⁰ Ibid. p 13.

⁶¹ Charlotte Schaller, *At War!* (London: 1917) p 30.

know; Dad may have bought it in a bookshop in London on his way home from France, on leave. It was for us a treasure worth more than gold and it remains for Jean and me one of the happiest memories of our childhood. It was, after all, the story of three children who, like us, had a father fighting at the Front.⁶²

Thirsk, who says that he has not seen the book since he was a young child, remembers every detail of it, down to the colour of the illustrations. It has become a significant part of his memory of the war years perhaps because he and his sister identified so strongly with characters in the book. As a very young child, Thirsk perhaps understood little of what the war was really about. All he knew was that his father was gone and that those around him were worried for his safety. Having a book about other children, whose father had also gone to the war perhaps helped the Thirsk children to cope with their father's absence. They would see that they were not alone and that other children were facing similar fears to theirs. The fact that he could not read himself and that his elder sister read the tale to him often, suggests a private bond existed between the siblings around the book. Both now remember it fondly suggesting that they remember their reading together happily, perhaps because they were sharing the same experience, one that separated them from their mother but brought them closer together.

Conclusion

Increasing prosperity, the introduction of compulsory schooling and restrictions placed on the employment of children meant that more and more families in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods found that they had children at home and money to spend on them. Improved production techniques and a reduction in transport costs meant that new and better toys were appearing on the market all the time in the years leading up to the outbreak of war. War themed toys and fiction were a major part of this industry as, during the nineteenth century there had been an increase in the production and consumption of toy soldiers and an explosion in juvenile fiction heavily associated with imperial adventure. In this way Brown, Walvin and others have argued that an acceptance of, and even

⁶² James Thirsk, *A Beverley Child's Great War* (Beverley: 2000) p 25.

desire for, war was created in the period immediately before the First World War. When war came however children were exposed to even more vehemently aggressive attitudes through their toys and games than had been the case previously. The emphasis of these products also shifted subtly and moved away from their more overtly imperialist themes and onto strongly anti-German attitudes, in line with the fierce position of the popular press.

In the cheaper card and paper games and juvenile magazines as well as the more expensive products and books, children were presented with the very definite position of Britain in relation to the War. There was to be no confusion; Germany was at fault and had to be stopped by the British. Children's fiction glorified the war while presenting it as the natural outcome of a confrontation between the unscrupulous Germans and the moral, fair dealing British. The formulaic stories described the conflict in simplistic language of right and wrong; positive British characteristics were juxtaposed against negative German ones in order for all children to understand who to support and who the enemy was. A lack of public understanding about the reality of trench fighting meant that the wildly inaccurate descriptions of army life in the tales went unchallenged by parents who lacked the knowledge to contradict the images of exciting battles, daring raids and sumptuous food. Girls' fiction pointed towards rather than demonstrated the possibility of new opportunities available to women after the war. Authors rejected the more domesticated role of nursing for their heroines, choosing instead to place them in the action as drivers, industrial workers and spy catchers. Despite this, most characters still held on hard to their 'womanliness', they dutifully supported their brothers in uniform and strove to find love and secure themselves a future as wives and mothers. For younger children there were nursery rhymes, alphabet books, colouring books and picture books which all embraced the themes of war, sometimes hiding little of its brutality from their young readers. The pleasanter ones encouraged support for the war by depicting British soldiers alongside Colonial troops and allied forces to show children how Britain was being joined by friends in her quest to defeat the enemy. Children's books and toys were designed to keep up morale at home by poking fun at the enemy while strengthening support for the British forces.

Children were encouraged to hero-worship anyone in uniform and not question the reason for war or the fate of those who fought in it.

But this relationship was not all one way. The children were not simply passive receptors of these messages. There were many influences outside of the toys and books specifically aimed at them that also helped contribute to their understanding of the war and informed their play. As we have seen children did not necessarily need any particular product to play war games, fights and battles inspired by the war could be played by imaginary armies with imaginary guns. If there had been no war toys it is likely that children surrounded by the real war would still have been inspired to act it out amongst themselves. For children wanting a connection to their absent fathers and brothers, recreating the war through play, or reading tales of battles in fiction was perhaps the closest they could come. As we saw with James Thirsk, he revelled in a tale he could not yet read because it was about other children, like himself, with a daddy fighting the war.

Chapter 6 - 'Dear Father' - Family Correspondence in Wartime

Introduction

By 1917 the Army on the Western Front alone was sending home 8,150,000 letters a week and over the course of the war it has been estimated that the British Army's main postal depot in Britain handled two thousand million letters and papers as well as 114 million parcels.¹ Within that vast volume of mail are the letters of children to their fathers and those their fathers sent in return. The ordinary men that made up the majority of British troops during the First World War had no previous experience of fighting or army life. They left behind children with no benchmark against which to measure their feelings and anxieties about being separated from their fathers for so long. During the war the bonds of men and their children were maintained through letters as each side attempted to keep the other involved in their lives despite the separation in both distance and experience. Children did this by reminding their fathers of the world they had left behind. They told them tales of home and school, of friends and family, attempting to situate their fathers back into the centre of their own domestic landscape. Fathers on the other hand used both domestic imagery and fantasy to create a new reality for themselves on paper that could be both exciting and safe for their children. They had to liken their surroundings to ones with which their children were familiar, but then they employed their imagination to create scenes in which their dual identity as both parent and soldier could coexist. They did this both for their children and for themselves as a way of reconciling their new reality with their old. As such these letters provide a fascinating insight into the emotional history of soldiers at war.

The volume of mail sent in Britain had risen in the seventy-five years since the introduction of the penny post in 1840 from roughly 76 million items to 3,500 million by 1914.² David Vincent has argued that the penny post had been introduced

¹ Peter Boyden, *Tommy Atkins' Letters - the History of the British Army Postal Service from 1795* (London: 1990) p 31 and Edward Wells, *Mailshot: A History of the Forces Postal Service* (London: 1987) p 64.

² David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture - England 1750-1914* (Cambridge: 1989) p 33.

to encourage the nation to communicate. Campaigners believed that there was a great untapped market of the increasingly literate working classes who were prevented from using their new skills in writing to each other because of the prohibitive charges sending a letter incurred. Lowering postal charges from an average of 6d to the flat penny rate would increase working class correspondence and make up the shortfall in lost revenue from stamp charges. Thanks to the introduction of compulsory schooling in 1870 literacy levels in Britain rose sharply in the latter part of the nineteenth century and topped 99% for the first time in 1913.³ So, by the outbreak of the First World War, almost everyone in Britain was able to read and write and price no longer prohibited any but the very poorest from communicating regularly with family and friends if they felt inclined. Indeed Edith Hall, the daughter of a foundry worker in Hayes remembers that just before the First World War her family corresponded daily, taking advantage of the halfpenny postage on postcards:

My grandmother would send us a card each evening which we received by first delivery the next morning. She would then receive our reply card the same evening. If one lived in the same town as one's correspondent, an early morning posted card would be delivered at twelve mid-day the same day and a reply card, if sent immediately, would be received the same afternoon.⁴

So communicating by post was no longer the privilege of the middle and upper classes but had become a well established practice for all classes in society by the outbreak of war. Indeed, David Vincent has explored how letter writing had broadened working class horizons, allowing individuals to look further afield for work whilst still staying in touch with their families.⁵ A culture of letter writing was then already well established in Britain before the outbreak of war. People used the post to communicate regularly with those who had moved far away but also, as we have seen with Edith Hall, with those living nearer to hand. The popularity of the postcard proves that letters did not have to be lengthy, or be sent to impart any particular news; instead people often used the post to simply exchange short

³ Ibid. p 4.

⁴ E. Hall, *Canary Girls and Stockpots* (Luton: 1977) p 5.

⁵ Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture - England 1750-1914* p 37.

messages of good will or thanks. With the outbreak of war letters and post cards took on a new significance. The smooth running of the post became central to morale at home and in the fighting line, as both sides needed sustaining with the news that their relatives were safe and well.⁶

All mail sent by troops in the British Army was handled by the Royal Engineers Postal Section (REPS) who established Field and Base Post Offices throughout the theatres of conflict, the majority serving the Western Front. Most mail was initially sorted in France, however in order to cope with the enormous quantity of mail it was soon decided that this sorting could more effectively be carried out in Britain. In 1915 the REPS Home Depot moved from Mount Pleasant to a larger, temporary, building in Regents Park. By the end of the War its staff had grown from 30 in 1914 to a huge 2,540 - mostly women and men unfit for military service.⁷

So why did letter writing become so popular during the war and who was sending all these letters? The answer is that the writing and receiving of letters came to represent very different things depending on circumstances. To the soldiers at the Front the letters they received provided news from home, with messages of love and support that were recognised by the army as being essential for morale. The letters they sent were the way in which men maintained their relationships with their wives, girlfriends, parents and children. They were the means by which the men could attempt to escape their surroundings and recover, albeit temporarily, their pre-war, independent selves. We sometimes see in the letters they sent to their children, an attempt to create a fictional character for themselves - a soldier hero their children could be proud of. By doing this they were perhaps hoping to suspend the connection between their real self, a father, and their soldier self, a potential killer.

⁶ During the war itself postal charges for those sending letters from England stood at one penny per ounce for letters and one penny each for postcards. Initially the soldiers serving abroad had to pay postage on all mail they sent but after complaints that the costs were too high, and that German soldiers were able to take advantage of a free service, prices were lowered. From the 28th August 1914 letters to Britain and the Colonies weighing less than four ounces could be sent for free, those between four ounces and one pound were charged at 4d. This remained the case until July 1915 after which each ounce over four was charged at a penny each. Boyden, *Tommy Atkins' Letters - the History of the British Army Postal Service from 1795* p 31.

⁷ Ibid. p 28.

For those at home, most often the wives, mothers and sisters of soldiers, the act of writing a letter was the way in which they showed their continuing devotion to their absent husbands, sons and brothers. Parcels of clothing and tobacco were also sent as the women attempted to continue their role of providing for the physical well being of their families. Early in the war, before food shortages had really begun to be felt in Britain, parcels of food were also regularly dispatched by families of all classes. Working class wives and mothers baked cakes and pies with whatever spare food they could manage, while richer families could order luxury hampers from the major department stores to be sent straight out to their soldier's regiment.

Perhaps most importantly receiving a letter from a soldier was, for those left at home, a continuing sign of life. With communication lines often disrupted and newspaper reports, particularly after major battles, unreliable, a letter proved to those at home that their soldier was still alive.

The absence of a letter, for both those at home and those at the Front, often caused alarm and confusion. Delays caused by troop movements or a disruption of the mail service could leave both parties fearful and confused. Those at home worried that their soldier had been injured or killed while the soldiers themselves often worried that they were being forgotten by those they had left behind.⁸ News from the Front was often unsatisfactory as soldiers were prevented by the stringent censorship rules from giving any details about where they were or the action they had taken part in.

Censorship of letters had been introduced on the outbreak of War prohibiting men from discussing a range of subjects regarded as possibly useful to the enemy. These included comments on the effects of hostile fire, the physical and moral condition of the troops and details of defensive work.⁹ Letters to family and friends from the non-commissioned had to be submitted to the scrutiny of their commanding Officer.

⁸ Christa Hammerle, "'You Let a Weeping Woman Call You Home?' Private Correspondences During the First World War in Austria and Germany," in *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945*, ed. Rebecca Earle (Aldershot: 1999), pp 158-59.

⁹ Boyden, *Tommy Atkins' Letters - the History of the British Army Postal Service from 1795* p 30.

Officers on the other hand were expected to censor themselves, although their mail was still liable to be read by the regimental censor before being sent on to England. This double standard meant Officers perhaps felt able to communicate more freely with their families, without feeling that their personal lives were under scrutiny.

The effect of censorship on the content of letters sent home is impossible to tell. Would men, freed to write as they please have told those at home more of the details of what they were experiencing? We cannot know, although one of the letters in this chapter does suggest that the knowledge that their mail was to be read by a third party did curb some men's enthusiasm for writing as well as the content of their message. Letters from England on the other hand, were uncensored so some men got around the rules by giving their mail to friends to post when home on leave. This also meant that letters sent to soldiers were uncensored and in this way men learnt of the true extent of food shortages and bomb damage from their families at home. In Germany letters sent out to troops were liable to be censored. Wives complaining too bitterly about conditions on the home front sometimes had their letters returned by the Army as they were considered too dangerous to troop morale.¹⁰

The role of mail in maintaining morale in wartime was appreciated by the British High Command and a regular mail service was maintained throughout the war. Behind the lines men could take advantage of the recreation huts established by churches and groups like the Scouts and Guides which always supplied free stationary as well as a comfortable place to compose or read a letter. Indeed many of the letters included in this chapter are written on headed, YMCA or equivalent paper. Even without appropriate stationary men still found a way to write home. Other letters read for this chapter were written on scraps of paper, torn from notebooks and diaries, and penned in anything from crayon to fountain pen.

When men moved up the lines the practicalities of writing home got harder. Not only were writing materials and a surface to write on harder to find, but what it was

¹⁰ Hammerle, "You Let a Weeping Woman Call You Home?" *Private Correspondences During the First World War in Austria and Germany*, pp 154-57.

possible to say was limited as well. The army's answer to this second problem was the Field Service Postcard. The pre-printed card allowed men to communicate a limited amount of information to their families by choosing the option from a list of several that best described their circumstance. The remaining options could be deleted but no additional message was allowed. Thus men in front line trenches could let their families know whether they were well or not, and whether they had received any mail recently, but could give away nothing as to how they were feeling or what action they were taking part in.

These cards amused many at the time and have become a much lampooned image of the war because of the way in which they allowed the sender no opportunity for individuality in their expression of anything from good to really dreadful news. Paul Fussell has described them as being the first widespread example of a 'form' - that type of document which 'uniquely characterises the modern world'.¹¹ Fussell also points out the implicit optimism in the post cards saying:

One paid for the convenience of using the postcard by adopting its cheerful view of things, by pretending to be in a world where belated mail and a rapidly healing wound are the worst that can happen, and where there is only one thinkable direction one can go - to the rear.¹²

But adopting a cheerful view of things was not something soldiers did only when using a Field Service Postcard. Another enduring image of the First World War is the optimistic way in which many soldiers described their circumstances to those at home. No doubt designed initially to allay their family's fears, the stoical good humour displayed in many soldiers' letters quickly became a kind of communicative formula which allowed men to cheer themselves as well as their families.

Understating the horrors they were witnessing and risks they were taking, many soldiers letters read much like the breezy gung-ho language of the adventure stories discussed in chapter 5. Perhaps perpetuating the idea that the war was fun, a terrific adventure they were lucky to be a part of, helped men to create a positive

¹¹ P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: 1975) p 185.

¹² *Ibid.*

atmosphere in the trenches that prevented any but the most desperate admitting, at least in their letters home, how they really felt.

But there are other reasons too why men might adopt a positive, enthusiastic tone in these letters. This chapter will explore the ways in which men's style of writing reflected their own feelings towards participation in the war as well as their attitudes towards their children. These men were constructing their war experience on paper for their children and we must try to understand the part this construction played in helping them reconcile their role as both soldier and father.

The letters in this chapter are part of the Imperial War Museum's collection of documents that have been donated over the years since the war ended.¹³ Sometimes these letters are part of a larger collection of one family's correspondence and are often accompanied by detailed biographical information and other artefacts like medals and photographs. On other occasions the archive simply holds individual letters, with little or no accompanying biographical detail, so where biographical information is available it has been included but it is often incomplete or largely missing.

With the exception of a group of letters sent and received by correspondents who were not related, all of the letters in this chapter were exchanged by children and their fathers or other close male relative. Many of the letters represent intimate portraits of family life and give valuable clues to Edwardian issues of parenting and the role of the father within the family. Many of the sets of correspondence do not begin until 1916 or 1917 suggesting that these family men did not volunteer to fight but were eventually conscripted into the army and forced to leave their families.

As family units were broken up by war, letters became the main channel through which communication between husbands and wives and fathers and children could be maintained. Some men, who had perhaps never written before, wrote regularly to their wives and children, attempting to be a partner and parent from abroad. Others

¹³ File references for each set of correspondents are included in the bibliography.

were clearly unfamiliar with the practice or lacked the confidence to write lengthy regular letters. Without detailed knowledge of the educational background of these correspondents it is difficult to be certain whether reticence in writing was a result of lack of ability, or simply a lack of inclination on the writer's part. Working class soldiers would have attended Elementary school at least but many perhaps had had little use or opportunity for composing letters, and were therefore hindered in their attempts to maintain contact with those at home. That is not to say however that all working class fathers struggled to correspond with their children. On the contrary, most of the letters in this chapter are from men serving in Other Ranks and it is often the letters from Officers that are the most uncommunicative.

Because we have only a very small proportion of the millions of letters sent between fathers and their children we cannot draw any general conclusions about the differences between working, middle or upper class family relationships. It could be that working class families, where children lived at home and were schooled locally, were less used to being separated and therefore wrote more often. Or perhaps it was the case that Officers were more conscious of their duty to keep up morale at home and so wrote only in general, positive terms to their children. What we do know is that these letters have survived the intervening years because they meant something to the people that received them. They were sent and kept by families that loved each other. They were treasured and eventually deposited in the national archive because those that kept or found them recognised the importance of them as testimony to how ordinary people responded to extraordinary conditions.

Children, particularly older children, often wrote weekly to their fathers, encouraged by mothers and teachers to keep their fathers up to date about their lives and to show their support for the war. Younger children were also included in the letter writing cycle, with fathers writing them separate letters intended to be read out to them by their mothers. In return mothers penned letters dictated by their children, or composed ones themselves for the very young. The arrival of a letter often became a family event with everyone gathering together to hear the news, as men with little time to write asked children to share their letters with their siblings.

Letters to the Unknown Soldier

But letter writing was spread wider than the immediate family unit with many children including letters with the parcels of cigarettes and clothing they collected and sent out to the troops via their schools. Encouraged by teachers and parents, children sent messages of support to soldiers they had never met, and in return received letters of thanks. The following examples show how the practice of letter writing became common to complete strangers as the home front supported the fighting line through the mail.

Very early in the war, as we have seen in chapter 3, schools mobilised their pupils to collect, make and buy goods to send to the troops overseas. Very often the children were encouraged to include with these parcels a letter to a particular soldier who was designated 'their' soldier. For the children this provided a personal contact with the war and a real soldier around whom they could focus their energy when collecting or knitting scarves and gloves. The soldiers who received these parcels and messages often replied to the children and were clearly touched by the gesture and effort of the letter writers. Some children and soldiers exchanged a single letter while others began a correspondence that lasted the duration of the war and beyond.

Amongst the collection at the Imperial War Museum are several letters from servicemen to children they had never met and perhaps never would, thanking them for their gifts and making enquiries after their health and well being. As with all types of letter I found far more letters sent by soldiers than I did those sent to them. This is because the survival of letters sent to the Front was much more precarious than those sent home. They may have been lost in the course of battle, or discarded by a soldier on the move. Letters sent to Britain on the other hand were usually treasured and saved, not only by family members but also, as we shall see, by individual children who valued their messages from 'their' soldier.

The pupils at St John's School on the Isle of Dogs in East London were one such group of children who were each given the name of a particular soldier and encouraged to knit and send parcels to them. Amy Griffiths, eight years old in 1914, sent a letter accompanying her parcel in the first months of the war. Amy's mother had insisted she include her age on the letter to avoid any complicated misunderstandings later on. Amy was the first at school to receive a letter from her adopted soldier, Sergeant J. Hancock of the 1st Battalion Royal Fusiliers, and her reply was read out to the whole school in assembly. Although Amy's letter to Sergeant Hancock does not survive we can imagine its tone and content from the reply she received. Sergeant Hancock wrote to Amy on October 11th 1914 saying:

I am writing to thank you for your kindness in sending me the tobacco cigarettes, it was very kind of you, I'm afraid you've given me rather a hard task in telling me to kill all the Germ-Huns, but I'll do my best for you. I'm afraid I can't manage the Kaiser as he won't come anywhere near me unfortunately, but I'll give him a look-up when we get to Berlin. The Germans serenade us in the evenings with their national songs, and we give them a cheer when they finish, and invite them over to our trenches, but they are too shy.

Please thank your friends for their kindness and accept my thanks for yourself. I hope this will find you in the best of health.

Goodbye, yours faithfully, J. Hancock

This letter displays the cheery optimism of the early days of the war when the volunteer army believed the fight would be short and victorious. That the eight year old Amy was already versed in the language of war propaganda, referring to the Germ-Huns, is no surprise when you consider, as we did in chapter 2, the mood of anti-German sentiment that swept the nation in the lead up to, and first months of, the war. But Sergeant Hancock's subsequent letters to Amy, which after the first one were sent to her home address, begin to hint at the difference in the soldiers' and civilians' developing perceptions of their enemy. In January 1915 Hancock writes to Amy telling her of the Christmas truce which occurred at places on the Western Front. The letter, very different in tone from the last, suggests a new found respect for the men on the other side of no-man's-land.

I spent a rather interesting if not a happy Xmas, we made a truce with the enemy opposite us they are only 60 yds away and exchanged cigarettes, papers etc, a lot of them could speak English, they are Saxons and object to being called Germans they said they would be very glad when the war was finished, but they firmly believe they are going to win, I have enclosed one of their postcards with the chaps name on who gave it to me. We are having very rainy weather and our trenches are like little rivers, and are not at all pleasant to live in. Please excuse this awful scribble, as writing is rather a difficult job.

These letters plus a couple of postcards and a field service postcard, all sent between 25 October 1914 and 17 February 1915, were deposited at the Imperial War Museum by Amy's daughter and accompanied by a description of the circumstances of the correspondence. Amy had kept the letters all her life and told the story of their provenance to her children and grandchildren. She had taken pride in the correspondence at the time and continued to do so into adulthood, suggesting the strength of the feelings she had for her childhood contribution to the war effort and her relationship to a soldier.

Other children sent gifts and letters to groups of soldiers they did not know as part of a whole school effort, but many still received an individual reply. In December 1915, 7-year-old Bertha Wadey received a letter from a Lieutenant H. N. Hignett, serving in the 1/5th Battalion Cheshire Regiment in France, thanking her for the parcel of gifts she had sent out to the Battalion from Dulwich Hamlet School. The officer does not seem to be conscious of any need to hide the conditions of trench warfare from the 7-year-old, nor resent the extra work of having to write and thank her. His letter shows no condescension,

I have only time to write you a very short letter, but I wish to thank you very much for the tin of Vaseline which I kept for myself out of the big box of things which came from your school. You don't know how glad I was to have it last night. The trenches were half full of water and freezing at the time. As there was a biting cold wind I smeared my face and hands with Vaseline and so kept them from getting chapped with the frost. It is most awfully kind of you all to send these things out to the men who were all very pleased with them.

Wishing you a very happy Xmas and New Year,
Yours sincerely,
H. N. Hignett

This letter is accompanied in the archive by a certificate of gratitude to Bertha from the Overseas Club, a patriotic organisation established 'to promote the unity of British Subjects the world over'. Groups like the Overseas Club and the Girls Patriotic Union were active in organizing and recognizing the work children did for the war effort. They awarded certificates and ribbons in recognition of children's contribution, and the large numbers of them deposited in the Imperial War Museum suggests that the recipients treasured them as tokens of their part in the 'official' war effort. Bertha's certificate recognizes and thanks her for sending comforts to the troops at Christmas 1916 and an additional, hand written, note at the bottom thanks her for helping Belgian children.

Some schools 'adopted' Prisoners of War and children sent letters and parcels through the Red Cross to Germany. Joan Gillespie's form at Woodford School, East Croydon, adopted Private W. J. Fitzwalters who was held at Giessen and Soltau during their period of correspondence. Private Fitzwalters' first postcard to Joan, sent in January 1916, is fairly formal, thanking her for her parcel and letter and replying that horses are his favourite animal. But gradually, perhaps surprised that the schoolgirl is continuing to write to him, Private Fitzwalters begins to open up to Joan and tells her something of his life back home describing his house in Hackney, North London and saying 'I'd give anything to be there now'. By June 1917 the pair are more intimate correspondents with Fitzwalters seeming genuinely pleased to have heard from Joan and taking an interest in her holiday plans:

Dear Miss Gillespie, I was very pleased to hear from you and as it is the same day in and day out with me all I can say is I am in good health and spirits, sorry your sister has been sick, the weather is ideal just right for a long holiday by the sea. May this term at school be a happy one, my best wishes to you and the form, I remain yours truly, W. J. Fitzwilliams

Other schools and groups focused their attention on wounded soldiers convalescing in their local area. Many collected food, newspapers and magazines and even paid personal visits to cheer the men, often recuperating far from home. For these men, often horribly scarred both physically and mentally, we cannot be sure how welcome

these visits were. But without close family nearby, and perhaps because of their naïve interest, wounded soldiers occasionally wrote to the children of the horrors they had experienced and the frustration they now felt. Alice Waterhouse, a schoolgirl at Parochial School, Aughton, received such a letter after collecting food for the patients at a military hospital in Moss Side, Liverpool. Lance Corporal H. Bearer wrote to Alice in June 1915:

Just a few lines hoping you are in the very best of health. I am pleased to let you know that I am feeling a little better considering I have been in hospital over 8 months now. Also I wish to thank you very much for your kindness in giving me those eggs which I heartily enjoyed for my tea. I was buried alive by a shell bursting in front of my trench while I was on observation post for nearly three days before being dug out. This is the ninth hospital I have been in. I was in six different hospitals in Manchester before being sent to Maghull so I must thank God I am alive. You may remember me I passed by your school in the wheelchair about two weeks ago. I would like to write you a few lines to thank you for your kindness to me. God bless you with success and good health these are my sincere wishes to you. My kind regards and best respects to you and your teacher.

Sincerely yours
7338 L/Cpl H Bearer

For some children and soldiers, these donations and visits to hospital started up relationships that lasted throughout the war and beyond. 12 year old Doris Tickner struck up one such friendship with Private Mick Teulan, an Australian soldier serving with the 5th Division AIF. Private Teulan had been injured by a shell in France and was recovering at Spalding Hall Convalescent Home in Golders Green, North London, near to where the Tickner family lived. The archive contains 55 letters written to Doris between 1917 and 1919, mainly by Mick but also by both his sisters and his wife in Australia. The relationship was clearly of great importance to the whole Teulan family, separated by thousands of miles as well as the war itself. Teulan's wife and sisters thank the whole Tickner family for their support and refer to packages and presents they have sent from Australia. Mick often asks why he has not heard from Doris for some time as he is moved around the country and then eventually back to France, but she is clearly a fairly regular correspondent.

When he is eventually sent back to France in the spring of 1918 Teulan jokes to Doris that he is unlikely to see her again until he gets another wound and is sent back to England:

You see I have taken your advice this time I am letting all the shells go by and just at present there are any amount of them flying about our own and German ones. They are going over the ground where we are camped and I am not in the deep dug out either in fact there are only a few pieces of wood covering me, not enough to stop a shell if it happens to fall on it. I will try to arrange to get to a hospital where you can visit if I am lucky enough to get back to England again.

In September 1918 Teulan was in England again after being shot through the wrist and joked to Doris ‘certainly I thought that it was only the shells that I was to dodge. You did not mention bullets, bombs or grenade, nor Gas.’ Mick Teulan survived the war and returned to Australia in 1919.

Writing was good for morale. This was recognised by everyone from the army, the post office, and the government, to individual families and schools. Sending a letter had become a national endeavour, important both for maintaining the ties of affection but also for strengthening the bonds of citizenship. Children were encouraged to write to men they had never met as a way of highlighting to them the enormity of the war effort. By adopting a soldier at the front, in a POW camp or in hospital children were ensured a personal connection to the war regardless of whether they had a relative involved in the fighting. And children clearly relished this connection. The fact that the correspondence often outlived the initial exchange of gifts and thanks, developing into fledgling friendships shows how much importance was attached to the link by both the children themselves and the soldiers to whom they wrote. Here we see men writing genuine, kind, uncondescending letters of thanks and goodwill to small children they had never met. They appear truly touched by the interest of the children and particularly for those men with no family close by, the relationships they formed through the letters probably helped sustain them throughout the war.

Family letters

The remainder of this chapter looks at letters sent between children and their fathers during the war. Some fathers wrote to their children individually and often, others hardly at all, preferring to send love to them as a line at the end of their letters to their wives. Some fathers spoke at length about the war and the conditions in which they were living while others dwelt entirely on family matters, responding to the news from home. None of the letters I have read, written by fathers home to children, mention specific instances of violence or death although some do mention guns and shells. There are far fewer surviving letters sent by children to their fathers but from the replies sent back to England it is sometimes possible to gauge the tone and content of the children's own letters.

The letters sent by children to their fathers are overwhelmingly concerned with domestic details and family life. This is unsurprising as it made up almost the entirety of the children's experience, but it is nevertheless significant as it represents a determined effort to keep the father involved in the family unit. Children reported what they had done at school, at the weekend or on holiday, as well as the actions of siblings and other relatives to keep their fathers up to date about significant happenings and relationships in their lives. By taking an interest and responding with questions or comments on such news fathers were seeking to participate in the daily lives of their children. If they couldn't be there in person to share in their children's domestic routine fathers enquired and prompted their children for details that would allow them to imagine the world they were missing. For the children sharing their adventures with their fathers via a letter and receiving their interest in return meant that their fathers became a part of their memory and understanding of the events and people in their lives.

Fathers in turn often wrote to their children in a way that mirrored the domestic detail of life at home. Indeed much of the day-to-day business of work in the trenches consisted of entirely domestic chores, from cleaning and equipping the

trenches to the preparation and serving of meals. Regular soldiers carried out these tasks while the Officers had responsibility for ensuring the smooth running of the operation. When men were sick or injured it was other men who cared for them and thus, very much like the women they had left behind, men became immersed in the domestic details of caring for themselves and each other. In *Dismembering the Male* Joanna Bourke has argued that for the men fighting in the trenches 'home remained the touchstone for all their actions' and that men actually pursued domesticity in an attempt 'to regain their sense of honour and a taste of contentment'.¹⁴

So it was easy for fathers to summon up a domestic image to describe to their children and wrote of living conditions, food, animals and friends in a way designed to give their children a way of picturing their absent father in circumstances they could relate to. Lieutenant E Hopkinson's letter to his young daughter Mildred, written in December 1916, is a good example of this. Then a 2nd Lieutenant in the 1/8th Battalion Sherwood Foresters, Hopkinson describes the contents of a Christmas parcel received from the civic authorities in Nottingham writing:

I said I would tell you what the parcel contained. Well here they are:-

- 1 tin plum pudding
- 1 tin milk
- 1 tin Dubbin
- 1 tin peppermints
- ½ lb Cadbury's chocolate
- 1 tablet carbolic soap
- 1 stick shaving soap
- 1 packet butterscotch
- 1 pair leather laces
- 1 carriage candle
- 1 packet bachelors buttons
- 1 Christmas card

Now do you not think that is a very useful parcel for me to receive out here. The difference between this years one and last is, a plum pudding is substituted for a plum cake and a packet of butterscotch is put in extra. We have had two plum puddings and they were good. The other things I have not yet sampled.

¹⁴ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: 1996) p 23.

The rest of Hopkinson's letter contains news of the platoon's sports fixtures and score line and his suggested answers to a spelling game begun by his daughter. In return Hopkinson poses her a maths question and enquires about school and homework. In response to the news that the family back home have been trying to catch a rat that has taken up residence at the end of the garden Hopkinson writes:

Of course out here it is nothing to see scores of rats when in the trenches and in billets. At night when I am in bed I can here the rats running about in the loft room above. But I do hope you will get rid of them down the garden because they are not at all pleasant companions.

Centring letters home on domestic details was perhaps particularly necessary when the children were very young, when fathers may have feared that an extended absence would be too much for the bond they had had such little time to build up. One such father was A. C. Stanton who was called up late in 1916 and began service as an Air Mechanic in the 13th Kite Balloon Section of the Royal Flying Corps in February 1917. Stanton's two children Peggy and Hugh were just four and three respectively when Stanton was sent to the Western Front to carry out meteorological ballooning duties in the summer of 1917. During the war Stanton's wife Dora and the children moved from Wembley to Highgate in North London and the family corresponded regularly, Stanton sending the children 18 letters between April 1917 and December 1918.

In his first letter home to the children Stanton explains 'When you are both a little more grown up you will know why it was that I had to go away from home for a time and leave you and mother.' But the rest of the letter is nothing but light hearted. After drawing a picture of a tent and explaining that that is where he now lives Stanton goes on:

We got some pretty plants and put them round the tent to make it nice and like home. I expect the plants belonged to some little girl like you Peggy, once, but she had to leave them and go away. In the place here there are three little kittens, grey with long hair, fluffy ones, they have a good time. Nearby are woods with ever so many big trees, and little snowdrops grow under the trees, and in the trees are lots of birds called

magpies, black and white. Ask mother to tell you about magpies, they are like some little children who chatter all the time and play tricks.

The other day I saw a soldier who had a monkey for a pet, the monkey sat on the ground and squeaked when I gave him one of the raisins which mother sent me out, he was so pleased to show all his teeth.

You must try and be good children and kind to mother, and when I come home we shall all have a big treat together.

From reading the next few letters Stanton sent to his young children you could be forgiven for thinking that his portion of the Western Front had more in common with a farm yard or wildlife sanctuary, so full is it with bunny rabbits (which he sketches), goats (which the men feed cake to) and dogs (that he befriends), than a battlefield. But the tactic works and the children respond (in letters written by their mother, but addressed and signed by them) with enquiries about the animals and a plea to bring one of the dogs home after the war is over.

However as the fighting continues it appears Stanton is beginning to miss his children more and more and when he writes to them to wish them both happy birthday in October 1917 he writes:

I should very much like to see you for a little while out here, as there aren't any children here, only big grown-up men, but some day the children will all come back with their mothers and fathers, and the boys and girls will play in the holes and corners where the men have to live now.

I shall tell you more about this when I come home, so until then you must wait for me and be ever so kind to each other and to dear mother, who is taking so much care of you.

From then on the war itself makes more of an entrance into the letters, perhaps as Stanton begins to forget his earlier concern for his children's age, or because he wants to bring them closer to him by giving them a clearer understanding of the life he is living. Hughie is told of the airships and balloons Stanton sees and rides in, while Peggy is told about all the French children in the neighbouring villages and how their lives have been altered by the war. In the summer of 1918 Stanton writes a letter to the children with frightening detail about the war that would have been unthinkable in his first few letters. He writes:

Let me tell you something pretty I saw the other day. You know that where I am the Germans fire great big guns at us and the shot from these guns goes off in the air with a great noise, and then all the pieces of shot come falling down, and sometimes may hurt somebody. Well the other morning I was going down the road when I saw two children a little girl about as big as Margaret and a tiny little boy, not quite so big as Hughie; just as I came up to them a big shot came whistling along, and the little girl at once put her arms round her little brother, and hid his face in her apron until the shot had burst with a great noise and all the pieces had fallen down. They both looked up at me and laughed. Now wasn't that pretty! I hope you will both be as kind and brave as those two little children.

Then perhaps as an attempt to allay the children's fears Stanton goes on, in his first and last attempt to explain warfare, to say:

I have to carry a helmet with me to put on when there are pieces of shot falling down. A helmet is a sort of hat made of iron. Years ago before there were any guns Soldiers wore what is called armour, that is pieces of iron over their clothes to prevent them being hurt by swords and spears. The bravest of these soldiers were called knights, and they rode on horses. They went about the country doing all sorts of brave deeds, and generally they found a lovely princess in the end and married her. And although we don't wear armour now-a-days, except the helmet I told you about, there are still lots of brave deeds that can be done, and there are princesses too, but you have to watch for them. I found one once, but perhaps I will tell you about that another time.

Stanton's only method of explaining war to his children is to compare it to the tales of knights and princesses they would be familiar with from their storybooks. By doing this Stanton escapes with them into a fantasy world where he too can be a knight doing brave deeds for their princess-mother. During the two years that Stanton is away from his family Peggy and Hughie start school, attending Home School which appears to be a small, independent school with a progressive curriculum, near to their Highgate home. In celebrating this beginning of school life with his children Stanton obviously wants to give them the same kind of encouragement as he would have done had he been at home, but missing such a milestone in his children's lives was clearly a wrench to Stanton:

Mother told me in her letter about your going to school and about all the wonderful things you are beginning to do there. I hope that whatever you do

whether it is singing or painting or feeding the birds, that you will always try to do it as well as you possibly can, and you will find that whatever it is will become easier and better all the time.

Always ask questions when you want to know about anything, but be sure to try and listen to what the answer is, then you won't have to learn the same thing over and over again, but before asking any questions have a little 'think' and see if you can find out yourself what you want to know, then ask and see if you were right.

Other fathers also took an active interest in their children's education despite being separated by the war. In the huge collection of over 100 letters written by the four Butling children to the father Private A. J. Butling, serving in France with the Army Service Corps, and his letters to them, there are constant references to school and regular updates on all exams and marks received. When the first of the letters were sent in 1916 the eldest child George was 13, Eric was 11, Grace 7 and Ben just 2 years old. The family lived in Wavertree, Liverpool and both George and Eric wrote almost weekly to their father, he in turn wrote regularly to them, sometimes just one letter which was to be read to the others, sometimes individually. In his first letter to his father, sent in March 1916, George is obviously well up on events of the war and keen to show his father how well he is doing at school, writing:

Just a few lines to let you know I am still thinking of you in the present grave crisis but I think that in the next few days the tide will turn; anyhow we must wait and see what happens. I see that the Germans have captured quite a number of tanks and guns but I expect you will know more about that than us in Blighty.

There is a vigorous offensive in our school this last week – as the exams are on, but I think that I have done fine in the majority so far especially arith. Geometry, nature study, and not so bad in Latin and algebra but I had better not say too much as we have not finished yet.

The war was on the boys' minds often at school with George suggesting 'A First Class Naval Battle' as the subject for a drawing lesson and Eric drawing a machine gun for his handwork exam. But they were not distracted in their work with George especially regularly coming top in his class for some of his subjects and being rewarded at Christmas 1916 with a day's holiday for each subject in which he excelled. Writing excitedly to his father George said:

We are to have as many holidays as we are top in, and we can choose which day we like, so when you come home on leave I shall have my odd days, so let me know in time so that I can apply for them.

Christmas 1916 was also an exciting time for 7 year old Grace who wrote to her father of a visit into town to see Father Christmas:

I went to the Grotto with Mother and Ben and Mrs Himman and Willie came with us. I was very glad when I saw what I got, there was a tank there, and soldiers peeping up out of the trenches to see if the Germans were coming. My present was a slate and when I got home I began to draw on it.

The war came even closer to the children's lives at home when in February 1918 the boys got a new teacher at school, a discharged soldier Eric described as 'a fine chap'. This fired the boys' imagination and Eric wrote to his father all about the new teacher's description of trench warfare and how the guns were disguised, 'he told us of one gun which was disguised so well that it was there fifteen months without being found out.' A month later George reported an excursion to see some of the weapons of war:

Last night an illuminated tramcar in the form of a tank came down Smithdown Rd so we all went to see it. The tractors were edged with electric light and at various other parts, altogether making a fine show, also a dreadnought was towed on behind looking very grotesque as it was all in darkness.

When Private Butling wrote to his children his letters contained a mixture of domestic detail, entreaties to good behaviour and comments about the war, in differing amounts perhaps depending on the age of the child the letter was addressed to. To 7 year old Grace Butling made light of his domestic situation, attempting to make his sleeping quarters sound like somewhere his daughter might like to play writing:

I am writing it [letter] in my bunk on the box that mother sent the cakes in. You and Benny would call it a cubby house if you saw it and want to play in it, I expect, wouldn't it be fun. One man sleeps underneath me and another man above me. The top man has to go up a ladder to his bunk which is level

with the eighth step of the ladder. Mine is on the forth. So you see we have to do a little gymnastics when we go to bed.

But writing to the older Eric this cubby house has lost some of its charm:

I shall soon be getting in to bed beg pardon, my bunk (a sort of cubby house) with two blankets, waterproof sheet and my overcoat. Fancy it? Guess not. Much love etc, Yours Dad.

Although addressed to a particular boy Private Butling always intended George and Eric to share their letters and as well as encouraging them in their school work he also took seriously his responsibilities as an absent father for their moral upbringing. Unable to be there in person to show and teach them to be conscientious, honourable boys, Butling sometimes wrote serious letters, advising them of their responsibilities while he was away and entreating them to behave. In April 1917 he wrote to Eric:

I should very much like to be with you for a few evenings, or, for good, but there is a great amount of work for us to do here yet so don't expect me yet a while.

Well Eric my lad, I am expecting both you and George to be honourable boys and I wish you both to grow up thorough Christian children. It is up to you both and I hope you will always remember that whatever scrapes you get in to.

But it was to the eldest, George, that Butling wrote in most detail about his feelings about the war. Replying to a letter asking when his father will get some home leave Butling writes:

At present I cannot tell when that will be as since this "Push" has started it has altered things somewhat. The Kaiser wishing to annihilate us, especially us British, evidently they still treat us with contempt. I take off my hat to our fallen comrades deeply deploring their loss, at the same time greatly admiring their noble sacrifice and valiant stand against such enormous odds. It is a revelation that, once more the British spirit still lives that has been handed down to us to take up and carry on.

The war took its toll on Private Butling and it appears that it was George who was most sensitive to his father's state of mind. In a comment which suggests Private

Butling may have been suffering from some of the symptoms of shell shock George wrote in September 1918:

I am glad to here that you have got over your toothache, and I hope that you will remain free from all complaints in the future, including “night alarms” and such like.

Despite surviving the war itself Private Butling died of dysentery in 1919 after serving in France for three years – he is buried at Charleroi in Belgium.

It is clear from many of the letters how preoccupied some fathers were with the differences they would see in their children when they returned home. Realising that they were likely to be away from home for years rather than months the men who were called up from 1916 did not expect the war to end quickly. Those with young children knew that when they returned their sons and daughters would have developed both physically and mentally while they were away. As we have seen many fathers took a keen interest in their children’s schooling but for fathers whose children were too young for school it was the physical changes that prayed on their minds. When Sapper Ernest Williams was called up into the Royal Engineers in 1916 his two children, Marjorie and Harold were too young to go to school. The letters he writes have to be read to the children by their mother and the ones they send to him are penned by her and illustrated by the children. To begin with he addresses these letters to ‘My dear little Marjorie’ and ‘My dear sonny Harold’, but by the following year, after Marjorie has turned five, he is acknowledging her growth beginning ‘My dear little (I mean big) pet Marjorie’. In that letter of April 1917 he goes on:

Mother tells me that you are growing so big she has to make 2 new dresses for you – never mind how big you grow I will put you on my shoulders when I come home – because I am getting such a strong daddy.

All of Williams' letters to his children are of a purely family nature, he rarely mentions the war at all and seems to dwell on things they have done together in the past and what they might do as a family in the future. He clearly misses his wife and

children desperately and is keen to remind them of his love and encourage their bond with him despite their separation. On many occasions he write notes to Harold, who I think was perhaps a year or two older than Marjorie, chastising him for not writing to him saying things like:

Harold dear every letter mother sends you must send me a note in it every time. Don't forget that your daddy wants a note from his big boy every time.

While training at Hitchin in Hertfordshire Williams wrote to Marjorie of an incident which illustrates how often his children were on his mind saying:

Well yesterday I saw a big bear in the street and the man told him to dance and when the man started singing – the bear danced – oh it was funny and all the children did enjoy themselves. I asked one little girl if her name was Marjorie and she said no it is Maggie. You see she looked something like you so I just wondered if her name was the same as yours.

Although none of the children's letters to their father survive it is clear from comments about them in his letters that Marjorie in particular was a regular correspondent. She sent him pictures she had drawn, which he displayed on the wall near his bunk, and sent him flowers. She also wrote to him of the new clothes she had been given and told him jokes and stories about what she had been doing. At one point in 1917, while he was training at Newark, the family came to stay near by and it is obvious from his letters that a great deal of thought and planning on his part went in to where his wife and children were to stay and what they might do while they were there. To all intents and purposes the Williams family were trying to maintain their family unit in the face of such a long separation and letters became the chief means for them to develop this relationship.

By May 1918 when Williams writes to Marjorie on the occasion of her seventh birthday he had been away since she was four years old. He has missed almost half of her life but although tinged with sorrow his letter is filled with affection:

My darling sweet pet own girlie Marjorie,
Your daddy sends to his darling daughter, a special letter all by itself to wish her very many happy returns of her birthday. Fancy she is 7 years old – she must be getting a big girlie now and I must not say little girlie any more, but if she grows as big as a house she will always be her Daddy's own loved girlie. Oh daddy is going to try so hard to get this silly old war finished so that he can get back home again and be with his girlie every day and not to be miles and miles away from her over the sea. I do hope you have a jolly day – that it is fine sunshine and that you have a good time all the time. I should like to send you a box of lovely flowers but the poor things would be all withered away before you could get them so I will let them go on growing in the fields and gardens and just imagine that you can smell them.
Ta ta my darling pet. God bless and take care of you and dear loving brother Harold and that sweetest of all, our Mother. Heaps and heaps of love and kisses from your own always loving Daddy.

Williams and many other fathers included sketches in their letters. Sometimes these were of animals or trains or flowers, things they thought their children would enjoy. Other times the men sketched their surroundings, showing their children their uniform or sleeping arrangements. Williams drew animals and cartoon sketches designed to amuse his children while the poet E G Buckeridge illustrated his journey to France for his young son Anthony. Beside a detailed picture of a boat Buckeridge wrote:

I suppose you are now quite the man of the house now that I am away, even though you are only 4 ½ years old. This is Daddy going over in the steamer to France. I hope you can see him. He is the important looking gentleman in the bows. There wasn't room to draw the captain and the crew. I expect they are somewhere downstairs don't you. This is Daddy in his new tin bonnet. He is somewhere inside.

P. A. Wise serving with the 102nd Siege Battery RGA on the Western Front went even further in two beautifully illustrated letters to his young daughter Alice. In the letters (see Appendix B) it seems Wise is trying to make light of his situation by illustrating the humorous side of life in the trenches although some of the pictures might well have alarmed his daughter. By illustrating their letters, most often to quite young children, these fathers are helping to create the story of their war experience in the minds of their children. Just like in the picture books they have at home, these fathers are appearing as characters in their own life story. For children as young as Alice Wise, four year old Anthony Buckeridge or the Williams children,

imagining their absent father in circumstances so unlike any they had ever experienced must have been almost impossible. Their fathers, realising that their children would be confused and troubled by their absence create and illustrate a story for them. They are the hero, embarking on an adventure, crossing the sea aboard a steamer and making a home for themselves in strange and exciting tunnels. The children in turn could use these illustrations, just as they did with their picture books, to become enthralled by the tale of their father's adventure.

To begin with fathers and their children looked for common experiences, details of domestic life that they could share with each other. They turned to the familiar, to animals and plants and food and surroundings in an attempt to keep up a mutual connection. But as the war went on and the gaps between their meetings lengthened fathers had to look for some other way to forge an identification with their children. It was no longer enough to rely on shared experiences especially when very young children perhaps could not even really remember what it was like to have their father at home at all. Instead some fathers attempted to create a new reality for their children through their letters. These fathers became characters in a narrative of the war, pictures on a page or heroes in a partially invented landscape. They told their children the truth about the more pleasant aspects of their surroundings and then fictionalised the rest to produce a tale that was both positive and exciting. Children in their turn responded to these letters with interest; they wanted to play with the dogs their fathers had met and sleep in the cubby house bunks where their dads went to bed. They wrote regularly, often with immense detail about what had gone on at school, the marks they had received, the friends they had seen and the food they had eaten, maintaining the bonds with this central figure in their emotional life who for the present could not be with them.

War News

Not all fathers kept the war from their children; some discussed it at length describing every aspect of their life at the Front. In most cases these letters are

addressed to older children, perhaps because fathers believed that the children were already well aware of the war and what it entailed. As we have seen from earlier chapters many children were extremely interested in the details of the war and are likely to have asked their fathers for details even if the fathers were originally reluctant to share them. Letters describing the war range in style from jokey, gung-ho references to serious, descriptive passages which show that not all parents were at pains to hide the war from their children.

Captain B. Foulis of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders clearly felt his young niece Nancy should be instilled with a strong sense of the purpose behind the fighting and wrote to her regularly after he joined up in 1914. His letters are funny and brutal at the same time suggesting that he knew that his niece would share in his ghoulish delight in fighting the Germans. The first one sent in October 1914 is short, simply saying:

Thank you very much for your letter which I got today. It was very wicked of these bad German to shoot Uncle Willie, so I hope to get near them soon and shoot a great lot of them just the way that Uncle Teddy shoots the bunnies. We are kept very busy here marching and practising shooting so as to be very good at killing the Kaiser when we go to Germany.

A year later he has more detail to give about life in the army and, although playing down the danger he is in, still describes a far more gruesome war than many of the other adults who write to children from the trenches:

I have now got over here and am living in a trench close to the Germans. It is rather a jolly trench for there are all sorts of little houses and snug little holes and corners dug out everywhere. Some of these little houses we use for sleeping in and other for our meals.

The "Germs" are about 100 yards away, and we often throw shells and bombs and things at each other, but our trench is a jolly strong one so that they cannot do us any harm.

We have got a lot of enormous rats and tiny mice. They scuttle and scamper about everywhere and do not bother about the war at all.

This morning one of our soldiers killed a large rat with a spade. Now we have a bomb throwing machine, so we put this rat onto the machine and threw it all the way into the German trench. I wonder if they had it for breakfast?

It is rather pretty at night here there are so many wonderful lights in the sky. You see the flashing of big guns and of bursting shells very often, but mostly a long way off. Then there are the rockets which are sent up every few minutes both by ourselves and the Germans. They light the sky almost like daylight, so that you can see every blade of grass in the ground between us and the Boches. They are fine to watch.

Foulis seems confident that his niece will appreciate the humour in the rat throwing incident as much as he and his men evidently did, suggesting that he remembers very well the fun children can get out of the truly disgusting. As an Officer Foulis was trusted to censor his own mail and although he refers to killing Germans in his first letter he plays down any suggestion that he himself is in danger. Perhaps conscious of Nancy's age, or perhaps reluctant to admit the truth to himself, Foulis describes an exciting, amusing war - much like a game his niece might enjoy. The "Germs" and he throw bombs at each other while he makes a "snug" little home for himself in his trench. Foulis is likening his experience to a game, much like the one we saw Evelyn Waugh and his friends playing in Chapter 2 when they built a camp and fought neighbouring children over territory.

Other men who enlisted at the start of the war also seem keen to share their experiences with their children. R. P. Harker was in his 30s when he enlisted as a regular soldier after failing to secure a commission at the very start of the war. He appears to have been a widower with a 13 year old son, Freddie, at boarding school. Harker's letters to Freddie are full of the details of army life, in fact contain almost nothing else, and at times he sounds more like a schoolboy than the one he is writing to. He shows a ready acceptance of the hardships of army life and a keen sense of patriotism which he appears to have wanted to pass on to his son. In November 1914 he wrote to Freddie describing the men's attitude to fighting:

Many thanks for your last letter. Awfully glad to hear that you beat Bigshotte so easily, and so glad you were up one in the form that week. The sketch of the destroyer with the gun on it is quite good on your last letter. We are billeted in a school here and this town is filled with soldiers. Our army seem to be doing magnificently and our soldiers don't think much of the Germans as fighting men, but the German artillery is awfully good and also their machine guns, without them they would have made a poor show. They have

all sorts of unsportsmanlike tricks and attack our men disguised in khaki and sometimes kilts and shout out sentences in English saying “don’t shoot, we are so-and-so”, giving the name of some English regiment. They also shout out “cease fire” in English and give our signals. I don’t think the war will be over before next spring at the earliest.

Harker was clearly revelling in his new role as a soldier. So keen was he to get out to France that he had enlisted as a regular soldier despite the fact that he would have undoubtedly got a commission had he waited a couple of months. Harker, almost certainly the product of a public school education himself writes very much in that style Paul Fussell has termed British Phlegm. 'The trick here is to affect to be entirely unflappable; one speaks as if the war were entirely normal and matter-of-fact.'¹⁵ Harker's letters are breezy and confident and he embraces Army life to the full. In many ways his letters are reminiscent of the boys' adventure fiction discussed in the previous chapter, fiction Freddie was likely to be reading at school. All is exciting, the British are upstanding, fine chaps, while the Germans are underhand and sneaky. By depicting the war as a great adventure and by presenting himself as the hero of the tale to his teenage son, Harker is helping to reconcile Freddie to his absence while boosting his own sense of pride and confidence.

Shortly after being commissioned into the North Staffordshire Regiment in March 1915, Harker was killed by sniper fire. In the following months his sister Ethel corresponded regularly with Horace Waterall an old family friend and fellow soldier. From one letter it is clear that Ethel feels that Freddie has not been too affected by his father's death saying:

It is a merciful thing that Freddie does not realise things but all the same it seems inexpressibly sad that it should be so after Robert having for years past given up such a lot that Freddie might have everything.

However from reading the autobiographical accounts in chapter 2 it seems certain that Freddie, away at boarding school but still surrounded by the war, is likely to

¹⁵ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* p 181.

have felt his father's death perhaps even more because of the detailed way in which his father had been writing to him of his life.

It was not only to boys that fathers sometimes felt comfortable describing the more frightening aspects of the war. British born Canadian, Captain Ivan Finn of the 10th Battalion CEF, wrote to his daughter living in England in 1915 of the conditions he was living in:

My darling Margaret

Father sends his love to you. I cannot write very much because there is such a fearful noise from our guns. I hope that I shall see you soon again and that the war will end quickly. A lot of farms are burning up and the sun is very bright and warm.

I live in a hole and feel very dirty for I have been unable to wash since I left England. The other day I saw a battle in front where the poison gases were used. It looked like a horrible green yellow curtain hanging from the sky.

Now my darling I will end. God bless you and keep you always.

Your loving father, Ivan.

Whether Margaret was alarmed by this or not it is impossible to know. The effects of poison gas were known by the public at this time and wounded soldiers were a common sight in England, but Captain Finn obviously believed his daughter would be more interested than scared by his descriptions. For some fathers the need to share what they were seeing was overwhelming and far outweighed their concerns for what their children might need to hear. In a fascinating letter that avoided the censor Private W. Vernon serving on the Western Front wrote to his daughter Lucy of the Allied retreat from the Marne after the German advance in the spring of 1918. The first half of the letter is fairly predictable dealing with the weather and family matters, much like the hundreds of other letters fathers had been writing to their children. But then the second half of the letter explodes after Vernon adds pages to his unsealed letter that has already been passed by the censor. He begins by telling Lucy about where he has been and how and where he was injured and recovered. Then he begins to talk of the retreat:

You should have seen us retreating, the roads were packed with troops and horses, guns, limbers, Red Cross Ambulances, French and ours and wounded

walking for miles and miles. They daren't stop for fear of Jerry catching them but the worst of all was the civilians, they had to run for their lives and leave everything they had, only just what they stood up in and plenty we saw with a little baby in a pram and a few odd things, just what they could lay hold of and they were on the road for days and days sleeping on the roadside at night, it was heartbreaking to see them. Some of our A.S.C. drivers would give them a lift on the wagons.

While we were retreating Jerry was over the top of us with his aeroplanes dropping bombs and firing his machine gun at us and we started firing at them. We brought one down with our rifles. It was fine sport.

Again we hear the echoes of adventure fiction in the 'fine sport' of bringing down an enemy aircraft. Or is the final phrase an example of Private Vernon adopting the enthusiastic language his Officers used to inspire their men? Then again it is possible that Vernon took a genuine delight in shooting down the plane. After all perhaps Vernon had just spent several years living in trenches, being shot at by Germans, and so felt justified in revelling in his enemy's death. Joanna Bourke has explored the often ambivalent feelings soldiers have towards their victims noting that 'although the act of killing another person in battle may invoke a wave of nauseous distress, it may also incite intense feelings of pleasure'.¹⁶ Bourke has described how successfully hitting the enemy gave men a sense of their own power and that adding another 'kill' to their score was often a cause of much celebration. Importantly however, Bourke also recognises the link between fantasy and experience. As martial combat has become an integral part of the modern imagination through literature and films, so soldiers have gone to war already excited by the possibility of killing. As we have seen, late nineteenth century children's literature was full of tales of imperial battles and military adventures and so First World War soldiers had an image of warfare in their minds well before they arrived on the Western Front. According to Bourke, in the act of killing fantasy and experience are intertwined and must remain so for the sake of the soldier's moral survival. By imbuing their actions with a level of fantasy, borrowed from literature or films, 'combatants [are] able to construct a story around acts of exceptional violence which could render their actions pleasurable'.¹⁷

¹⁶ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing - Face to Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London: 1999) p 13.

¹⁷ Ibid. p 42.

Here again we see the idea that men, in describing their experiences to their children in this way, were casting themselves as the heroes of a story their children might enjoy. By linking their own fantasies about the war they were fighting with the ones their children read in adventure fiction, these soldiers were attempting to find a place for the war within a fantasy world both understood. Children could imagine their fathers in a tale that always had a happy ending, while fathers could reconcile their actions to themselves by locating them in the familiar language of their own childhood stories. Perhaps because they were writing to children, men like Foulis and Vernon felt freer to employ this language of fantasy. In Vernon's case there is a stark contrast between his description of the German advance and his account of the shooting down of the plane. At first he pours his heart out to his daughter about the realities of warfare, detailing the 'heartbreaking' sight of the civilian refugees fleeing their homes. But then he returns to the language of adventure stories when he describes his own part in killing a man. Clearly Vernon was not insensitive to human suffering, just that he chose to set his own act of violence in a different light.

Vernon is well aware of the risk he is taking in sending this letter but it appears he just cannot stop himself now he has the chance for the first time to tell his daughter what the war is really like:

Dear Lucy, don't tell anybody what I have told you in this letter for if I was to get found out I should get Court Marshalled. I could fill 20 or 30 pages if I liked telling you my experiences, it seems quite different writing when you can put what you like in the letter without anyone censoring it after you. This is the first time I have had a chance to send a few exciting lines. I think I will now draw to a close. You will wonder what I have been doing sending such a long letter, so with love to all,
From your Loving Father xxxxxx
Good Night

This last bit about how different writing a letter is without having to worry about the censor may explain the lack of detail and concentration on family matters in many of the other men's letters home. To Vernon it was the possibility of telling the truth to his daughter that caused him to write in such an eager and detailed way. The

difference between the first half, read by the censor, and the second is telling. A bland and uninteresting letter written by a man who appears slightly bored and perhaps only writing to his child out of duty, becomes an exciting and moving letter when Vernon is free to write as he likes. He risked Court Martial and possible imprisonment for sending this letter but was clearly desperate to share with his daughter what he was experiencing.

Some fathers would never see an end to the war. Lying in a VAD hospital in Earls Colne, Essex, Sergeant F. H. Gautier of the 11th Battalion, Cheshire Regiment, knew he was dying. From there he wrote to his young daughter Marie with a note on the front of the envelope saying ‘To my dear daughter Marie when she is able to understand’. The Gautier’s eldest son Albert had recently been killed at Ypres and in this letter Gautier is calling on his daughter to remember him and her brother who he knows she will be too young to remember:

To my darling daughter Marie,

Dearly loved daughter this my letter to you is written in grief. I had hoped to spend many happy years with you after the war was over and to see you grow up into a good and happy woman. I am writing because I want you in after years to know how dearly I loved you, I know that you are too young to keep me in your memory. I know your dear mother will grieve. Be a comfort to her, remember when you are old enough that she lost her dear brave son, your brother, and me, your father, within a short time. Your brother was a dear brave boy, honour his memory for he loved you and your brothers dearly and he died like a brave soldier in defence of his home and Country. May God guide and keep you safe and that at last we may all meet together in his eternal rest. I am your loving and affectionate father

F. H. Gautier xxx

Gautier died two months after writing this letter in June 1916. Marie treasured the letter, keeping it with a postcard from her brother Albert which said ‘I shall come home to see you some day, love brother Albert.’ Here Gautier is using the letter form to communicate with his youngest child over a space in time rather than a physical space which was the case with most letters written by fathers to their children. It lets him address his child in a manner not appropriate to her age at the

time and allows him to appeal to her to support her mother and remember him and her brother in a way a baby never could.

Some men seem to have had no hesitation in telling their children about the realities of trench fighting. They are either matter-of-fact about it like Harker or Captain Finn or they appear to revel in it like Foulis or Vernon. It is interesting to note that all but one of these letters describing war news was sent to girls. This suggests that the men recognised the childish interest their daughters and nieces would have in the ghoulish detail of battle and did not believe they would be upset by what they heard. By describing scenes of firing rats at the Germans or shooting down aircraft with rifles these men are likening their experience to childhood fun - they are merely taking part in an adventurous game rather than in a dangerous war. They did this to reassure their children but also perhaps to convince themselves that what they were seeing and doing was nothing more than the sort of thing they would have loved to do as children.

Conclusion

Writing to their children gave men a chance to return to the themes of play and adventure that had sustained their pre-war understanding of warfare. Through their words and illustrations men constructed a wartime identity for themselves which they presented to their children. This creation of a soldier-father, who lived in holes in the ground and who saw danger but was never threatened by it, allowed both children and fathers themselves to come to terms with what they were facing. Children could feel positive about their fathers' absence because their fathers were positive themselves. In return fathers could be reconciled to their new role as potential killers by recalling the language of fantasy that had first brought warfare to their attention.

Michael Roper has suggested that the circumstances of trench life led young men, and particularly junior officers, to identify with their own mothers as they fulfilled a maternal role caring for the men under their command. When they organised or undertook the provision of food, clothing, or nursing duties they were performing the very tasks their own mothers had once performed for them.¹⁸ If, as Roper suggests, this gave them a closer understanding and identification with their own mother is it not also possible that it led married men to identify with their wives in their duty of performing the maternal role for their own children? Did fathers have a new understanding of what it meant to care for the physical and mental well being of their children? The concerns over health and adequate diet expressed by many fathers in their letters to their children certainly suggest that they now recognised the fundamental importance of these issues.

If caring for other men did lead fathers to identify with their wives as mothers, and thus see their role as parent more clearly, perhaps it is also possible that as soldiers, with no control over their own fate, they may also have identified with their children. Powerless to decide on their own actions, the experience of fighting during the First World War has been described as emasculating. But does this experience not also have much in common with being a child? Children had little or no control over their own lives in Edwardian England and were dependent on their parents for their material well being. So perhaps their fathers, in a similar situation gained a new insight into their children's position and felt closer to them as a result.

Most of these letters suggest close family relationships where families were attempting to maintain and strengthen their bonds by writing to each other. They bridged a physical separation as well as a vast gap in their experience of the war by telling each other about what they were doing, and also what they were missing in not being together. Each side came to rely on letters as a sign of the continuing existence of love from the other as well as proof of their health and life. Fathers parented from a distance, backing up their wives and providing their children with a

¹⁸Michael Roper, "Maternal Relations: Moral Manliness and Emotional Survival in Letters Home During the First World War," in *Masculinities in Politics and War - Gendering Modern History*, ed. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh (Manchester: 2004), p 308.

link to the world outside the domestic sphere. Children learnt about the war through the separation from their fathers as much as through any descriptions of the war itself that their fathers might give them. The war meant grief and separation for millions of homes throughout Britain and even for children whose fathers did return in the end they had already experienced the loss of years of family life.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

Children were surrounded by the First World War everyday, at home, at school and in their youth groups. They read about it in books, magazines and newspapers, studied it at school and re-enacted it in their private games. The separation from fathers and brothers, when they volunteered or were conscripted to fight, meant that the wider international conflict took on a personal significance, endangering the men these children loved. So the children tried to make sense of the war around them, combining what they learnt about the war from adults with what they came to understand about it for themselves. And adult representations of the war could be very different from the realities of it as felt by children. Sometimes these two forms of understanding complemented each other, allowing the children to accept and reconcile themselves to the war but at others they became confused, unsure how the way they were feeling made sense in the light of what they had been told.

Schools and youth groups taught children specific lessons with regard to the war and their role in it. The war was held up as a lesson in citizenship. It could be used to both teach children about their national history as well as give them concrete examples of the ideal characteristics of the British race. Attention had been focused on the education and training of young people in the pre-war years by philanthropists, Labour and Trade Union leaders, Imperialists and Educators. There was concern over the security of the British Empire in the light of the falling birth rate and poor standards of health and education amongst the working population. Children were seen as a hope for the future, a way of ensuring that Britain could continue to compete in both trade and war. So just as new pre-war legislation sought to protect children's health and well-being in order that they might be fit to serve their country in years to come, so their minds and moral development became a focus to ensure that children understood and accepted this future responsibility.

War entered the school curriculum through the teaching of history, geography and English, but the underlying emphasis was on citizenship. Teachers sought advice on how to explain the war to the children from the Board of Education who pointed

towards explanations that stressed Britain's role as one of a great people defending the rights of weaker nations. There was concern from the Board that intellectual neutrality be maintained as far as possible. They wanted children to know that Britain's involvement was the right thing but they hoped that through careful teaching of Britain's past achievements, and the study of international geography and history, children would come to this conclusion by themselves. Lessons on the war were designed to teach the children their place as citizens of a great empire but they were also attempts to help the children make sense of the war around them. Teachers knew that children were suffering at home from the absence of fathers and brothers and so incorporated the war into their lessons to help the children understand why that separation was necessary.

For the leaders of Britain's uniformed youth groups there was no question that the war was necessary. In fact war was held up as an ideal example of what happens to a country if its citizens do not take responsibility for the security of the nation. Despite denying any links to the country's military machine the leaders of Britain's male uniformed youth groups saw their organisations as the ideal way to instil in young men the desire to want to fight to defend their country. Indeed we have seen how Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scout movement, lamented the fact that he had not begun his movement earlier so that there would have been a body of trained men ready and willing to take up arms when war was declared.¹ Equally girls needed to be trained to be useful companions to men, taught home-craft and hygiene so that they could fulfil their biological destiny as wives and mothers to the future sons of empire. Youth groups like the Girl Guides, Scouts and Boys Brigade were set up in the pre-war years to answer adult anxieties about the development of sufficient moral character in working class adolescents. They became immensely popular because they successfully combined their emphasis on character training with adventurous activities that children enjoyed. The war provided these organisation with the ideal opportunity to show their members how to practise self-discipline, obedience and self-sacrifice by working for the war effort as everything from messengers to guards and hospital volunteers.

¹ The Boy Scout Association, "Headquarters Gazette," September (1914): p 263.

Schools and youth groups saw children's participation in the war effort as important in terms of teaching them about the duties of citizenship but it was in 'the war after the war' that children's education and character training would really come into its own.² Educationalists, teachers and youth group workers continually stressed the important role their children were to have in the reconstruction of the country once the fighting was over. Pre-war pressure for a new education act that would increase funding providing for a raising of the school leaving age, nursery provision and the introduction of continuation schools, gained greater urgency during the war. Reformers stressed the need to make up for the huge destruction of human life by ensuring that the generations of the future would receive an education that would fit them to be productive citizens of a global empire. Britain needed not only to be rebuilt, but to be improved. Young peoples' talents were being wasted because of the lack of adequate secondary provision and the limits of what could be achieved in the few years of schooling before the domestic economy forced them out to work. The war provided the added energy needed to create an Education Act that went further than ever before in legislating for the educational needs of Britain's children. Despite the cut backs of the 1920s much of the thinking behind the 1918 Education Act informed the education debate in Britain up until the Second World War.

But what about the children themselves? How did they respond to their lessons at school and the instructions of their youth group leaders? It appears that they relished the chance to become involved with the war effort and learn about it at school. In some cases it was the children themselves that propelled the war onto the curriculum and school inspectors reported that their increased enthusiasm led to an improvement in results despite the practical difficulties imposed on schools by the war. Some children were particularly excited by the chance the schools gave them to correspond with soldiers abroad, whether they be relatives or men previously unknown to the children. In encouraging the children to write to soldiers they did not know, schools and teachers were hoping the children would learn to identify with the war effort, and the men sacrificing themselves in battle. For their part some children treasured the letters they were sent, sometimes keeping them for the rest of their

² Girl Guide Association, "Annual Report," (London, 1916).

lives as a souvenir of the part they had played in the war effort. When given the chance children enthusiastically collected, saved and made things for the war. They earned badges, certificates and the praise of their teachers for their work and seemed to want to genuinely be a part of the national endeavour whenever they could. Indeed sometimes the children went against the guidance of the adults around them to take on even greater responsibilities than that which had been proposed for them. We have seen how some Scouts in Westgate took up arms in defence of their country despite instructions not to do so.³ Particularly in the early years there was widespread popular support for the war, reflected in the success of Kitchener's recruiting campaigns, which led many young boys to attempt to enlist in the army before they had reached the required age. Brought up on adventure fiction that glorified war and presented the chance of battle as a great adventure, some young boys were desperately keen to have the chance to fight.

In June 1915 twelve year old H J Palmer from Plumsted in London wrote to an Army recruiting officer,

Dear Sir,

When you read these lines you will think I am silly or something after that, but I am quite earnest.

My greatest friend has been killed by treachery at the front, my brother has been discharged medically unfit from the West Kents, and my father is making shells in the arsenal. For the first thing I want and feel I must avenge my friend, secondly I feel I must keep up my brother's honour by taking his place, and thirdly I feel that I must carry on the work my father has begun.

I am twelve and a quarter years of age and exactly 5ft 3" high and 33 inches chest measurement. Will you please do your best to procure me a position as a drummer or bugler in any regiment where one is needed for I can assure you that I will do my best for my God, my King, and my Country.

I remain your faithful servant,

H J Palmer⁴

This child wanted to serve in the Army as a matter of duty. The death of his closest friend meant that the cause of war had become personal. He wanted to defeat the Germans in revenge for killing his friend. Children could not be protected and

³ Alwyn Dawson, *The Story of the 1st Chiswick - Early Years 1908-1939* (1978) p 18.

⁴ Imperial War Museum

sheltered from death; by the end of the war bereavement was an almost universal experience touching every family in the country. How children responded to their loss however could vary enormously and depended on the strength of their relationship to the dead man and the circumstances under which they experienced that loss. Here Palmer wants to strike out against those that have hurt him and offers himself as a willing servant of the army.

But there is something else going on here as well as his desire for revenge. Palmer is clearly troubled that his older brother is unable to fulfil his obligation as a soldier. The elder Palmer's discharge on medical grounds is seen by his younger brother as a stain on his honour and he begs for the chance to serve in his brother's place. We have seen repeatedly how young boys brought up reading adventure fiction imbued with the public school ethos of self-sacrifice and duty were desperate to have the chance to prove them themselves on the battlefield. Regardless of the type of school the Palmer boys went to (no biographical information accompanies this letter in the archive) they were both well versed in the ideal, promoted by fiction, schools and youth groups, that to serve your country was not only a duty but also an honour.

But not all children responded to the loss of a close friend or relative by seeking revenge by enlisting in the army. Indeed autobiographical evidence suggests that children could often feel ambivalent or unsure about how to react after a death. It appears that it was particularly those children living away at boarding school that were the most unsure of their feelings. Surrounded by other children, and with little adult-child communication about personal matters, children at boarding schools were left to grieve on their own. They had to make sense of how they felt and what was expected of them by both their peers and their school. The Public Schools did not encourage displays of emotion as a means of teaching their pupils self-restraint. That fact coupled with the schools' almost universal support for the war effort meant that children who lost a father or older brother were encouraged to be proud of their loss and to see it as a noble sacrifice.

But it was not only children at boarding school that could be confused by their feelings. Children living at home had to adapt to the changing dynamics of their neighbourhood after war was declared. Many found that where before their parents had frequented German shops and may even have had German friends, they had now turned against their neighbours and were encouraging their children to do the same. For their part many children were keen to display their patriotic credentials by attacking or abusing the Germans they knew. Some did this with little comprehension of the pain it caused and others only came to realise later how ashamed they were of their actions. Autobiographies offer occasional glimpses of how this transformation of attitude occurs. Authors recalling their childhood selves add an adult interpretation to the events that they are recalling. Thus C.H. Rolph's memory of the abuse his German school friend experienced is shaped in part by the fact that he is ashamed of the fact that he did nothing to protect him. The memories recorded in autobiography are actually layers of memory, added over time, as experience and knowledge give meaning to the fragmentary images recalled from childhood.⁵

Autobiography highlights the diversity of emotional response children had to the war. Similar events, like an air-raid or the shooting down of a Zeppelin, could be interpreted and understood in very different ways. Some children remember being excited by what they saw, enjoying the unusual opportunity for being up in the middle of the night, while others were terrified, convinced that the Germans were on their way to the family home. There was no pattern of feeling, regardless of age or gender children could be scared or enthralled by what they saw. For the first time ordinary British citizens were being attacked in their own homes and the once exciting and novel sight of an aeroplane had become something to be wary of.

But it could also be something to revel in. Young boys were often particularly excited by the evidence of the night's raids, collecting and swapping any souvenirs they found in the debris of shells or fallen aircraft. It seems that at times they were

⁵ S. Freud, "Screen Memories," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: 1962).

so caught up in the excitement of what they were seeing that they had few thoughts to spare for what it meant to be an airman in battle. In September 1916, fifteen year old Patrick Blundstone witnessed a Zeppelin being shot down near where he was staying with Mrs Willy, a family friend in Cuffley, Essex. The following day Patrick wrote to his father excited to tell him what he had seen but keen to allay any fears his father might have over his safety,

Dear Daddy,

I hope you are not alarmed, you should not be, unless you know where one of the Zepps went. I have heard that it raided London (up the Strand) and caused heavy casualties. But this I know because I saw, and so did everyone else in the house.

Here is my story:-

I heard the clock strike 11 o'clock. I was in bed and just going to sleep. Between 2 o'clock and 2.30 o'clock, Lily (the servant) woke Miss Willy and told her she could hear the guns. Miss Willy woke Poolman [family chauffeur], and told him to wake me, ... We saw flashes and then heard "Bangs" and "Pops".

Suddenly a bright yellow light appeared and died down again.

"Oh! Its alright" said Poolman. "Its only a star shell". That light appeared again and we Miss Blair, Poolman and I rushed to the window and looked out, and ... there, right above us was the Zepp! ... It was inflames, roaring and crackling. It went slightly to the right, and crashed down into a field!! It was about 100 yds away from the house and directly opposite us!!!⁶

Being so close to the action the whole group rushed out into the night to inspect the damage. In his letter to his father we can see how Patrick partially recognises the revulsion his father will feel at his description but is unable to contain his excitement at passing on all the gory details in writing,

I would rather not describe the condition of the crew, of course they were dead, - burnt to death. They were roasted, there is absolutely no other word for it. They were brown, like the outside of Roast Beef. One had his legs off at the knees, and you could see the joint! The Zepp was bombed from an aeroplane above, with an incendiary bomb ... We have some relics some wire and wood framework. The weather is beastly but Mrs and Miss Willy are jolly people, hoping you are all well, love to all,
Your loving son Patrick⁷

⁶ Imperial War Museum

⁷ Ibid.

Patrick's ghoulish delight in the details of what he saw could be explained by his age. Indeed soldiers writing to their children sometimes put in details of disgusting things they had seen or done, like firing dead rats into German trenches, because they knew it would amuse their audience. Unlike Patrick however soldiers rarely mentioned the death or injury of fellow soldiers. Instead they edited out the danger of war turning their experience into a tale of adventure.

They became semi-fictional characters in their own letters home creating a narrative in which they could appear quite safely. In order to maintain their bonds with their children fathers need their children to be able to picture them. At first they achieved this by concentrating on domestic scenes, describing their living conditions, their food and the people and animals they met day to day. But as the war went on this was not enough. They had been gone too long for these illusions of shared experience to be enough. They wanted their children to understand where they were and what they were doing. To reconcile themselves and their children to their new role these soldier-fathers often reverted to the language of fantasy and play that had sustained their own pre-war understanding of combat. They presented the war as fun and exciting, comparing it to childhood games in order to both please their children and perhaps to allay their own fears.

Through play children were most able to reconstruct the war for themselves. Provided with props by toy manufacturers and parents, children could create miniature versions of the war with toy soldiers, guns, planes and battleships. Alternatively they could dress themselves as soldiers and shoot each other with imitation guns. But evidence suggests that even when children had no toys available they were still keen to play war games. They could make their own toy guns with what they found lying around and could fight over territory as they had before the war, changing their imaginary battlefield from the Imperial Colonies to the Western Front. If girls were excluded from these games by their brothers there were nurses uniforms and toy hospitals to amuse them. They were encouraged to tend the soldiers that fell in their brothers' battles but not to want to play with them. The war encouraged the production of toys and the creation of games sharply divided along

gender lines. Masculinity became closely associated with soldiering just as femininity did with domestic roles and nursing. Despite the new opportunities for women to work outside the home opening up during the war the toys and books that were produced for girls still saw their future in domestic terms. Girls' fictional wartime heroines had some fun, they drove ambulances and military vehicles, worked in munitions factories and caught spies; but they also took care of their appearance, made chutney and fell in love. While this shows some indication of an acknowledgement that women were capable of more than just domestic duties it hardly suggests that women writers of girls fiction were hoping to revolutionise the outlook and prospects of their readership.

But opportunities for girls to become more involved in life outside the home had been opened up by the war. As Guides they served in public buildings and hospitals and their work was recognised by government as being significant to the war effort. At school their chances of a secondary education were improved, as were those of their brothers by the implications of the 1918 Education Act which recognised the vital importance of children's education for the reconstruction of Britain in the post-war years. The war placed children at the heart of the debate about Britain's future - it was no longer enough to talk about 'national efficiency' and bemoan the lack of interest in the Empire. If war was to be avoided in the future, and if Britain was to remain a strong Imperial power, children must be educated both intellectually and morally for the task ahead.

To fully understand the relationship of the First World War to the lives of children in Britain further research is needed to see what happened to these children after the war was over. How did the war alter attitudes to childhood in the 1920s and 30s? How did it influence psychologists', psychoanalysts', teachers', health workers' and others' understanding of the physical and mental development of children? How did these children respond to the task of reconstruction when they became adults? How did they feel when faced with another war so soon after the one they had grown up during? Did the experience of children during the First World War influence the care of children by parents, teachers and the authorities during the Second World War?

The answers to these questions would allow us greater insight into the lives of children in the first half of the twentieth century and help us to understand how the First World War influenced the conception of childhood in Britain.

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Appendix A

The following is a brief introduction to each of the autobiographers included in this thesis:

Joseph Armitage was born in Leeds in 1908. The son of a steel worker and a domestic servant, Armitage was educated at St Joseph's Roman Catholic school for 8 years. His unpublished memoir held in the Working Class Autobiographical Archive at Brunel University is part autobiography and part documentary about the working class way of life in Leeds at beginning of 20th century.

The poet **W. H. Auden** was born in York in 1907. Educated at preparatory boarding school (alongside Christopher Isherwood) and then Gresham's (a public school) Auden's family lived in Birmingham where his father was professor of public health at the university. The memories quoted in this chapter come from his essay *As it seemed to us*, published in his collection *Forewords and Afterwords* (1973).

The writer **H. E. Bates** was born in May 1905 the son of a shoemaker. Bates describes a happy childhood spent in Northamptonshire, where he grew up in an atmosphere of intense respectability knowing neither affluence nor poverty. Bates was educated at elementary school progressing via a scholarship to grammar school in Kettering.

Kathleen Betterton's 300 page unpublished autobiography, entitled 'White pinnies, black aprons...' concentrates on her childhood years. Born in 1913 in Fulham, London, Betterton's father was a liftman on the London underground and she considers that her family were poor but 'respectable'. Betterton was very young during the war but in later years she attended Queensmill Road Council School then went via a scholarship to Christ's Hospital and Oxford.

The Anglo-Irish novelist **Elizabeth Bowen** was born in 1899 in Dublin. Her father was a barrister and the family were prominent figures in the community. Bowen's memories of her school days at Downe House, a girls' boarding school in England, are contained in a collection of school memoirs compiled by Graham Greene entitled *The Old School* (1934).

Born in 1904, **Henrietta Burkin's** father was exempt from military service because of his specialist knowledge of the cabling of the London underground. For much of the war the family lived in East London. Burkin attended a local church school, and then St Martin in the Field's school till 1919.

Beatrice Curtis Brown was born in 1901 into a middle class family living in London. Her autobiography *Southwards from Swiss Cottage* (1947), describes her youth growing up in London where she attended a private girls' school.

Dame Barbara Cartland was born into an upper class family in 1901. Her father, Bertram Cartland was a businessman and the family moved in high society although in the memoir Cartland recalls that her mother's social ambitions were often hampered by a lack of funds.

Gibson Cowan was born 1903 near Southend. Cowan's father, who worked as a chauffeur, was Jewish and Cowan experienced several incidents of anti-Semitic abuse at the local village school before moving to London in 1915 where he continued his education at secondary school.

The daughter of a master plasterer, **Minnie Cowley** was born 1907. During the war she attended Nelson Road school in Whitton, leaving at fourteen to become a domestic servant. Her unpublished autobiography *My Daddy is a Soldier*, is held in the Local Studies Collection at Richmond upon Thames and describes her happy but harsh childhood and her mother's attempts to provide for her family while surviving on her husband's army pension.

The novelist **Graham Greene** was born in 1904. He grew up in Berkhamstead and attended Berkhamstead School where his father was the Headmaster. Greene's autobiography *A Sort of Life* (1971) tells of unhappy schooldays made worse by his father's position.

The writer **Henry Green** was the son of a wealthy industrialist. Born in 1905, Green attended a preparatory boarding school on the South Coast and later went to Eton. Green's memories of childhood make up the majority of his autobiography *Pack My Bag* (1970) where the First World War features heavily.

Edith Hall was born in 1908 near Hayes in Middlesex. Her father was a baker who enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps during the war. Her autobiography *Canary Girls and Stockpots* (1977) was published by the Workers Educational Association and recalls her childhood during the war when female munitions workers from the local factory boarded with her family.

Dora Hannan was born in Portsmouth in the first decade of the 20th century. Her father was a stoker in the Royal Navy and served aboard H.M.S. Audacious until it was sunk by a mine off the Irish coast. Fortunately her father was picked up by a passing steamship and survived the war. Hannan was educated at elementary school and then secondary school until the age of 14.

Born in 1908 **Eileen Hunter** grew up in an upper-middle class family living on the outskirts of London. Her father ran a successful printing business allowing the family to afford to send Eileen to a boarding school during the war to avoid the air-raids.

Jim Ingram was born in 1912, the son of a typewriter mechanic. His father fought in the Army during the war and Jim and his mother stayed with various relatives in London, Manchester and Suffolk until the family emigrated to Canada after the war.

The writer **Christopher Isherwood** was born in 1904 in Diley, Cheshire. He came from an upper class background and boarded at St Edmund's Preparatory school where he was a contemporary of W. H. Auden. His father was a professional soldier and was killed on the Western Front in 1915.

The son of a Post Office worker **Arthur Jacobs** was born in the first decade of the 20th century. The close family lived in Hampstead, North London during the war, where Jacobs father was greatly missed by his son and wife when he was called up into the Army.

Molly Keen was born 1903 in Hounslow on the outskirts of London. Her father was a master sign writer and remained at home during the war. Two of her elder brothers however, were in the armed forces. She attended the local Catholic school and remembers a happy childhood.

Syd Metcalfe's unpublished memoir *One Speck of Humanity*, describes an often unhappy childhood. Born in 1910, Metcalfe's father was a painter and decorator before enlistment. His parents marriage was an unhappy one, with his mother regularly unfaithful and showing little interest in her children's welfare.

The writer **Malcolm Muggeridge's** recollections of his schooldays are from a collection of school memoirs called *John Bull's Schooldays* (1961). Muggeridge was born in 1903 from a working class background and lived in London as a child where he attended Borough Secondary School run by the London County Council.

The writer **Beverley Nichols** was born in 1899. His family were wealthy although suffered at the hands of Nichols' father who was an alcoholic. A teenager during the war Nichols was educated at Malbourn College.

Loelia Ponsonby (later Loelia, Duchess of Westminster) was born in 1902 and lived in St James' Palace where her father Frederick Ponsonby was secretary to the King. She had fairly unhappy childhood, and her undemonstrative mother left her and her brother to be brought up by nannies.

The novelist **V.S. Pritchett** was born in 1900. His father was a failed stationer and salesman and the family moved house repeatedly as his father pursued new business opportunities. Pritchett was educated at various schools around London and left at 15 to take up a position in the leather trade at the request of his father.

The poet and literary critic **Kathleen Raine** was born in 1908. She grew up in a middle class household in Ilford where her socialist father was a schoolmaster and mother was a teacher. Her memoir *Farewell Happy Fields* (1973) concentrates almost entirely on her childhood years.

The son of a police sergeant **C.H. Rolph** was born in London in 1901. After Elementary school, Rolph went on to be educated at Childerley Street Central School between 1910-1915.

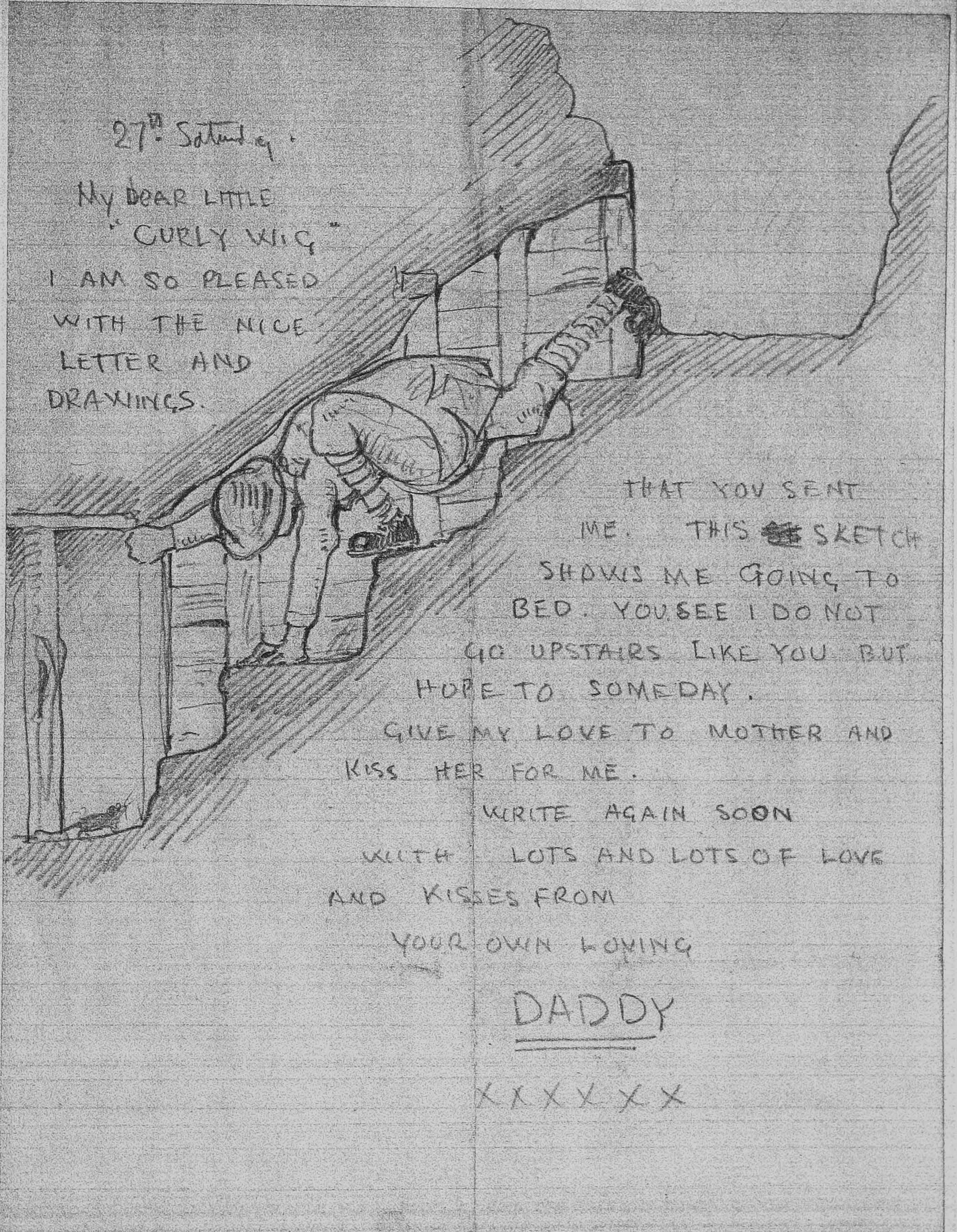
The historian **A.L. Rowse** was born in St Austell, Cornwall in 1903. He was the son of a china clay worker and was educated at elementary school before winning a scholarship to grammar school. Rowse's father was too old to be called up but was sent to work in the iron mines near Oxford half way through the war.

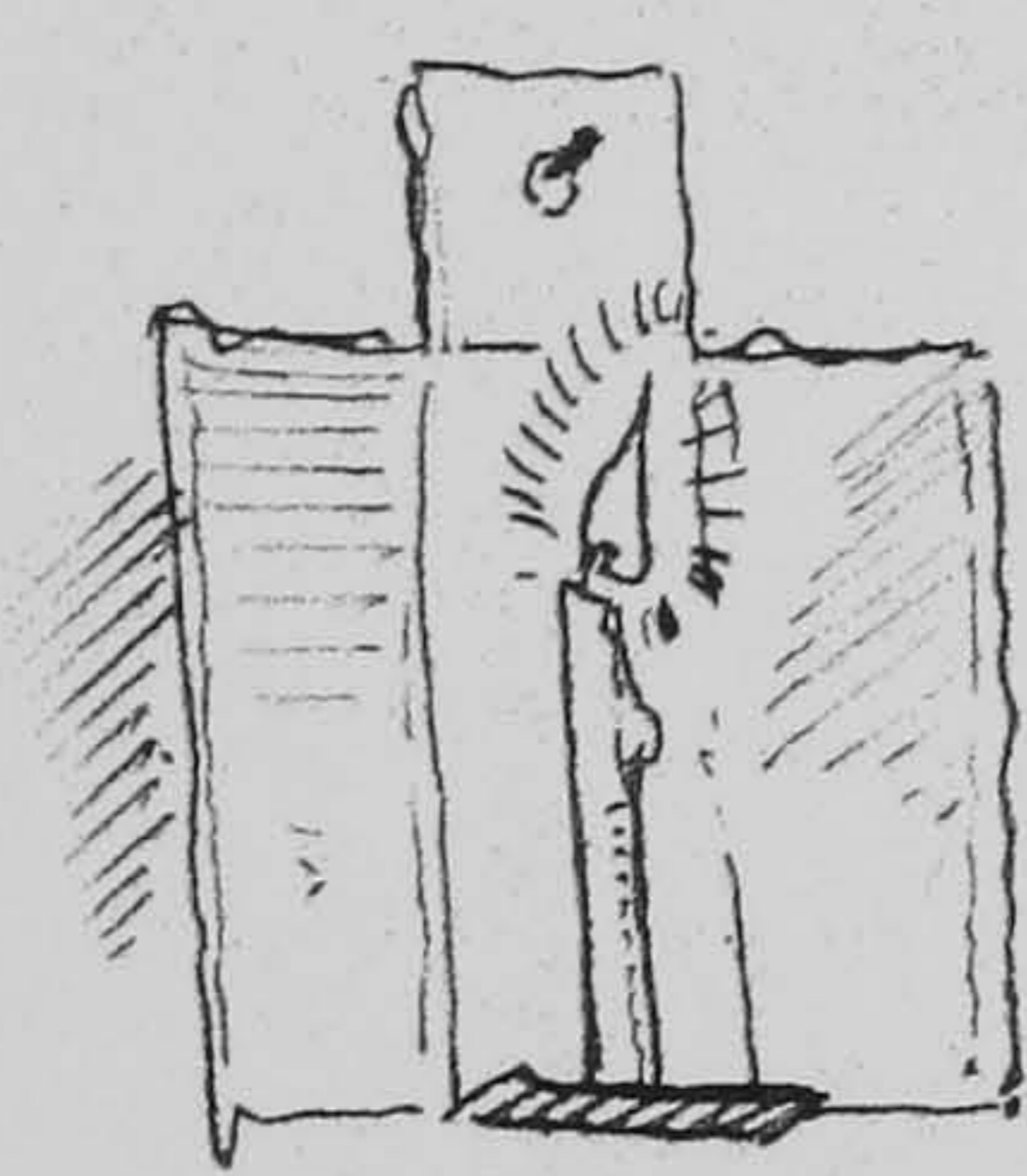
The poet **Stephen Spender**'s recollections of his school days are also from Graham Green's *The Old School* (1934). Born in 1909 in London Spender's father was a liberal journalist. After preparatory school Spender attended University College School in London.

Arthur Sturgess was born 1905 and lived near Kettering as a child. His father drove a steam digger for an iron and oil company and his mother had previously been a domestic servant. Sturgess was educated at Loddington School near Kettering between 1910-1917 and his memoir *A Northamptonshire Lad* (1982) tells of a happy rural childhood.

Extracts from the autobiographies of both **Waugh brothers, Alec** (born 1898), and **Evelyn** (born 1903), are included here. Their father, Arthur Waugh, was a publisher and literary critic and the family lived a comfortable life in Hampstead, London. Alec Waugh was educated at Sherborne, leaving in 1915 to join the Inns of Court Officer Training Corps, where he spent two years before going to France. After preparatory school, Evelyn Waugh was sent to Lancing, unable to follow his brother to Sherborne after Alec's involvement in a homosexual scandal.

Appendix B





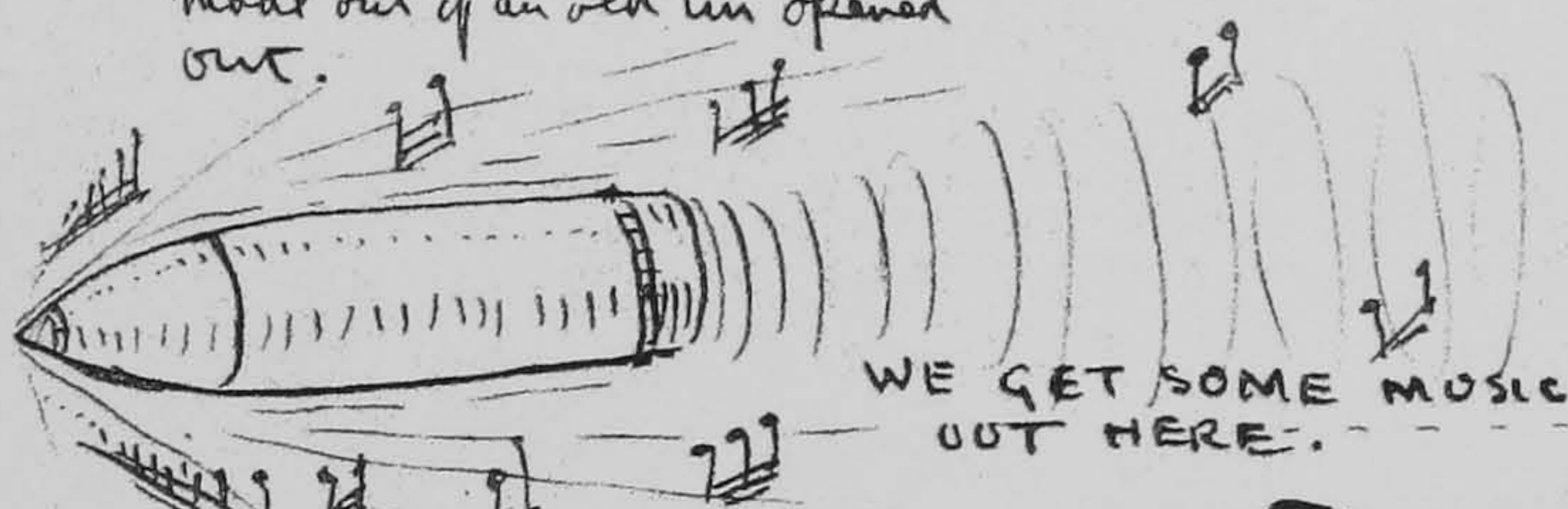
DADDY'S CANDLE-STICK
Made out of an old tin opened
out.



HAVING A
BATH.



Going in to
my office in a HURRY.



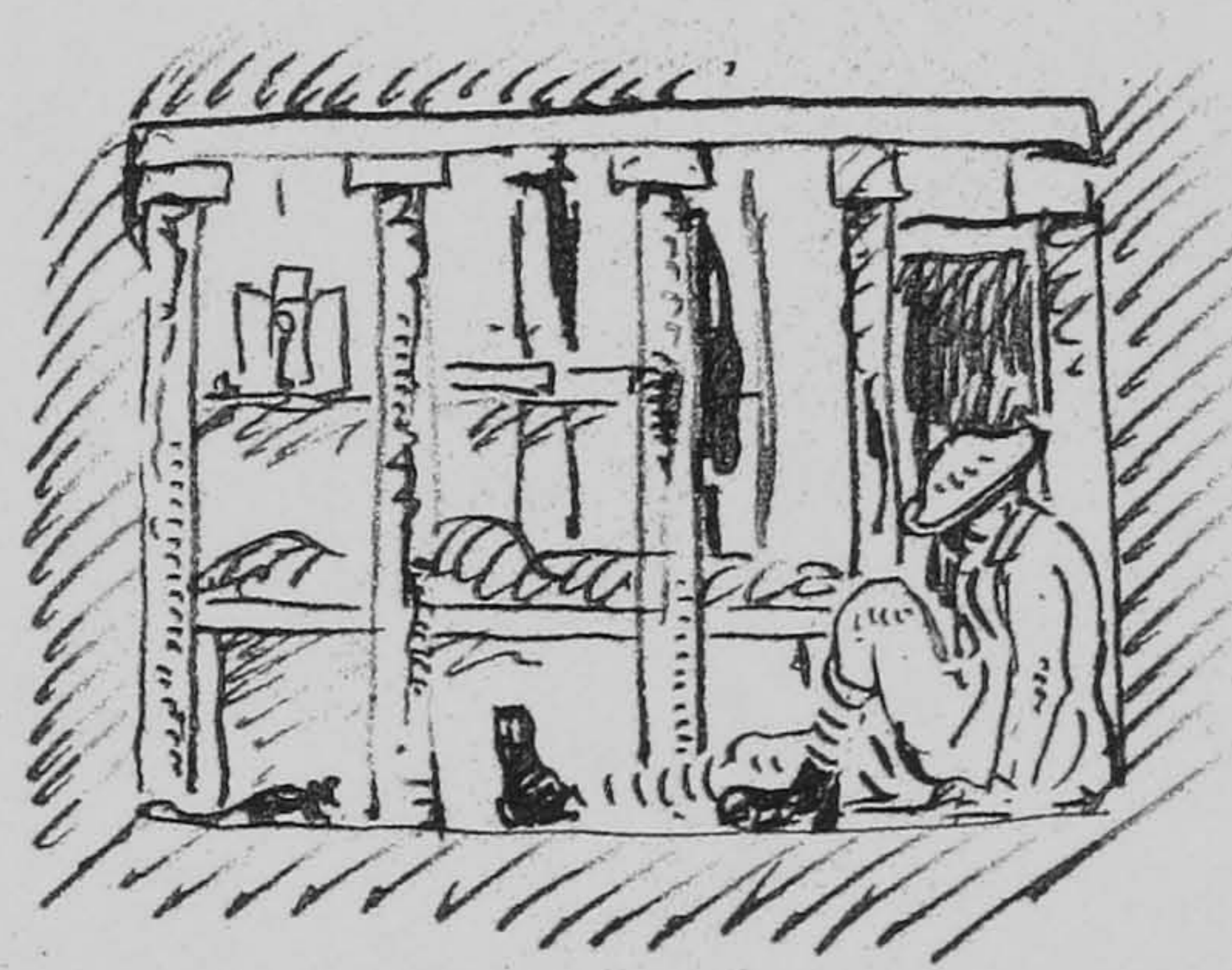
WE GET SOME MUSIC
OUT HERE.



KARAR.R. PARARADPI!



GAS.



MY DEAR LITTLE
ALICE. I AM SO PLEASED
WITH YOUR SKETCHES
AND LETTER SO SEND
ONE IN RETURN.

GIVE MY LOVE TO
DEAR MOTHER.

WITH LOTS OF LOVE
AND KISSES FROM YOUR
EVER LOVING

DADDY. XXXXXX

I WONDER WHEN THIS
"BALLY" WAR WILL END?